

# Evangelism: Defending the Faith

---

## BUDDHISM – Part 2

Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) was shocked to see the different aspects of human suffering: Old age, illness and death and ultimately encountered a contented wandering ascetic – who inspired him to begin a new life as a seeker of truth and enlightenment.

After having received enlightenment, Siddhartha reached a state where he was no longer affected by fears of suffering or death and so he began his teachings of the Four Noble Truths we have shaped Buddhism as we know today.

**The Four Noble Truths** are regarded as the central doctrine of the Buddhist tradition, and are said to provide a conceptual framework for all of Buddhist thought. These four truths explain the nature of dukkha (Pali; commonly translated as "suffering", "anxiety", "stress", "dissatisfaction"), its causes, and how it can be overcome.

According to the Buddhist tradition, the Buddha first taught the four noble truths in his very first teaching after he attained enlightenment. This was recorded in the discourse *Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dharma* and he further clarified their meaning in many subsequent teachings.

### **The Four Noble Truths are:**

1. The truth of dukkha (suffering, anxiety, dissatisfaction)
2. The truth of the origin of dukkha
3. The truth of the cessation of dukkha
4. The truth of the path leading to the cessation of dukkha

### **First truth: dukkha – The Truth of Suffering**

- The first noble truth is the truth of dukkha. The Pali term dukkha (Sanskrit: dukkha) is typically translated as "suffering", but the term dukkha has a much broader meaning than the typical use of the word "suffering". Dukkha suggests a basic dissatisfaction pervading all forms of life, due to the fact that all forms of life are impermanent and constantly changing. Dukkha indicates a lack of satisfaction, a sense that things never measure up to our expectations or standards.
- The emphasis on dukkha is not intended to be pessimistic, but rather to identify the nature of dukkha, in order that dukkha things may be overcome. The Buddha acknowledged that there is both happiness and sorrow in the world, but he taught that even when we have some kind of happiness, it is not permanent; it is subject to change. And due to this unstable, impermanent nature of all things, everything we experience is said to have the quality of dukkha or dissatisfaction. Therefore unless we can gain insight into that truth, and understand what is really able to give us happiness, and what is unable to provide happiness, the experience of dissatisfaction will persist.

# Evangelism: Defending the Faith

---

## Second truth: origin of dukkha – The Truth of the Origin of Suffering

- The second noble truth is the truth of the origin of dukkha. Within the context of the four noble truths, the origin of dukkha is commonly explained as craving conditioned by ignorance. This craving runs on three channels.
- Craving for sense-pleasures this is craving for sense objects which provide pleasant feeling, or craving for sensory pleasures.
- Craving to be this is craving to be something, to unite with an experience. This includes craving to be solid and ongoing, to be a being that has a past and a future, and craving to prevail and dominate over others.
- Craving not to be: this is craving to not experience the world, and to be nothing; a wish to be separated from painful feelings.
- Ignorance can be defined as ignorance of the meaning and implication of the four noble truths. On a deeper level, it refers to a misunderstanding of the nature of the self and reality.
- Another common explanation presents the cause of dukkha as disturbing emotions rooted in ignorance. In this context, it is common to identify three root disturbing emotions, called the three poisons, as the root cause of suffering or dukkha.
- **These three poisons are:**
  - ✓ Buddhism teaches that harboring the three poisons leads to evil and suffering. The Three Poisons are "**greed**," "**hate**" and "**ignorance**."
    - Lobha, greed or desire, is attraction to something we think will gratify us.
    - Dvesha or dosa is anger, hatred, animosity, ill-will and aversion.
    - Moha is ignorance or delusion. The first two poisons have ignorance as their root. Because we see ourselves as small, limited and needy, we pursue things we think will make us happy and hate things that cause us discomfort.

## Third truth: cessation of dukkha – The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering

- The third Noble Truth is the truth of the cessation of dukkha. Cessation (Pali: nirodha) refers to the cessation of suffering and the causes of suffering.
- The cessation of all the unsatisfactory experiences and their causes in such a way that they can no longer occur again. It's the removal, the final absence, the cessation of those things, their non-arising.
- Cessation is the goal of one's spiritual practice in the Buddhist tradition. According to the Buddhist point of view, once we have developed a genuine understanding of the causes of

## Evangelism: Defending the Faith

---

suffering, such as craving (tanha) and ignorance (avijja), then we can completely eradicate these causes and thus be free from suffering.

- Cessation is often equated with nirvana which can be described as the state of being in cessation or the event or process of the cessation. A temporary state of nirvana can be said to occur whenever the causes of suffering (e.g. craving) have ceased in our mind.

### **Fourth truth: path to the cessation of dukkha – The Truth of the Path Leading to Cessation of Suffering**

The fourth noble truth is the path to the cessation of dukkha. This path is called the Noble Eightfold Path, and it is considered to be the essence of Buddhist practice.

#### **The Eightfold Path consists of:**

- Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration
- While the first three truths are primarily concerned with understanding the nature of dukkha (suffering, anxiety, stress) and its causes, the fourth truth presents a practical method for overcoming dukkha. The path consists of a set of eight interconnected factors or conditions, that when developed together, lead to the cessation of dukkha. Ajahn Sucitto describes the path as "a mandala of interconnected factors that support and moderate each other."
- Thus, the eight items of the path are not to be understood as stages, in which each stage is completed before moving on to the next. Rather, they are to be understood as eight significant dimensions of one's behavior—mental, spoken, and bodily—that operate in dependence on one another; taken together, they define a complete path, or way of living.

### **ILLNESS, DIAGNOSIS, AND CURE**

In the Buddhist tradition, the Buddha is often compared to a great physician, and his teachings are compared to medicine. The teachings on the four noble truths in particular are related to a medical diagnosis, as follows:

1. The truth of dukkha: is recognizing that there is an illness
2. The truth of origin: is identifying the cause of the illness (the diagnosis)
3. The truth of cessation: is identifying a cure of the illness (the prognosis)
4. The truth of the path: is recommending a treatment for the illness that can bring about a cure (the prescription)

This analogy is said to emphasize the compassion of the Buddha—that he was motivated by the desire to relieve the suffering of beings. It also emphasizes that the Buddha was presented as physician, or healer of the spirit, rather than as a meta-physician or someone who spoke of supernatural powers.

# Evangelism: Defending the Faith

---

## METHODS OF STUDY AND PRACTICE

The two main traditions of Buddhism are Theravada and Mahayana which have different approaches to learning about the four noble truths and putting them into practice.

Differences between Theravada and Mahayana practices

- The Theravada tradition strongly emphasizes reading and contemplating The Discourse That Sets Turning the Wheel of Truth—the first discourse of the Buddha—as a means to study the four noble truths and put them into practice.
- In the Mahayana tradition, practitioners are more likely to learn about the four noble truths through studying various Mahayana commentaries, and less like to study the version of the first discourse. The Mahayana commentaries typically present the four noble truths in the context of the Mahayana path of the bodhisattva.
  - **Bodhisattva** - person who has achieved enlightenment, but decides not to pass immediately into nirvana. – Also known as a “Buddha-to-Be”. They dedicate their lives to helping others attain enlightenment – which they affirm through vows – no matter how long it may take.
    - According to Mahayana Buddhism a Bodhisattva has six virtues: Generosity, morality, patience, courage, meditation and wisdom.
- They place special stress on scriptures that are not included in the Tipitaka. They believe that enlightenment is open to everyone not just to monks.

Tipitaka, the name of Buddhists sacred texts. These texts or Pali Canon, were written down around 25BCE. Tipitake means “three baskets”, a title that refers to the three divisions of the scriptures:

- **Vinaya (discipline)** – these scriptures are concerned with monastic discipline, practice and lifestyle – they include instructions on living at peace, caring for the sick, giving to the poor, and teaching the lay community.
- **Sutta (themes)** – these teaching of the Buddha as related by his disciple Ananda are recorded into five parts: they contain a series of dialogues, illustrations and parables linked by common moral and spiritual themes.
- **Abhidamma (teachings)** - the final part provides a systematic analysis of Buddhist ideas and notions of experience. Special emphasis placed on describing and analyzing different mental states. It’s considered extremely important aid for meditation techniques.

# Evangelism: Defending the Faith

---

## WORSHIP AND RITUALS

Buddhist rituals vary from one school to another. Traditionally, they include honoring the Buddha and reciting the Three Jewels and Five Precepts. Worship may occur in a shrine at home or in a temple.

- **Prayer** – in Mahayana tradition prayers may be offered to the bodhisattvas. Saying prayers or turning a prayer wheel to symbolize a repeated mantra is another way to gain merit.
- **Alms** – Monks and nuns live a life of poverty. They rely on alms given by laypeople for their survival. Each day, monks collect alms for their community. Donating food or clothing is a popular way for lay Buddhists to acquire merit.
- **Offerings** – Buddhists make symbolic offerings – such as flowers, candles, and incense at temples and shrines. Flowers symbolize the fleeting nature of earthly life; the flame of a candle indicates the light of enlightenment; the smell of incense reflects the spread of the dharma – teaching/doctrine.

Monks and Nuns must live according to the Monastic Rule outlined in the Pali Canon. They observe the Five Precepts, plus additional rules that prescribe eating times, ban them from taking part in entertainments such as, dancing and singing, and forbid them to lie on a luxurious bed.

The rule also instructs on other aspects of monastic life, such as the kind of robes that should be worn.

## FIVE PRECEPTS

1. Not to harm living things – which has led many Buddhists to become vegetarians and pacifists (refuse to perform military duties – peacekeeper)
2. Not to take what has not been given
3. To avoid sexual misconduct
4. To avoid unworthy speech (such as lying and speaking harmfully of others)
5. To avoid drugs and alcohol (which cloud the mind)

## IMAGES OF THE BUDDHA

Image of the Buddha adorn every temple and sacred site. These are not intended to be realistic portraits, but employ a rich symbolism to indicate different aspects of the Buddha's character. Some 32 features symbolize various properties of Buddhahood. For example the bump on the top of the head, or *ushnisa*, indicates wisdom and spirituality, while a third eye symbolizes spiritual insight. Hand positions, or mudra, and posture or asana, are also symbolic. **(Images of Buddhist statues where provided to understand the terms below.)**

- **Bhumispara** – this depiction shows the Buddha seated on the ground with his fingers of his right hand touching the earth. Touching the earth Siddhartha is believed to be asking nature to witness his resolve.

## Evangelism: Defending the Faith

---

- **Abhaya** – when the Buddha's right hand is raised – it represents "no fear" – this indicates that he is offering protection to his followers.
- **Dhyana** – is the traditional pose of meditation. This Buddha symbolizes the intense concentration required to overcome the self and achieve enlightenment.
- **Vitarka** – this Buddha's hand gestures represents the turning of the Wheel of Law and reminds Buddhists of the first sermon principles of the Buddhist doctrine.