

The Four Noble Truths



TEN SUTTAS FROM DIGHA NIKAYA

Translated by
Burma Pitaka Association

A GIFT OF DHAMMA

“The Four Noble Truths”

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Introduction: “The Four Noble Truths”. The review of the Buddha’s life shows that the prince *Siddhattha* (the Bodhisatta) even at a young age, was able to show his skill in concentration meditation practice. At the ploughing festival conducted by his father, he was placed in a couch under a rose apple tree. At the height of the ceremony, the prince Siddhattha went into intense concentration by breathing in and exhalation and quickly attained his **first jhanas** (absorption concentration). It was this spiritual experience that reminds him to use the concentration practice to discover **the four noble truths**. If we were to learn the practice of **Sila-Samadhi-Panna** the three training practices, we should learn it by example. Using this jhana absorption concentration he discovered the four noble truths and found the path leading to the cessation of suffering for all sentient beings. He thus preaches the first sermon – **Turning the wheel of Dhamma – the Noble Eightfold Path – Dhammacakka-pavattana Sutta**”, in 6th century BC, India

It was not easy for Buddha to determine whether he should expound his newly discovered Dhamma “**Turning the Wheel of Dhamma**” because he thought that there are not many wise to understand his Dhamma. Even today, there are learned people who dispute on the right interpretation of his Dhamma. Some said, yes, I could reach Nibbana by single training (**Panna or Vipassana**) and some said I could reach Nibbana by three trainings (**Sila-Samadhi-Panna**). In fact, the Buddha explains his dhamma very clearly in the four Noble Truths, yet we still find confusion in the unconfused subject. Let me present you why Buddha hesitate to discourse his dhamma for the first time:

Illustration - Now the Blessed One thought: To whom shall I preach the Dharma first? Who will understand this Dharma readily?

And the Blessed One thought: There is **Alara Kalama**; he is clever, wise, and learned; long since has the eye of his mind been darkened by scarcely any dust. What if I were to preach the Dharma first to Alara Kalama? He will readily understand this Dharma.

Then an invisible god said to the Blessed One: Alara Kalama died, lord, seven days ago. And knowledge sprang up in the Blessed One’s mind that Alara Kalama had died seven days ago. And the Blessed One thought: Highly noble was Alara Kalama. If he had heard my Dharma, he would readily have understood it.

Then the Blessed One thought: To whom shall I preach the Dharma first? Who will understand this Dharma readily? And the Blessed One thought: **There is Uddaka Ramaputta**; he is clever, wise, and learned; long since has the eye of his mind been darkened by scarcely any dust. What if I were to preach the Dharma first to Uddaka Ramaputta? He will easily understand this Dharma.

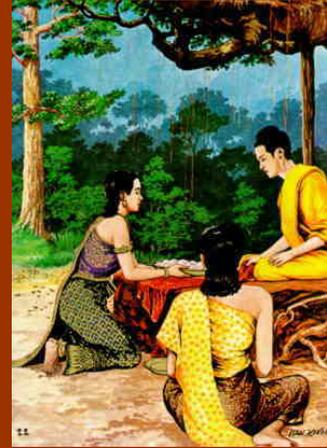
Then an invisible god said to the Blessed One: Uddaka Ramaputta died, Lord, yesterday evening. And knowledge arose in the Blessed One’s mind that Uddaka Ramaputta had died the previous evening. And the Blessed One thought: Highly noble was Uddaka Ramaputta. If he had heard my Dharma, he would readily have understood it.

Then the Blessed One thought: To whom shall I preach the Dharma first? Who will understand this Dharma readily? And the Blessed One thought: The five monks have done many services to me; they attended on me during the time of my ascetic discipline. **What if I were to preach the Dharma first to the five monks?**

Now the Blessed One thought: Where do the five monks dwell now? And the Blessed One saw by the power of his divine, clear vision, surpassing that of men, that the five monks were living at **Benares, in the deer park Isipatana**. And the Blessed One after having remained at Uruvela as long as he thought fit, went

forth to Benares and preached his newly discovered Dhamma – the Four Noble Truths and the “Turning the wheel of Dhamma” or.” **Dhammacakka-pavattana Sutta**”, in 6th century BC, India.

So he delivered the first sermon to the five ascetics – lead by **Kondanna**, later known as Anansi Kondanna. The remaining four ascetics took sometime to realize the dhamma, so Kondanna was the first to be taken into the order as the foremost Bhikkhu in Gotama dispensation. **Since 6th century BC, many changes had evolved, like, once in the beginning of Buddha dispensation, there was Bhikkhuni lead by Pajapati Gotami and after a lapse of 2000 years, Bhikkhuni order had been extinct, since some several hundred years in Theravada countries.** Human being by nature likes evolution and changes, even the Buddha tradition was changed to suit some powerful personal likes and dislikes discarding the authentic Buddha tradition. That was why Buddha made the prophecy that his dispensation would face – five disappearances, comes the end of his dispensation 5,000 years.



In his “**The Four Noble Truths**” he summed up thus:

- **Samadhi, when based upon sila, is rich in result and of great effect.**
- **Panna when based upon samadhi, is rich in result and of great effect.**

He then explained the four level of holinesses that we could attained by comprehending the “the Four Noble Truths”:

- a. **Sotapanna** – the stream winner – the first level of Sainthood.
- b. **Sekadagami** – the once returner (one more rebirth)
- c. **Anagami** – non-returner (no more rebirth in the sensual realm)
- d. **Arahatta** - liberated completely.

Knowing each individual has accrued his/her own kammic force, depending on individual, one would experiences differently: some who had practiced samadhti in their past lives could launch his/her effort on only Panna training; and some who had Panna practice in his/her past could launch on Samadhi in the present. However, the conventional method is to take up the three training practices in the sequential order.

No mater what people preach about the my dhamma, use the “Mahapadesa Sutta” to determine whether a preacher has correctly interpreted the Buddha dhamma so one could safely follow the correct path laid down by our Lord Buddha.

“The Four Noble Truths”

155. Then the Bhagava said to the Venerable Ananda, *“Come, Ananda, let us go to Koti village.”*

The Venerable Ananda respectfully assenting, the Bhagava, accompanied by a large number of bhikkhus, went to Koti village and dwelt there. During that time, the Bhagava addressed the bhikkhus thus:

Bhikkhus, it is through not having proper understanding and penetrative comprehension of “the Four Noble Truths” that I as well as yourselves have had to go incessantly through this long stretch (of samsara, round of existences), that we have had to go through one life after another continuously.

What are the Four Noble Truths that are not known properly, penetratingly? Bhikkhus, it is through not having proper understanding and penetrating comprehension of the Noble Truth of Dukkha, (Dukkha Ariya Sacca), that I as well as yourselves have had to go incessantly through this long stretch of samsara, (round

of existences), that we have had to go through one life after another continuously.

Bhikkhus, it is through not having proper understanding and penetrating comprehension of the Noble Truth of the Origin of Dukkha, (Dukkha Samudaya Ariya Sacca), that I as well as yourselves have had to go incessantly through this long stretch of samsara, that we have had to go through one life after another continuously.

Bhikkhus, it is through not having proper understanding and penetrating comprehension of the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Dukkha, (Dukkha Nirodha Ariya Sacca), that I as well as yourself have had to go incessantly through this long stretch of samsara, that we have had to go through one life after another continuously.

Bhikkhus, it is through not having proper understanding and penetrating comprehension of the Noble Truth of the Way to the cessation of Dukkha, (Dukkha Nirodha-Gamini Patipada Ariya Sacca), that I as well as yourselves have had to go incessantly through this long stretch of samsara, that we have had to go through one life after another continuously.

- **Bhikkhus, I have properly understood and penetratingly comprehended the Noble Truth of Dukkha.**
- **I have properly understood and penetratingly comprehended the Noble Truth of the Origin of Dukkha.**
- **I have properly understood and penetratingly comprehended the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Dukkha.**
- **I have properly understood and penetratingly comprehended the Noble Truth of the Way to the Cessation of Dukkha.**

The craving for existence, bhavatanha, has been cut off without any vestige remaining. The bhavatanha, which is like a rope that drags one to renewed existence, is exhausted. Now, there will be no more rebirths.

After the Bhagava had spoken the above words, he further said these verses:

"Existence after existence has had to be gone through in the long stretch of samsara because of lack of understanding of the Four Noble Truths as they really are. I have now perceived the Noble Truths. The bhavatanha, craving for existence, which is like a rope dragging one to renewed existence, has been rooted out. The root of dukkha has been cut off without any vestige remaining. Now, there will be no more rebirth."

While the Bhagava was thus sojourning at that Koti village, he repeatedly expounded to the bhikkhus this very discourse:

"Such is **sila**, morality;

such is **samadhi**, concentration of mind;

such is **panna**, wisdom.

- **Samadhi, when based upon sila, is rich in result and of great effect.**
- **Panna when based upon samadhi, is rich in result and of great effect.**

The mind, when developed through panna, is thoroughly liberated from the asavas, taints, namely, kamasava, bhavasava and avijjasava

Those who will reach the Higher Levels of Magga Insight without the Possibility of Returning

156. Then the Bhagava, after staying at Koti village as long as he wished, said to the Venerable Ananda, "Come, Ananda, let us go to Natika village."

The Venerable Ananda respectfully assented. The Bhagava, accompanied by a large number of bhikkhus, went to Natika village and stayed at a brick building.

At that time the Venerable Ananda approached the Bhagava and after making obeisance to him, sat on one side and asked the Bhagava these questions:

"Venerable Sir, at Natika village a bhikkhu by the name of **Salha** has passed away. What is his destination, *gati*? What is his next existence?"

"Venerable Sir, at (this same) Natika village, a **bhikkhuni**² named **Nanda** has passed away. What is her destination, *gati*? What is her next existence?"

"Venerable Sir, at (this same) Natika village, a devotee named **Sudatta** has passed away. What is his destination? What is his next existence?"

"Venerable Sir, at (this same) Natika village, a female devotee named **Sujata** has passed away. What is her destination? What is her next existence?"

"Venerable Sir, at (this same) Natika village, a devotee named **Kukkuta** has passed away. What is his destination? What is his next existence?"

"Venerable Sir, at (this same) Natika village, a devotee named **Kalimba** has passed away. What is his destination? What is his next existence?"

"Venerable Sir, at (this same) Natika village, a devotee named **Nikata** has passed away. What is his destination? What is his next existence?"

"Venerable Sir, at (this same) Natika village, a devotee named **Katissaha** has passed away. What is his destination? What is his next existence?"

"Venerable Sir, at (this same) Natika village, a devotee named **Tuttha** has passed away. What is his destination? What is his next existence?"

"Venerable Sir, at (this same) Natika village, a devotee named **Santuttha** has passed away. What is his destination? What is his next existence?"

"Venerable Sir, at (this same) Natika village, a devotee named **Bhadda** has passed away. What is his destination? What is his next existence?"

"Venerable Sir, at (this same) Natika village, a devotee named **Subhadda** has passed away. What is his destination? What is his next existence?"

157. Ananda, the **bhikkhu Salha**, due to the extinction of the *asavas*³, moral intoxicants, taints, was an **arahat**, who in this very life had attained to the taint-free emancipation of the mind (**Arahattaphala**)

Samadhi), and to the Insight emancipation (**Arahattaphala Panna**), having realized this emancipation for himself through Magga Insight.

Ananda, the **bhikkhuni Nanda**, through the complete destruction of the five Fetters, *samyojana*⁴, which lead to rebirth in the lower sensuous realms, is an **anagami**. She has arisen spontaneously⁵ in the **Brahma realm**, and being an Anagami, a Never-Returner, with no possibility of returning from that realm to existence in any form or in any other realm, will finally pass away in the realization of Nibbana in that very realm. (note - **this is the realm of fourth jhanas**)

Ananda, the devotee named **Sudatta**, through the complete destruction of three Fetters, *samyojana*, and the lessening of raga (passion), dosa (hatred), and moha (bewilderment), is a **Sakadagami**, a Once-Returner, who will make an end of dukkha, after returning to this realm of human beings only once.

Ananda, the woman devotee named **Sujata**, through the complete destruction of three Fetters, is a **Sotapanna**; a Stream-Winner, who is not liable to fall into realms of misery and suffering (*apaya*), assured of good destination and of attaining (the three higher levels of Insight, culminating in) Enlightenment.

Ananda, the devotee named **Kukkuta**, through the complete destruction of the five Fetters which lead to (rebirth in) the lower sensuous realms, is an **Anagami**. He has arisen spontaneously in the **Brahma realm**, and being an anagami, a Never-Returner, with no possibility of returning from that realm to existence in any form or in any other realm, will finally pass away in the realization of Nibbana in that very realm.

Ananda, the devotee named **Kalimba**, the devotee named **Nikata**, the devotee named **Katissaha**, the devotee named **Tuttha**, the devotee named **Santuttha**, the devotee named **Bhadda**, the devotee named **Subhadda**, each, through the complete destruction of the five Fetters which lead to (rebirth in) the lower sensuous realms, is an **anagami**. Each (of them) has arisen spontaneously in the **Brahma realm** and being an anagami, a Never-returner, with no possibility of returning from that realm to existence in any form or in any other realm, will finally pass away in the realization of Nibbana in that very realm.

Ananda, over fifty devotees from Natika village who have died are **anagamis** through the complete destruction of the five Fetters which lead to (rebirth in) the lower sensuous realms. **They have arisen spontaneously in the Brahma realm and being anagamis, Never-Returners, with no possibility of returning from that realm to existence in any form or in any other realm, will finally pass away in the realization of Nibbana in that very realm.**

Ananda, over **ninety devotees from Natika village** who have died are Sakadagamis, Once-Returners, through the complete destruction of the three lower Fetters, and the lessening of passion, hatred and bewilderment (moha). They will make an end of dukkha after returning to this realm of human beings only once.

Ananda, over **five hundred devotees from Natika village** who have died are Sotapannas, Stream-Winners, through the complete destruction of the three lower Fetters. They are not liable to fall into realms of misery and suffering, and are assured of a good destination and of attaining (the three higher levels of Insight, culminating in) Enlightenment.

1. gati: in this context, course after death. *Gati* means literally 'going', that is, going from life to life , by way of rebirth.

2. bhikkhuni: a female bhikkhu.

3. asavas: See para 249 of Samanaphala Sutta.

4. Samyojana: Fetter. See Appendix B 1

5. spontaneously: *opapatika*: arisen or reborn without being conceived in or issuing from a womb, appearing suddenly in complete mature

Discourse on Four Great Authorities

BURMA PITAKA ASSOCIATION, 1984

Mahapadesa Sutta

187. Then, after staying at Bhandā village as long as he wished, the Bhagava said to the Venerable Ananda, "Come, Ananda, let us go to Hatthi village, and to Amba village, and to Jambu village, and thence to the town of Bhoga."

The Venerable Ananda respectfully assented, saying "Very well, Venerable Sir." And the Bhagava, together with a large company of bhikkhus, reached the town of Bhoga.

The Bhagava stayed at the Ananda shrine at that Bhoga town. While there, the Bhagava said to the bhikkhus, "**O Bhikkhus, I shall give a discourse on the four Great Authorities¹. Listen to the discourse and bear it well in mind. I shall speak.**"

The bhikkhus respectfully assenting, the Bhagava gave this discourse:

188. O Bhikkhus, in this (matter), if a bhikkhu should say thus:

"Sirs, I have heard and received this (exposition) from the mouth of the Bhagava: Such and such is the Doctrine; such and such is the Vinaya, Instructions on methods of removing defilements²; such and such is the Teacher's (i.e., the Buddha's) Teaching."

O Bhikkhus, the words of that bhikkhu should not be (immediately) received with approval, nor should they be (immediately) rejected with scorn. Without approval or rejection, those words and phrases (attributed to the Buddha) should be carefully noted and should be collated with (lit., put into) the Sutta³ and examined in the light of the Vinaya.

If, on thus being collated with the Sutta or on being examined in the light of the Vinaya, the words and phrases do not fit in with the Sutta, or are not in accord with the Vinaya, then it must be concluded that 'This assuredly is not an utterance of the Bhagava; it is only an utterance wrongly learnt by the bhikkhu.' And, thus (coming to this conclusion), bhikkhus, the assertion should be rejected.

If, (however), on being collated with the Sutta or on being examined in the light of the Vinaya, the (attributed) words and phrases fit in with the Sutta, or are in accord with the Vinaya, then it must be concluded that 'This assuredly is an utterance of the Bhagava; it is an utterance learnt aright by the bhikkhu.' Bhikkhus, remember well this first (directive on assertions citing) Great Authority.

Again, O Bhikkhus, in this (matter), if a bhikkhu should say thus:

"There is a community of bhikkhus with elders and a chief bhikkhu at a monastery with such an such a name. I have heard and learnt this (exposition from that very community of bhikkhus: Such and such is the Doctrine; such and such and such the Vinaya; such and such is the Teacher's Teaching."

O Bhikkhus, the words of that bhikkhu should not be (immediately) received with approval, nor should they be (immediately) rejected with scorn. Without approval or rejection, the words and phrases (attributed to that community of bhikkhus) should be carefully noted and should be collated with the Sutta and examined in the light of the Vinaya.

If, on thus being collated with the Sutta or on being examined in the light of the Vinaya, the word and phrases do not fit in with the Sutta, or are not in accord with the Vinaya, then it must be concluded that

'This assuredly is not an utterance of the Bhagava it is only an utterance wrongly learnt by that community of bhikkhus.' And, thus (coming to the conclusion), bhikkhus, the assertion should be rejected.

If, (however), on being collated with the Sutta or on being examined in the light of the Vinaya, the (attributed) words and phrases fit in with the Sutta, or are in accord with the Vinaya, then it must be concluded that *'This assuredly is an utterance of the Bhagava; it is an utterance learnt aright by that community of bhikkhus.'* Bhikkhus, remember well this second (directive on assertions citing) Great Authority.

Again, O Bhikkhus, in this (matter), if a bhikkhu should say thus:

"There are many bhikkhu elders at a monastery with such and such a name, who are of wide learning and knowledge, who can recite by heart (the Pali Texts) having memorized the Doctrine, the Vinaya, and the Fundamental Precepts for bhikkhus⁴. I have heard and received this (exposition) from those bhikkhu elder themselves: Such and such is the Doctrine; such and such is the Vinaya; such and such is the Teacher's Teaching."

O Bhikkhus, the words of that bhikkhu should not be (immediately) received with approval, nor should they be (immediately) rejected with scorn. Without approval or rejection, the words and phrases (attributed to the bhikkhu elders then it must be concluded that *'This assuredly is not an utterance of the Bhagava; it is only an utterance wrongly learnt by those bhikkhu elders.'* And, thus (coming to this conclusion), bhikkhus, the assertion should be rejected.

If, (however), on being collated with the Sutta are in accord with the Vinaya, then it must be concluded that *'This assuredly is an utterance of the Bhagava; it is an utterance learnt aright by those bhikkhu elders.'* Bhikkhus, remember well this third (directive on assertions citing) Great Authority.

Again, O Bhikkhus, in this (matter), if a bhikkhu should say thus:

"There is a certain bhikkhu elder at a monastery with such and such a name, who is of wide learning and knowledge, who can recite by heart (the Pali Texts), having memorized the Doctrine, the Vinaya, and the Fundamental Precepts for bhikkhus. I have heard and received this (exposition) from that very bhikkhu elder: Such and such is the Doctrine; such and such is the Vinaya; such and such is the Teacher's Teaching."

O Bhikkhus, the words of that bhikkhu should not be (immediately) received with approval, nor should they be (immediately) rejected with scorn. Without approval or rejection, those words and phrases (attributed to the Buddha) should be carefully noted and should be collated with the Sutta and ***examined in the light of the Vinaya.***

***If, on thus being collated with the Sutta or on being examined in the light of the Vinaya, the words and phrases do not fit in with the Sutta, or are not in accord with the Vinaya then it must be concluded that 'This assuredly is not an utterance of the Bhagava; it is only an utterance wrongly learnt by the bhikkhu elder.'* And, thus (coming to this conclusion), bhikkhus, the assertion should be rejected.**

If, (however), on being collated with the Sutta or on being examined in the light of the Vinaya, the (attributed) words and phrases fit in with the Sutta, or are in accord with the Vinaya, then it must be concluded that *'This assuredly is an utterance of the Bhagava it is an utterance learnt aright by the bhikkhu elder.* Bhikkhus, remember well this fourth (directive on assertions citing) Great Authority.

O bhikkhus, remember these four (citations of) Great Authorities, Mahapadesa.

While the Bhagava was sojourning at the Ananda shrine in the town of Bhoga, there, too, he repeatedly

expounded to the bhikkhus this very discourse:

- *"Such is sila, morality;*
- *such is samadhi, concentration of mind;*
- *such is panna, wisdom.*
- *Samadhi, when based upon sila, is rich in result and of great effect.*
- *Panna, when based upon samadhi, is rich in result and of great effect.*

The mind, when developed through panna, is thoroughly liberated from the asavas, taints, namely, kamasava, the taint of sensuous desire, bhavasava, the taint of hankering after repeated existence, and avijjasava, the taint of ignorance of the true nature of existence as set out in the Four Noble Truths."

1. Great Authorities: Mahapadesa: The whole term may be paraphrased as directives for deciding on statements attributed to the Buddha, or to the other three Authorities.

2. The Vinaya: This explanation is according to the Commentary, commenting on this para 188.

3. The Sutta: According to the Commentary, this term in this para 188 means the entire Teaching of the Buddha, encompassing the three Pitakas.

4. Fundamental Precepts: *Matika*, (lit., contents), here means Fundamental Precepts for bhikkhus and bhikkhunis.