

The Four Noble Truths

1. Life is suffering

Suffering is perhaps the most common translation for the Pali word **dukkha**, which can also be translated as imperfect, stressful, or filled with anguish.

Contributing to the anguish is **annica**-- the fact that all things are impermanent, including living things like ourselves.

Furthermore, there is the concept of **anatta** -- literally, "not self." Anatta means that all things are interconnected and interdependent, so that no thing -- including ourselves -- has a separate existence. Dukkha, annica, and anatta are known in Buddhism as the Three Marks of Existence.

2. Suffering is due to attachment

Attachment is a common translation for the word **tanha**, which literally means thirst and is also translated as desire, clinging, greed, craving, or lust. Because we and the world are imperfect, impermanent, and not separate, we are forever "clinging" to things, each other, and ourselves, in a mistaken effort at permanence.

Besides tanha, there is **dosa**, which means avoidance or hatred. Hatred is its own kind of clinging.

And finally, there is **avijja**, ignorance, or the refusal to see. Not fully understanding the impermanence of things is what leads us to cling in the first place.

3. Attachment can be overcome

Perhaps the most misunderstood term in Buddhism is the one that refers to the overcoming of attachment: **nibbana**. It literally means "blowing out," but is often thought to refer to either a Buddhist heaven or complete nothingness. Actually, it refers to letting go of clinging, hatred, and ignorance, and the full acceptance of imperfection, impermanence, and interconnectedness.

4. There is a path for accomplishing this

There is the path called **dhamma**. Buddha called it the middle way, which is understood as meaning the middle way between such competing philosophies as materialism and idealism, or hedonism and asceticism. This path, this middle way, is elaborated as the eightfold path.

The Eight-Fold Path

1. **Right view** is the true understanding of the four noble truths.

2. **Right aspiration** is the true desire to free oneself from attachment, ignorance, and hatefulness.

These two are referred to as **panna**, or wisdom.

3. **Right speech** involves abstaining from lying, gossiping, or hurtful talk.

4. **Right action** involves abstaining from hurtful behaviors, such as killing, stealing, and careless sex.

5. **Right livelihood** means making your living in such a way as to avoid dishonesty and hurting others, including animals.

These three are referred to as **sila**, or morality.

6. **Right effort** is a matter of exerting oneself in regards to the content of one's mind: Bad qualities should be abandoned and prevented from arising again; Good qualities should be enacted and nurtured.

7. **Right mindfulness** is the focusing of one's attention on one's body, feelings, thoughts, and consciousness in such a way as to overcome craving, hatred, and ignorance.

8. **Right concentration** is meditating in such a way as to progressively realize a true understanding of imperfection, impermanence, and non-separateness.

The last three are known as **samadhi**, or meditation.

The Five Precepts

1. Refrain from killing.

2. Refrain from taking that which is not freely given.

3. Refrain from sexual misconduct.

4. Refrain from false speech.

5. Refrain from taking intoxicants that cloud the mind and cause carelessness.