



## What is Buddha Dhamma?

Buddha Dhamma is a system of living taught by the Buddha Shakyamuni. Buddha Dhamma is a system that can help one come out of suffering - when practiced and realised each for himself or herself, it stops the cycle of birth.

One can become fully enlightened and thus come no more to birth, avoiding old age, sickness and death.

The Buddha was born about 2,500 years ago in a place called Lumbini in ancient India, as Prince to the Shakya clan. He was known as Siddhartha.

His father, the King wished Siddhartha to become King.

Siddhartha grew into a fine prince, learning all the skills of a prince and excelled in all of them.

The King made sure that no imperfect situation arose that would upset Siddhartha and take his mind away from concentrating on being a King. The King ordered that all sick persons, all old persons and dying or dead persons were never to come into the sight of his son.

This perfect unnatural life was soon broken when Siddhartha saw an old person, a sick person and a dead body during his visits into the city outside the castle walls.

These visions of other states of human life developed in Siddhartha a yearning for the knowledge of "why is it so?"

After telling his wife, princess Yoshodhara, Siddhartha left his family, his father, his wife, his son and all his royal wealth in search for the truth.

Siddhartha could not believe that one day he too would be afflicted with sickness, old age and death and so would his loved ones. That he would be separated through death from his wife and child who he loved very much.

He wished to find out why there is suffering in life, why there is old age, sickness and death? He wished to find a way to help his loved ones and all beings understand this suffering and find an answer to it.

After 6 years of practicing as an ascetic (holy man) Siddhartha had not discovered what he was looking for. This practice involved renunciation of all worldly pleasures, refraining from

taking food, water, bathing, cutting hair, speaking. This was the practice used by the holy men of the day in search for spiritual truth.

One day a music teacher was teaching his student how to play a string instrument.

Siddhartha heard the teacher say "if you wind the string too tight it will break and if you have the string too loose, there will be no music". On hearing these words, Siddhartha came to the realisation of the middle way of life - it must be neither strict and nor undisciplined.

The Buddha Dhamma is called The Middle Way.

Siddhartha then decided to sit under the Bodhi tree to find out once and for all about the world.

He sat under the Bodhi tree for six days. On the full moon day of the fifth lunar month Siddhartha came to enlightenment.

During this time he came to realise the nature of all things, the nature of existence, how to come into being and how to stop coming into existence.

From this day on he was called the Buddha.

The Buddha said that each person can find out all the things that he had found out for themselves.

He recommended that persons find out for themselves - that this is the only way to wake, by seeing for yourself.

He taught the method of what he had done so others could follow in his footsteps and come to understand about the nature of the world.

Through practicing Samatha Bhavana - one pointed concentration, and Vipassana Bhavana - insight meditation, one can see for himself or herself.

So, Buddha Dhamma is a system of practice that can lead one to enlightenment - realising the nature of all things.

Buddha Dhamma is a system that gets one out of suffering - stops the cycle of birth. One can no more come to birth, thus avoid old age, sickness and death.

The Buddha found that beings are forever being born, getting sick, old and dying.

That beings are always in this cycle of birth and death. That beings take birth in the six planes of existence - human, heavenly, hell, hungry ghost, azura and animal.

He found that this cycle was fueled by craving - the desire for being.

The Buddha taught the law of dependent arising, as a structural principle, is to be understood in the four noble truths, the summary of the teaching of the Buddha.

The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, the Buddha's teaching on the four noble truths is considered to be the first sermon the Buddha gave after his enlightenment.

The four noble truths are:

The noble truth of sorrow (life is suffering)

The noble truth of the arising of sorrow

The noble truth of the cessation of sorrow

The noble truth of the path which leads to the cessation of sorrow.

Truth (sacca in Pali language) is "that which is". The Buddha taught that there are four such truths.

The first truth deals with dukkha (suffering or sorrow). As a feeling dukkha means, that which is difficult to be endured.

The truth of sorrow shows us that "birth is sorrow, old age is sorrow, sickness is sorrow, death is sorrow, grief, lamentation, pain, misery and despair are sorrow; association with the loathsome is sorrow, separation from the loved is sorrow, not to get what one wants is sorrow - in short, the five taken-up aggregates are sorrow".

Venerable Ajahn Sumedho encourages us to "understand dukkha: to really look at, stand under and accept your suffering. Try to understand it when you are feeling physical pain or despair and anguish or hatred or aversion - whatever form it takes, whatever quality it has, whether it is extreme or slight. This teaching does not mean that to get enlightened you have to be utterly and totally miserable. You do not have to have everything taken away from you or be tortured on the rack; it means being able to look at suffering, even if it is just a mild feeling of discontent, and understand it."

Ajahn Sumedho explains that there are three aspects to understanding that there is suffering. The first insight is to see that there is suffering, not to just say that I am suffering or 'I meditate and go on retreats to get out of suffering, but I'm still suffering and don't want to suffer'. When we say "there is suffering" we are looking from a reflective position rather than owning the suffering and saying that it is mine. The insight is simply the acknowledgment that there is this suffering without making it personal.

The second insight of the first noble truth is 'suffering should be understood'. The second aspect is that suffering or (dukkha in Pali language) is something to understand. One should understand suffering, not just try to get rid of it.

The third aspect of suffering is 'suffering has been understood'. When you have actually practiced with suffering, looking at it, accepting it, knowing it and letting it be the way it is, then there is the third aspect, 'suffering has been understood'.

Narada Thera answers What is this Noble Truth of Suffering?:

"Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, disease is suffering. Death is suffering, to be united with the unpleasant is suffering, not to receive what one craves for is suffering, in brief the five Aggregates are suffering".

The cause of human suffering can be found in the thirsts of the physical body and in the illusions of worldly passion.

If these thirsts and illusions are traced to their source, they are found to be rooted in the intense desires of physical instincts.

Desire, having a strong will to live, as its basis, seeks that which it feels desirable, even if it is sometimes death. This is called the Truth of the Cause of Suffering.

Ajahn Sumedho explains the second noble truth is also examined from three aspects; 'there is the origin of suffering, which is the attachment to desire. Desire should be let go of. Desire has been let go of'.

The second noble truth states that there is an origin of suffering and that the origin and that the origin of suffering is attachment to the three kinds of desire: desire for sense pleasure, (kamma tanha in Pali language), desire to become (bhava tanha in Pali language) and desire to get rid of (vibhava tanha).

Desire for sense pleasure is wanting sense pleasures through the body or the other senses and always wanting things to excite or please your senses. For example, when you are eating, if you are hungry and the food tastes delicious, you can be aware of wanting to take another bite.

Desire for wanting to become something can be seen in the realm of ambition and attainment - the desire to become. We get caught in striving to become happy, seeking to become wealthy or wanting to become something other than what you are right now.

When we get disillusioned with trying to become something, then there is the desire to 'get rid of things'. 'I want to get rid of my suffering, I want to get rid of my anger. We are not taking a stand against the desire to get rid of things nor are we encouraging that desire. Instead, we are reflecting, 'It's like this; it feels like this to want to get rid of something'.

The second insight into the second noble truth is 'Desire should be let go of'. This insight is about recognising desire without identifying with it in any way.

The third insight is 'desire has been let go'. When you have let go of desire, you no longer judge or try to get rid of, you recognise that it's just the way it is. Through the practice of letting go we realise that there is the origin of suffering, which is the attachment to desire, and we realise that we should let go of these three kinds of desire. Then we realise that we have let go of these desires; there is no longer any attachment to them.

If desire, which lies at the root of all human passion, can be removed, then passion will die out and all human suffering will be ended. This is called the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering.

In order to enter into a state where there is no desire and no suffering, one must follow a certain Path.

The cause of this suffering is craving or attachment (tanha) which is the Second Noble Truth.

The truth of the arising of sorrow is "the craving which leads to renewal of being, accompanied by delight and passion, finding delight in various things; that is to say, craving for pleasure, craving for being and craving for non-being".

The truth of the cessation of sorrow "is the remainderless dispassion cessation, giving-up, relinquishment, abandonment, and release from that same craving".

Ajahn Sumedho explains that the whole aim of the Buddhist teaching is to develop the reflective mind in order to let go of delusions. The four noble truths is a teaching about letting go by investigating or contemplating 'why is it like this?' without forming an opinion about whether these are good, bad, useful or useless'.

We reflect as we see suffering; as we see the nature of desire; as we recognise that attachment to desire is suffering. Then we have the insight of allowing desire to go and the realisation of non-suffering, the cessation of suffering. These insights can only come through reflection; they cannot come through belief.

Cessation is the natural ending of any condition that has arisen. It is not something that we create in the mind but it is the end of that which began. Therefore, cessation is not a self- it does not come about from a sense of 'I have to get rid of things,' but when we allow that which has arisen to cease. To do that, one has to abandon craving- let it go. Then, when it has ceased, you experience cessation, emptiness, non-attachment.

The truth of the path leading to the cessation of sorrow "is the noble eightfold path, that is to say, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration".

To start to live by the noble eight fold path a one ought to develop the ten bases for

meritorious actions.

The Ten Bases for Meritorious Actions (in Pali language: Dasa Punna Kiriya vatthu) are the key practices enunciated by the Buddha for us to practice as a group, they are:

1. Dana - Giving

In Pali language, Dana-maya-punna-kiriya vatthu

2. Sila - Morality

In Pali language, Sila-maya-punna-kiriya vatthu

3. Bhavana - meditation to arise the skillful states of the mind conducive to liberation.

In Pali language, Bhavana-maya-punna-kiriya vatthu

4. Apacayana - Reverence to the Triple Gem, one's parents, teachers, elders, and so on.

In Pali language, Apaciti-sahagata-punna-kiriya vatthu

5. Veyyavacca - Service to the Triple Gem, one's parents, teachers, elders, and so on.

In Pali language, Veyyavacca-sahagata-punna-kiriya vatthu

6. Pattidana - Sharing of merits

In Pali language, Pattanuppadana-punna-kiriya vatthu

7. Pattanumodana - Sharing in others' merits

In Pali language, Abbhanumodana-punna-kiriya vatthu

8. Dhammasavana - Listening to Dhamma

In Pali language, Savana-maya-punna-kiriya vatthu

9. Dhammadesana - Teaching the Dhamma

Desana-maya-punna-kiriya vatthu

10. Ditthijukamma - Rectification of one's views. Correcting one's own wrong views.

In Pali language, Ditthijukama-punna-kiriya vatthu

When you understand what Buddha Dhamma is, and you wish to know more about it and how to practice Buddha Dhamma, you must generate merit through wholesome actions (good deeds) to fuel your continued learning and realisation.

It is by realisation of the four noble truths that you can follow the path taught by the Buddha to become awakened.

The method followed by our Founder, John David Hughes is to do just this. To generate opportunities for persons to make merit in order to realize the four Noble Truths. Our Centre

operates on these ten bases for meritorious actions. You are most welcome to come and participate in our merit making activities.

We would like to quote here from the book by Annatta "As it is" where the author quotes from the poem by Sir Edwin Arnold about the Life and Teachings of the Buddha :

The first truth is of Sorrow. Be not mocked!  
Life which ye prize is long drawn agony:  
Only its pains abide; its pleasures are  
As birds which light and fly.

Ache of the birth, ache of the helpless days,  
Ache of the chill grey years and choking death,  
These fill your piteous time.

Sweet is fond love, but funeral-flames must kiss  
The breast which pillow and the lips which cling;  
Gallant is warlike might, but vultures pick  
The joints of chief and king.

Beauteous is earth, but all its forest-broods  
Plot mutual slaughter, hungering to live;  
Of sapphire are the skies, but when men cry  
Famished, no drops they give.

Ask of the sick, the mourners, ask of him  
Who tottereth on his staff, lone and forlorn:  
"Liketh thee life?" - these say the babe is wise  
That weepeth being born.

As the author, Annatta comments at the end of this poem  
"this appears to be a very gloomy picture, but that is not all there is to it; it is merely a  
diagnosis of the condition of life as lived by most of us."

The first step is to know, understand and realise the four noble truths. See life as it really is.  
When one understands this, the wish to find a way to be happy whether in living or in dying  
is generated.

May you understand the first noble truth: there is suffering.

May you know the causes of suffering.

May you realise there is a way out of suffering.

May you follow the eightfold path that is the way out of suffering.

May you practice the ten bases for meritorious action.

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May you be well and happy.

#### References

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