

# Road to Wisdom

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中国现代出版社

CHINA MODERN PUBLISHING HOUSE LIMITED

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## **Part One**

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*Life. Dharma. Practice. Achievement*  
*Liberation of Body and Mind in the World*  
*Hermit in the Deep Mountains*  
*The Tranquil Flow of the Dharma*



## Summary

### Chapter One

I would like to discuss with everyone: Why should we practice Buddhism?

Do we understand why the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are called the Three Jewels?

Next, let's explore the meaning of taking refuge in the Three Jewels.

The true refuge in life, the foundation of practice, which can truly guide and protect us, is dharma, the truth that we experience for ourselves.

Many people ask me, "Why, after practicing Buddhism, do I still experience afflictions? Why do I still feel anger, pain, and suffering?" Perhaps we can discuss these questions.

### Chapter Two

What did the Buddha teach?

The Three Marks of Existence, the Four Noble Truths...

Is understanding the teachings important for practicing Buddhism?

Everyone wishes to attain Buddhahood, but what is our understanding of the Buddha?

The Buddha is called "The Exalted One with Two Feet" — meaning the perfection of wisdom and merit.

So, what is the content of wisdom?

What is the content of merit?

Everyone wants to attain liberation, but what is the goal of liberation?

If one wishes to escape from the three lower realms, what are the necessary requisites? What is the content of practice?

If one wishes to escape from the cycle of rebirth within the six realms, what are the requisites? What is the content of practice?

If one wishes to attain the Noble Path, what are the requisites? What is the content of practice?

If one wishes to become a Bodhisattva, what are the requisites? What is the content of practice?

If one wishes to attain Buddhahood, what are the requisites? What is the content of practice?

### **Chapter Three**

The sequence of practice: understanding each stage of progress in practice.

When the Buddha was in the world, we lived in reliance on him; after the Buddha entered Nirvana, we rely on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipaṭṭhāna).

- Contemplation of the body
- Contemplation of feelings
- Contemplation of the mind
- Contemplation of phenomena
- The stages of meditation
- The stages of wisdom practice.

### **Chapter Four**

The structure of Buddhist teachings:

- Bodhicitta (the mind of enlightenment)
- Renunciation
- Great compassion



## Chapter 1: Why Study Buddhism

### Preface

Many friends have asked me why I chose to retreat into the mountains and live in seclusion. Some even invited me to take on certain tasks for Buddhism.

However, feeling that my wisdom was still limited, I sought a quiet place to thoroughly contemplate the Buddha's teachings and personally experience the truth of the Dharma through body and mind.

Just as one can only convey the true flavor of food after tasting it oneself, one can only share the Dharma truthfully and without doubt after experiencing it directly. Likewise, a responsible guide must have personally traversed the path many times before accurately leading others along it. The Buddha, the most perfect guide, led us in this way, and I hope one day I can lead others in the same manner.

Occasionally, when I descend from the mountains, I meet people who ask about various life issues, such as:

- How should we face the difficulties of life?
- How can we attain happiness?
- How should we deal with birth, aging, sickness, and death?
- How can we be free from afflictions?
- How can we maintain inner peace and harmony?

- Is birth followed by death an inevitable process? What is the true value of life?

These are questions that none of us can avoid. They are real issues that we all must face. And they are the questions I have pursued my entire life, in my search for the truth of life.

For decades, through studying with over a hundred great teachers and learning from the teachings of the Chinese, Tibetan, and Theravāda Buddhist traditions, I came to understand the wisdom and methods handed down by the Buddha. The reason these teachings have endured for so long is that the wisdom and truth they contain can be personally verified and experienced by anyone through diligent practice. Thus, the Dharma is not merely theoretical but a practical path that, through constant effort, allows one to realize the truth for oneself and benefit both oneself and others.

In the past ten years of mountain retreat, my reflections and experiences have only strengthened my conviction that only true wisdom can fundamentally resolve the doubts and suffering of life.

So, what is true wisdom?

How can we develop true wisdom?

Many ancient sages, just like us, have continuously explored the path to wisdom. Many religious cultures and theories that we can access today are the precious treasures left by those who came before us.

However, in the fast-paced world we live in today, how much of the true spiritual heritage can we still learn and inherit? Under the umbrella of sincere faith, how can we attain true wisdom?

Take Buddhism as an example:

Devoted lay followers of Buddhism should ask themselves:

- Why do we study the Buddha's teachings?
- As a fully enlightened being respected by all, what qualities of the Buddha make us venerate and follow him?

- Do practitioners of Buddhism truly understand the wisdom shared by the Buddha?
- The Dharma does not exist apart from the world, so what is the relationship between the Dharma and our daily lives?

...

These questions are the reason for writing this book.

I hope to share what I have learned, contemplated, and practiced along my journey in search of the truth.

May everyone find true happiness, peace, and harmony in life.

**One can only be free from suffering through understanding suffering.**

**The pursuit of happiness requires us to face life's suffering honestly.**

Every one of us, myself included, seeks a happy life. But what is happiness?

When life is constantly pressured by the suffering of birth, aging, sickness, death, the suffering of not getting what we want, the suffering of separation from loved ones, the suffering of meeting with what we dislike, and the burning suffering of the five aggregates — how can we feel happiness?

Is being born into wealth enough to avoid suffering?

Is success in business enough to avoid suffering?

Is harmony in marriage enough to avoid suffering?

Is having many children and grandchildren enough to avoid suffering?

We have all experienced life's disappointments — the pain of passion, anger, worry, and afflictions. I'm sure none of us can forget how these struggles have tormented us in the past, and we can foresee that such difficulties will continue to arise under different circumstances in the future.

In the end, we all must face the suffering of death.

Through these experiences of suffering, we cannot keep our unhappiness to ourselves — we continually spread it to those around us. A person filled with unhappiness creates an atmosphere of anxiety and unease, and anyone entering such an environment will feel its effects.

In this way, individual tension and anxiety accumulate to create collective social anxiety.

**Suffering is the fundamental issue of life, yet we know nothing of the cause of this lack — just as we are unaware of where we came from at birth and where we are going at death.**

Since these problems truly exist, we must learn to face them directly rather than wandering through life in confusion, only to end up never understanding what we lived for.

So, how should we confront these problems and ultimately free ourselves from them?

The fully enlightened Buddha teaches us that we must cultivate wisdom through hearing, wisdom through reflection, and wisdom through practice.

It is by hearing that we come to know the Dhamma; by hearing, we avoid evil; by hearing, we abandon the meaningless; and by hearing, we attain Nirvana.

Wisdom through hearing is the wisdom gained from listening to the words of wise teachers or reading their teachings. This type of wisdom is highly beneficial as it directs us toward the right path.

Through hearing, we are guided to reflect on and understand the theoretical knowledge, using reason to judge whether what we have heard or read is logical, valuable, and beneficial. If it is, we accept it—this is the second step, wisdom through reflection.

Only when wisdom through reflection matures can it lead us to practice based on that understanding, and it is through practice that we experience and realize the liberating wisdom. This is

wisdom through practice.

Practice is not something mystical or beyond comprehension, nor is it some strange or alternative lifestyle.

Practice means correcting our actions—specifically, the actions of our body, speech, and mind.

So, what kind of practice is the right one?

We call it morality (sīla), concentration (samādhi), and wisdom (paññā).

As it is said: "**Avoid all evil, cultivate good, purify the mind—this is the teaching of all Buddhas.**"

"Avoiding all evil" refers to the actions of body and speech. Not harming others or disturbing their peace and harmony is considered good behavior, which is the essence of morality in the Buddha's teachings.

"**Cultivating good**" arises from morality and leads to concentration. This means that not only should our bodily and verbal actions be purely good, but our mental actions must also be pure and free from defilement. This requires the power of concentration, which helps the mind focus and achieve inner peace and calm. Only when the mind is firmly settled can it stop the chaos of thoughts, preventing the growth of unwholesome thoughts.

When the six sense faculties (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind) are agitated, the mind will be disturbed. Only through concentration can the six faculties be freed from the six sense objects (form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thoughts), allowing the mind to become steady.

Just as a thousand streams flow into the ocean, causing no disturbance to the calm sea, so too, when desires enter the one free from craving, there is peace. When desires enter someone full of craving, however, there is only unrest. This is why the practice of concentration is so important.

"**Purifying the mind**" arises from concentration and leads to

wisdom. If we constantly develop wisdom, we will free ourselves from afflictions and suffering, and our thoughts will be at peace. This is the realm of wisdom.

**"This is the teaching of all Buddhas"**—the methods of morality, concentration, and wisdom have been taught by all Buddhas of the past, present, and future as the fundamental path to free ourselves from afflictions and reach the other shore of happiness.

Studying Buddhism cannot be separated from daily life. We should start with the small actions around us. Every thought, word, and deed should be free from greed, hatred, and delusion, and we should cultivate morality, concentration, and wisdom. Only then can we truly align with the teachings of the Buddha and become true practitioners of Buddhism.

**Truth Transcends Sects** — The existence of suffering and the way to be free from suffering do not differ based on sect or race.

Two thousand five hundred years ago, the compassionate sage and enlightened Buddha left his royal family, his beloved wife and child, and his loving parents to seek everlasting happiness and ultimate freedom from suffering. Naturally, we know that the Buddha, respected by the world, found the path to liberation and reached the other shore of ultimate happiness. He has shared this path to the other shore with us!

Many people rely on different faiths to seek comfort and spiritual support.

However, the suffering of the world is a common affliction for everyone; it does not differ based on sect.

Similarly, the true wisdom (truth) that leads to liberation from suffering must also be universal. What do these universal characteristics have to do with sectarian differences?

Just as fire is hot and ice is cold, this is a universal truth of nature. If we place our hand in the fire, whether we are aware of it

or not, it will burn. Fire does not care whether the hand is left or right, male or female. There is no distinction, no difference, and no bias.

The Buddha's teachings do not promote sects, philosophies, or belief systems. His teachings aim to **help us see the truth of suffering in life, understand its causes, and share the practical methods for its cessation, based on his own realization, allowing us to see the reality of the happiness that lies on the other shore.**

Therefore, the Buddha never spoke on topics unrelated to the cessation of suffering. He emphasized: what he taught was not his creation or invention, nor something revealed through miracles, but the truth itself, the essence of the Dhamma, the natural law, realized through his own efforts, in complete and direct awareness of the true nature of body and mind.

Before him, many had discovered the truth, and after him, many more will discover it. The Buddha taught that after listening to the teachings of wise teachers, we should continuously practice for ourselves, as personal experience is the best evidence.

If we wish to benefit from the truth, we must experience it directly. Only through this can we know that it is real and valid.

The Buddha repeatedly emphasized that he only teaches the truth that he has personally realized.

He encourages us to develop three kinds of wisdom:

- **Wisdom through hearing**
- **Wisdom through reflection**
- **Wisdom through practice**

The Buddha, like a perfect doctor, accurately diagnosed the illness of humanity, identified its cause, and prescribed the most effective remedies. When we recite this prescription over and over, we develop wisdom through hearing.

If the patient continues to reflect on why a particular medicine must be used and what its effects are, by consulting the doctor's

writings, his students, or through personal inquiry, this leads to wisdom through reflection.

However, only by actually taking the medicine can the illness be cured, bringing real benefit. In the same way, only wisdom through practice can truly lead us to the goal of healing.

**The only true refuge in life, the only foundation we can stand on, and the only thing that can truly guide and protect us is the natural law — the truth that we experience personally.**

The Buddha shared with us the truth that he had personally realized, without division between inner or outer, without any reservations, and without transmitting secret teachings to a select few.

The Buddha wished only to explain the natural law, the truth, in the simplest and most accessible way, so that more people could benefit from it.

The Buddha had no interest in sectarianism or personal worship, and he repeatedly emphasized: the person transmitting the teachings is insignificant compared to the truth itself.

The Buddha simply wanted to share the wisdom that leads to liberation from suffering and affliction, not to turn us into blind followers.

Thus, only with true wisdom can we possess everything.

Following the Buddha's footsteps, I proceed without hesitation.



## Chapter 2: How to Obtain the Buddha's Teachings

What did the Buddha teach? Is studying the Buddha's teachings important?

In life, where there is light, there is no darkness.

Where there is wisdom, there is light; where there is ignorance, there is darkness.

By understanding the true meaning of impermanence and non-self, one is constantly illuminated by the light of wisdom, and darkness naturally disappears!

**So, where does light come from, and where does darkness go?**

**How can we live in accordance with the ultimate truth?**

People in the world are often intoxicated by sensual pleasures and attachment, seeking happiness outside of themselves. They believe they can find the happiness they seek in food, wealth, or companionship. Thus, they are driven by greed and sensual desires, always living in a cycle of gain and loss, bound to suffering. Our bodies and minds are constantly entangled in worldly affairs, and our emotions fluctuate with various conditions.

For example, today a couple may be in love, but tomorrow they may become strangers; today, friends may share hardship together, but tomorrow, due to self-interest, they may become enemies.

Our lives are spent in such instability and ignorance, wasted in

this way. We endlessly cycle through births and deaths in the wheel of samsara, without beginning or end.

The wise learn to awaken to impermanence through these changes in life. They confront the suffering in life, seek the truth about life, and experience the truth of life, thereby attaining ultimate liberation.

So, what is the Dharma (truth) that the Buddha realized and wished to share with us?

It is the Three Marks of Existence: “**All conditioned things are impermanent, all phenomena are non-self, and Nirvana is eternal peace.**”

- 1. All conditioned things are impermanent:** This means that everything is constantly in a state of arising and passing away. What existed in the past has changed in the present, and what exists now will eventually vanish in the future.
- 2. All phenomena are non-self:** This means that in all conditioned and unconditioned phenomena, there is no enduring self.
- 3. Nirvana is eternal peace:** This refers to the state of cessation, where all the suffering of birth and death is extinguished. It is peaceful and unmoving, and thus blissful. Therefore, Nirvana is eternal peace,

Any teaching that aligns with these three principles is the Buddha's true Dharma. Just as a seal verifies authenticity in worldly matters, these principles are known as the Dharma seals.

Experiencing the Buddha's teachings is the process of experiencing the constant arising and passing away of the body and mind. Walking on the path of the true Dharma is like walking on the bright path of light. If we cling to the fleeting and insubstantial process as real, we will experience suffering. If we can experience the transience, instability, and impermanence of these processes as

they truly are, attachment will disappear. This is the importance of experiential practice for a practitioner.

When we learn to continuously observe the sensations within and around the body and mind, we become more and more aware of the nature of impermanence.

When sensations arise, we do not react habitually, but simply recognize them clearly, allowing them to arise and pass away naturally. In this moment, our ingrained habits and attachments will surface and then fade away. When old habits and attachments cease, suffering disappears, and we attain liberation and freedom.

This is the work of direct experience, and we must keep making efforts. Every step brings its own benefit. Only through continuous effort, patience, and persistent practice can we reach the goal.

The teachings are like a map to the other shore. The Buddhas and enlightened practitioners are like experienced guides who have traversed the path between this shore and the other countless times through their own practice. They have carefully recorded every detail of the journey on the map to share with us, guiding practitioners safely and accurately along the correct path.

Many practitioners aspire to attain realization, to see the truth, to understand the mind and realize its nature, to comprehend the original essence, and to fully penetrate the nature of emptiness. However, if one does not study the teachings and establish the correct understanding, how can one even begin the journey without the necessary provisions, the map to get started, or an understanding of the destination? Isn't it easy to go astray, to remain stagnant, or to fall into delusion?

Therefore, we must listen to the teachings, the Three Marks of Existence, and the wisdom of *prajñā*, and thoroughly internalize the teachings. Only then will we not lose our way on the path of practice, and we will follow the guidance of the Buddhas and

Bodhisattvas.

Theory (Dharma) guides practice, and practice resonates with the theory (Dharma). This is the correct way to practice.

Now, we need to learn how to contemplate rationally and understand the path we experience in practice:

1. If not making distinctions is the practice of the wisdom of “emptiness”, then would lethargy, sleep, and formless concentration also be considered practicing the wisdom of “emptiness”?
2. If not making distinctions is the practice of wisdom of “emptiness”, would the mind remaining indifferent to the stimuli of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and consciousness also be considered wisdom of “emptiness”?
3. If focusing the mind in one place without making distinctions is the wisdom of “emptiness”, then is all meditative concentration also the practice of the wisdom of “emptiness”?

Some say: If one first observes the object that one clings to and then eliminates the mind that clings, it is like a dog chasing the stone thrown at it without noticing the person who threw it. This method does not address the root cause, so it cannot solve the problem. Focusing the mind without allowing distinctions to arise and eliminating all distinctions from the mind is merely a method of suppression, not a fundamental solution.

The correct practice of the wisdom of “emptiness” requires first recognizing the object one clings to and then, through the correct understanding of the truth, realizing that the object one clings to is impermanent and lacks inherent existence. Only then can deluded attachment be cut off. It is like mistaking a rope for a snake in the dark and becoming fearful. Only by shining a light and clearly seeing that the rope is not a snake will the fear disappear. Without this clear vision, the fear will never subside. It is only

by observing the emptiness of phenomena such as the "self" that deluded attachment to "self" can be eliminated, not by closing one's eyes and refusing to make any distinctions.

So, where does this wisdom come from?

We need good teachers (kalyāṇa-mittas)!

**How do we recognize and select a good teacher?**

In life, it is difficult to find someone who truly understands us, and it is even more difficult to encounter a good teacher who can guide us out of suffering.

**In these times, far removed from the Buddha, where can we find such a spiritual guide?**

Some travel across rivers and mountains, seeking teachers and the method to dispel their doubts.

When I was young, I served the public during the day, and at night, under the light of an oil lamp, my first teacher opened up a vast realm of knowledge and learning for me.

Everyone's life journey is different, but only by understanding the true meaning of life can we establish the correct view and grasp the true value of our existence. And all of this begins with hearing the teachings.

**To hear the teachings, we must first find good spiritual teachers.**

**A good spiritual teacher is not limited to one person or a few people. Any teacher or friend who helps us cultivate virtue and establish the correct view is a good teacher.**

Since ancient times, in the pursuit of truth and the search for good teachers, our predecessors have climbed mountains and crossed rivers, undeterred by difficulties and obstacles. Just like Sudhana in the AvatamsakaSūtra, who visited 53 different teachers in his journey toward the shore of wisdom, each teacher guided him at different stages of the path. Through this process, he aligned his practice with the theory and applied the theory in his practice,

ultimately following the path of wisdom. Only wisdom gained through personal experience is accurate and can be applied freely.

Thus, whether we are monastics or laypeople, if we can humbly seek learning, listen regularly to the teachings, and learn to discern and reflect through hearing, this is the first step in understanding the truth of life and the key to unlocking wisdom.

Since I was young, I have heard many methods of teachings and practice, which is why I have never been confused about my life's direction.

It was under this plan that I learned the truth, understood the value of life, and planted the seeds of wisdom through my experiences in practice.

Therefore, I would like to share some methods of seeking knowledge with everyone:

Pilgrimage is a great way to train the mind and seek good teachers in the practice of the Dharma. Many people may not have heard the term "pilgrimage," but it is similar to how, in modern life, many people challenge themselves: traveling alone by car, riding a bicycle, or walking across mountains and rivers. The ancient saying goes, "Travel ten thousand miles and read ten thousand books." However, there is a slight difference: monastics who go on pilgrimage typically do so without money. During their journey through mountains, cities, or deserts, they practice endurance and cultivate relationships with countless people through a heart filled with loving-kindness (*mettā*).

Another form of practice is to seek solitude in the remote mountains. The Buddha greatly valued the significance of forest life because it brings peace and calm to both body and mind. In such an environment, we can sow and cultivate the seeds of concentration and wisdom. Living amidst busyness and noise, it is difficult for these seeds to grow. Once concentration and wisdom blossom, one can return to society, ready to face the challenges brought by

sensory experiences. Thus, we leave home, retreat to the remote mountains to practice meditation, and dwell in accordance with the Dharma.

Whether on pilgrimage, in a mountain retreat, or living in the city, it is essential to understand the purpose behind choosing such a lifestyle and the meaning it holds, so as not to waste this life.

**How can we find good teachers who align with our pursuit of the true Dharma?**

A good teacher, also called a spiritual friend, helps us grow in virtue, leads us out of suffering, guides us to the shore of happiness, and can even directly help us transcend the ordinary and reach sainthood.

A good teacher has compassion and cannot bear to see others suffer.

A good teacher puts oneself in another's shoes, and in all interactions, speaks with gentle, loving words.

A good teacher is courageous in the true Dharma, able to undertake difficult tasks without retreating.

A good teacher constantly dispels others' doubts, offering the gift of the Dharma selflessly.

The most supreme good teachers are those who have attained either of the four stages of noble attainments: Buddha, Pratyekabuddha, Bodhisattva, and Arahant.

Next, draw close to practitioners who have attained meditative concentration, or those who are proficient in any or all of the scriptures, whether it be the suttas, the vinaya, or the abhidhamma.

Next, associate closely with those who have mastered one sūtra, one commentary, and its explanatory texts. Such individuals preserve the system of sacred texts and maintain the pure transmission of tradition.

We should strive to seek out and visit good teachers, as they

are the first and essential condition for liberating ourselves from suffering.

A true good teacher is one who possesses ten qualities:

1. Their morality is in line with the precepts, as their faculties are well-restrained.
2. They are peaceful in body and mind, as their conduct is beneficial to others.
3. Their mind is absorbed in concentration (samādhi), and thus they are free from confusion.
4. They are endowed with right faith, right mindfulness, and right wisdom, and their virtues grow as they are free from defilements.
5. They are courageous, as their morality, concentration, and wisdom are complete.
6. They tirelessly work for the benefit of others, making them rich in experience.
7. They have heard much, and thus their insight into truth is clear.
8. They understand the true meaning and thus speak skillfully.
9. They proclaim the Buddha's true Dharma without error, and their compassion runs deep.
10. They have realized the truth themselves, knowing that all phenomena are unobtainable, and thus they do not regress.

### **Are you a worthy vessel?**

Often, when good teachers are right by our side, we are too busy or distracted to focus on learning. So, as seekers of happiness, how can we seize the opportunity to learn?

Let us examine the common situations that arise during listening:

**The Buddha used a metaphor for the first type of**

**unworthy vessel, which can be of three kinds: an overturned vessel, a stained vessel, and a leaking vessel.**

Just as a heavy rain of nectar falls from the sky, but if the mouth of a bottle is facing downward, not a single drop can enter. Similarly, when one is blocked by ignorance, even though physically present in the place where the Dharma is being taught, not a single word enters the ears. This is known as an overturned vessel.

Another person may listen attentively, but clings to their own views, constantly comparing and mixing the teachings with their incorrect beliefs. This is known as a stained vessel.

The third type of person listens and contemplates well but does not put the teachings into practice. They do not uphold the precepts and are often lazy and careless. Thus, letting the teachings heard slip away with the passage of time is known as the **leaking vessel**.

A true vessel for the Dharma, however, is someone who feels joy while hearing the teachings, maintains unwavering focus, reflects constantly on the teachings until they are never forgotten, and continuously practices and experiences the teachings in their life. Such a person praises the Tathāgata from the heart, honors the Buddhas, reveres good teachers, repents for their karmic obstacles, and remains steadfast in their pursuit of enlightenment.

A person with such potential and wisdom is capable of receiving the true Dharma and is called a **vessel for the Dharma**.

**Next, we should listen to the teachings of the Four Noble Truths with proper understanding.**

The Four Noble Truths encompass all teachings.

The Buddha **turned the wheel of Dharma** three times, which means he proclaimed and explained his teachings.

If you wish to understand all the sufferings in this world, look to the Buddha's first turning of the wheel of Dharma.

After attaining perfect enlightenment, the Buddha's first teaching to the world was delivered to the five ascetics, and it contained the **three teachings of the Four Noble Truths** and their sixteen aspects:

The first teaching:

- This is the nature of suffering (dukkha).
- This is the nature of the cause of suffering (samudaya).
- This is the path that can be cultivated (magga).
- This is the cessation that can be realized (nirodha).

The second teaching:

- Suffering must be understood.
- The cause of suffering must be abandoned.
- The path must be cultivated.
- The cessation must be realized.

The third teaching:

- Suffering has been understood.
- The cause of suffering has been abandoned.
- The path has been cultivated.
- The cessation has been realized.

The first teaching of Dharma contains:

- **This is the nature of suffering.**
- **This is the nature of the cause of suffering.**
- **This is the path that can be cultivated.**
- **This is the cessation that can be realized.**

### **The nature of suffering (The Noble Truth of Suffering):**

All things in the world, both body and mind, are governed by natural laws and characteristics.

Just as the nature of fire is to burn, and the nature of water is to cool, the nature of suffering is to oppress.

Whether we wish it or not, the appearance of suffering is inherently oppressive.

To truly confront suffering, let us now close our eyes and reflect carefully on our own lives.

Whenever suffering arises, can we escape from it?

Suffering from birth, aging, sickness, and death — no one can avoid it, everyone is oppressed by it.

**Birth suffering:** Perhaps most people cannot remember the experiences of infancy, but the fact that we don't remember them does not mean they didn't happen.

When we enter the womb, we do not grow within clean and fragrant lotus flowers of blue, red, or white, but in the mother's womb, beneath the stomach and above the intestines, between the mucous membranes and spine. It is extremely narrow, dark, and filled with foul smells. We experience unbearable suffering during the ten months we stay there, our limbs unable to stretch freely. This is the true suffering of entering the womb. Whether or not we remember it, it is a real experience.

When the mother suddenly jolts, walks, sits, stands, or turns, the fetus suffers accordingly, like a lamb in the hands of a drunkard or a snake in the hands of a snake charmer, being pulled forward, dragged backward, lifted up, or pressed down.

When the mother drinks cold water, the fetus feels as if it's falling into icy water; when the mother eats hot porridge or food, it feels like burning rain is pouring down. If she eats something salty or sour, the fetus feels as if it is being wounded with an axe and sprinkled with salt. These are the many sufferings of dwelling in the womb.

If the pregnancy is abnormal, the fetus experiences the pain of surgical procedures performed on the mother's body.

These are all sufferings caused by dwelling in the womb.

Suffering during childbirth: The fetus suffers greatly during

childbirth, passing through the narrow birth canal, like a great dragon being squeezed through a keyhole or like beings in hell being crushed to powder between the mountains. This is the suffering of birth.

Upon being born, the tender body, when touched, bathed, or wiped with cloth, feels as if it's being pierced by needles or cut by razors. This is the suffering of birth itself.

Growing up: As we grow, we face the sufferings of life pressure, dissatisfaction, and struggles that may even drive people to suicide, hunger strikes, or hanging themselves. These are the sufferings we create for ourselves.

**Aging suffering:** This is the suffering caused by the loss of youth.

With the slowing down of our limbs, the deterioration of our senses, the weakening of our memory, and the scorn of others, we experience both physical and mental suffering — all caused by aging.

**Death suffering:** This is the suffering of fearing the cessation of life.

Besides the inner fear of death, which for most is an unknown world, there are many forms of death.

For example, death by illness, unnatural death, natural death, death from the exhaustion of lifespan, and death from the exhaustion of merit are all manifestations of death. When our body and mind are oppressed by the inevitability of death, with joints severed and vital points struck, we experience unbearable, incurable physical and mental suffering. Since death relies on suffering, it is called suffering.

In our daily lives, what kinds of experiences do we face?

When we are oppressed by passions, anger, depression, or afflictions, this leads to physical and mental suffering...

When our body and mind are directly attacked, resulting in trauma...

When suffering arises from being murdered or bound by others...

When the loss of a loved one causes heat and torment to afflict the body and mind, burning the heart and leading to sorrow, it is as if a poisoned arrow pierces the heart. The sorrow burns like a red-hot iron ball, causing us to suffer the consequences of birth, aging, sickness, and death. This is the suffering of sorrow.

For those who have lost loved ones, their hearts weep and are constantly disturbed, and the cries of those pierced by the arrow of sorrow dry their throat, lips, and palate, making it unbearable. Compared to sorrow, weeping and wailing are even more intense.

**"Physical suffering"** refers to the pain and illnesses of the body, something that no one is unfamiliar with. It causes us anxiety due to its oppressive nature, and when the body is oppressed, the mind also suffers. Therefore, physical suffering is particularly emphasized.

**"Mental suffering"** refers to the suffering of the mind. Its characteristic is the affliction and disturbance that arise within the heart. Those caught in this suffering often express it by crying, beating their chest, tossing and turning, rolling back and forth, lifting their feet upside down, attempting suicide by stabbing, poisoning, hanging, or burning themselves, suffering various kinds of distress. Thus, when the heart is afflicted, bodily suffering also arises. Therefore, those free from mental suffering speak of the suffering of mental affliction.

**"Distressful suffering"** refers to the anguish caused by the excessive pain in the heart from the loss of loved ones. Its characteristics include burning of the heart, emaciation, and

groaning. It represents a state of continuous suffering that burns the heart and emaciates the body; hence it is called suffering.

Among sorrow, weeping, and distress, "sorrow" is like gently simmering a pot over a low flame; "weeping" is like something boiling over and spilling out of the pot due to intense heat; and "distress" is like something that hasn't yet spilled over but remains burning and drying up inside the pot.

On the path of life, the suffering of encountering enemies and unpleasant people is also quite unbearable.

For instance, when we meet enemies or people we dislike, or encounter unpleasant situations, the heart is constantly disturbed, and this mental discomfort can also lead to physical suffering.

For many people, the most difficult to overcome is the suffering of separation from loved ones.

When we are separated from the people or things we love most, sorrow arises in our hearts, accompanied by a sense of misfortune. For example, when we are separated from friends, family, or cherished possessions, we are deeply pierced by the arrow of sorrow, and such suffering is common throughout life.

Many people are also oppressed by the suffering of unfulfilled desires, constantly seeking things they cannot obtain, a source of suffering that nearly everyone experiences.

This suffering arises from our ever-growing desires, manifesting in the constant yearning for unattainable things. Hence, it is called the "suffering of unfulfilled desires."

The pressure of suffering is ever-present, continuously increasing without any pause along life's path.

The **"suffering of the burning of the five aggregates"**: The body corresponds to the form aggregate (rūpa), and the mind consists of the feeling aggregate (vedanā), perception aggregate (saññā), mental formations aggregate (saṅkhāra), and consciousness aggregate (viññāna).

The suffering of the form aggregate is the bodily illness caused by imbalances in the four elements (earth, water, fire, and air). The suffering of the mind arises from the elements provided by feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness, constantly leading to tension, anger, passion, frustration, and restlessness.

Thus, our body and mind are always burning with suffering. If we were to explain suffering in its entirety, it would take more time than we have. It's like taking a single drop of water from the vast ocean to represent the taste of all ocean water. Through this brief explanation of suffering, I hope we can all reflect on the true meaning of suffering in life.

Therefore, when the Buddha first **turned the wheel of Dharma, he said: This is suffering, it is of the nature to oppress.**

### **Explanations of Buddhist Terms**

**The Four Noble Truths** (The Twofold Law of Cause and Effect)

#### **The Law of Cause and Effect in Samsara:**

- **Suffering:** Understanding suffering truly then it leads to the desire to remove it.
- **The Cause of Suffering:** To remove suffering, one must understand its origin.

#### **The Transcendental Law of Cause and Effect:**

- **Cessation (Nirodha):** First, one is shown the wisdom of prajñā and the fruit of nirvana, thereby aspiring to pursue the ultimate truth.
- **The Path (Magga):** With the desire to realize nirvana, one develops the intention to practice renunciation.

It is like suffering from an illness: first, one must know where the illness is, then understand the origin of the disease. If one wishes to be cured and experience peace, the only way is to take

the appropriate medicine.

**The Nature of the Four Noble Truths:**

Law of Cause and Effect in Samsara	Truth of Suffering (Dukkha Sacca)	Suffering of Suffering (Dukkha-dukkha): the body is in critical condition, compounded by mental afflictions	
		Suffering of Change (Vipariṇāma-dukkha): the disappearance of a beloved person or a cherished object	
		All-pervasive Suffering (Saṅkhāra-dukkha): Suffering caused by conduct or action: physical actions, verbal actions, and mental actions	
	Truth of the Cause of Suffering (Samudaya Sacca)	The Truth of Samsara	Good Karma (Kusala Karma): Causes the birth in the good realms of humans and heavenly realms
			Evil Karma (Akusala Karma): Causes the birth in the three lower realms (hell, animal, ghost).
			Immovable Karma: Causes rebirth in realms of form or formlessness
	Causes of Mental Afflictions		The Six Root Afflictions
Twenty Secondary afflictions			

Transcendental Law of Cause and Effect	The Noble Truth of Cessation (NirodhaSacca)	Divided by Nature	The cessation of the Śrāvakas (Listeners).
			The cessation of the Pratyekabuddhas (Solitary Realizers).
			The cessation of the Bodhisattvas.
		Divided by Conventional Terms	The cessation of verbal designations (as asserted by some non-Buddhist paths, including those who have not yet cut the seeds of afflictions)
			The cessation of the notions of completeness and incompleteness
			The cessation of ornamented and unornamented
		Residual and non-residual cessation	
	Truth of the Path (MaggaSacca)	Path of the Śrāvakas	
		Path of the Pratyekabuddhas	
		Path of the Mahāyāna (Great Vehicle)	

### The Sixteen Aspects of the Four Noble Truths

Four Noble Truths	Sixteen Aspects	Explanation
Truth of Suffering (Dukkha Sacca)	Emptiness(Śūnya)	The Five Aggregates are devoid of inherent existence or essence that can be grasped
	Suffering(Dukkha)	This body is bound by karma and afflictions, and is not free to act according to its own will.
	Impermanence(Anicca)	Conditioned phenomena arise and cease, and are impermanent.
	Non-self(Anattā)	All phenomena are merely labeled and conventionally exist, without any inherent or independent self
Truth of the Cause of Suffering (SamudayaSacca)	Accumulation (Samudaya)	The nature of defiled actions and attachment as they give rise to suffering as a result
	Cause(Hetu)	The nature of defiled actions and attachment, as the root cause of suffering.
	Arising(Sambhava)	Defiled actions and attachment forcefully generate the result of suffering
	Condition(Pratyaya)	Defiled actions and attachment give rise to suffering and its accompanying factors

Truth of Cessation (NirodhaSacca)	Cessation (Nirodha)	The release from the bondage of all karma and afflictions, leading to the complete extinction of suffering.
	Tranquility (Śānta)	The release from the bondage of all karma and afflictions, leading to the tranquility of afflictions.
	Excellence (Prasrabdhi)	The release from the bondage of all karma and afflictions, leading to the experience of benefit and joy, free from all suffering.
	Separation (Vimukti)	The release from the bondage of all karma and afflictions, ensuring that suffering will not arise again.
Truth of the Path (MaggaSacca)	Path (Mārga)	The path that directly realizes non-self, establishing the way to liberation.
	Reality (Nyāya)	The path that directly realizes non-self, correctly counteracting afflictions in accordance with the truth.
	Practice (Pratipatti)	By realizing the path of non-self, one's practice accords with reality
	Exit (Niḥsaraṇa)	The path that directly realizes non-self, fundamentally and completely severing all afflictions.

**This is the cause, the nature of summoning (Truth of the Cause of Suffering - SamudayaSacca)**

Suffering arises from the cause, and nothing else. Determining the true cause of suffering is what is called the Truth.

Having understood the Truth of Suffering, why do we still experience suffering?

Where exactly does all this suffering come from?

Those who suffer seek pleasure, and those who find pleasure seek even more pleasure. It's like a sick person being tormented by the illness, experiencing unbearable suffering. The first step is the desire to cure the illness. The second step is the doctor correctly diagnosing the illness and its cause. The patient must then take the prescribed medicine in the right way, and finally, the illness will be cured.

Thus, we must learn to:

1. See ourselves as the sick person.
2. See the good teacher as the doctor.
3. Seek the Dharma as we would seek medicine.
4. See the Buddha's teachings as medicine to cure afflictions.

In the explanation of the Truth of the Cause of Suffering (SamudayaSacca), "cause" refers to the accumulation of afflictions and karma. The concepts of "I like," "my view," craving, attachment, appropriation, rebirth, and grasping onto becoming — all of these are synonymous with accumulation. These are accompanied by joy and attachment, so they are also referred to as "attachment with joy." Craving and attachment have the same meaning, including desire for the sensual realm, the form realm, and the formless realm.

In the realm of sensual desire, sensual craving arises when craving is directed towards the object of sight appearing before the eyes, and this is called sensual craving.

In the realm of form, form craving arises when one believes the object is eternal, this is associated with eternalist views.

In the formless realm, formless craving arises when

one believes the object is annihilated, this is associated with annihilationist views.

Just as fruits arise from their seeds, the world speaks of those who enjoy the fruits; just as causes lead to fruits, the world speaks of trees bearing fruits.

This can be compared to the process of sowing seeds: if we plant a mango seed, it will grow and produce fruit corresponding to the seed. The fruit does not arise from some other cause; it requires the combination of various conditions. Similarly, if we plant a bitter gourd seed, it will not yield a sweet melon; if we plant a sweet melon seed, we will not get bitter gourd fruit. The seed we plant is the direct cause, and it requires good soil, sunlight, water, and many other conditions to bear the desired fruit.

Likewise, in our lives, "If you wish to know the causes from past lives, look at the experiences of this life; if you wish to know the results of future lives, look at the actions of this life." Merit fields are the cause, and wealth and nobility are the results. If in this lifetime we experience happiness and prosperity, it is due to the diligent cultivation in the eight fields of merit in past lives. Hence, the world calls this "brightness," and the opposite is also true.

We must clearly recognize that if we cut off the causes of suffering — which means cutting off the accumulation of afflictions and karma — we will attain liberation, because when the cause of accumulation ceases, suffering also ceases.

Karma accumulation arises due to habitual attachment and grasping. Therefore, we must diligently practice meditation to subdue it. Affliction accumulation requires us to first clearly understand the afflictions that bind us to samsara and cause suffering, and then, through the practice of morality, concentration, and wisdom, we can truly free ourselves from these constraints and obstacles.

Here, we first need to understand the content of affliction

accumulation, which is divided into six root afflictions and twenty secondary afflictions.

**Six Root Afflictions:**

1. **Greed** — Characterized by attachment and desire.
2. **Anger** — The foundation of harmful actions.
3. **Ignorance** — Characterized by delusion and darkness.
4. **Pride** — Characterized by arrogance and conceit.
5. **Doubt** — Characterized by hesitation and uncertainty.
6. **Wrong View** — Characterized by distorted wisdom.

**Twenty Secondary Afflictions:**

1. **Wrath** — Characterized by explosive anger, with the function of confrontation.
2. **Hatred** — Characterized by holding grudges, with the function of tormenting the mind.
3. **Covering** — Characterized by hiding the truth, with the function of producing regret.
4. **Torment** — Characterized by cruelty, with the function of causing anger and shame.
5. **Jealousy** — Characterized by envy, with the function of causing grief and distress.
6. **Stinginess** — Characterized by avarice, with the function of clinging to possessions.
7. **Deception** — Characterized by deceit, with the function of leading a wrong livelihood.
8. **Hypocrisy** — Characterized by flattery and cunning, with the function of weaving webs of deception.
9. **Harm** — Characterized by malice, with the function of causing suffering to others.
10. **Arrogance** — Characterized by pride, with the function of seeking glory.

11. **Shamelessness** — Characterized by disregard for virtuous conduct, with the function of nurturing evil.
12. **Inconsideration** — Characterized by the exaltation of violence and evil, with the function of promoting unwholesome deeds.
13. **Restlessness** — Characterized by a lack of tranquility, with the function of disturbing meditation.
14. **Drowsiness** — Characterized by dullness, with the function of obstructing wisdom.
15. **Disbelief** — Characterized by craving and attachment, with the function of fostering wrong views.
16. **Laziness** — Characterized by sloth, with the function of increasing defilements.
17. **Negligence** — Characterized by indulgence, with the function of diminishing virtue.
18. **Forgetfulness** — Characterized by failure to retain what is heard, with the function of producing distraction.
19. **Distraction** — Characterized by wandering thoughts, with the function of being the base for bad mental habits.
20. **Lack of Right Understanding** — Characterized by incorrect comprehension, with the function of violating ethical precepts.

**This is the Path that can be Cultivated (Truth of the Path - MaggaSacca)**

**This is the Cessation that can be Realized (Truth of Cessation - NirodhaSacca)**

What in the world of body and mind is tempting and delightful?

Where does craving arise from, and where is it established?

In the world of body and mind, wherever there are tempting

and delightful things, craving arises and is established there.

The Buddha spoke of the **eighteen realms (dhātus)**:

- Eye base—form object—eye consciousness
- Ear base—sound object—ear consciousness
- Nose base—smell object—nose consciousness
- Tongue base—taste object—tongue consciousness
- Body base—tactile object—body consciousness
- Mind base—mental object—mind consciousness

We must understand that the six sense bases are tempting, the six sense objects are tempting, and the six consciousnesses are tempting. Therefore, craving arises from these temptations, and in these very places, craving can be rooted out and extinguished.

Here, the cause of samsara (the cycle of birth and death) is this craving, which continually arises, bound by the pursuit of pleasure and attachment to joy. This craving seeks pleasure in the present and the future, whether it be sensual craving, craving for form, or craving for formlessness.

Wherever there are tempting and delightful things in the world of body and mind, that is where craving can be uprooted and extinguished. The complete removal, extinguishment, abandonment, and liberation from this craving is the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering.

### **How can we reach the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering?**

Since we already understand the cause of suffering, we must diligently seek the path to liberation. Just as a clear diagnosis of an illness requires the search for a remedy, and the correct administration of medicine leads to recovery, the Buddha, as the most perfect physician, offers us the most effective and ultimate prescription—**the Noble Eightfold Path**.

The **Noble Eightfold Path** consists of: Right View, Right

Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

### **What is Right View?**

Right View is true wisdom. Merely contemplating the truth is not enough; we must personally experience the truth, see the full context of things, and understand their true nature, rather than just perceiving their surface appearance. Truth is reality, and only through personal experience can we know it.

Wisdom can be divided into three types:

1. **Wisdom from Hearing (Suta-mayāPaññā)** – This is the wisdom gained through listening, such as reading, hearing Dharma talks, or attending lectures. This is wisdom learned from others.
2. **Wisdom from Reflection (Cintā-mayāPaññā)** – Wisdom from hearing cannot become our own true wisdom. Only after hearing or reading something and reflecting upon it, analyzing whether it is reasonable, useful, and practical, and deciding to accept it after careful consideration, does it become reflective wisdom. This is intellectual understanding.
3. **Wisdom from Meditation (Bhāvanā-mayāPaññā)** – Reflective wisdom is still not our own insight because we have not yet personally experienced it. Only through personal realization and experience of the truth, with wisdom gained from practice, can we change the nature of our minds and transform our lives. This is wisdom from meditation.

Other people's guidance can only serve to inspire us; their direction merely points out the correct path. Ultimately, we must rely on our own efforts to attain Right View.