



Understanding The Four Noble Truths in Daily Life

• **Sapani Lama Rayamajhi**

Boudha Multiple Campus (MBPS)

Introduction

When I first started learning about Buddhism, I did not expect Buddhism to connect much with my daily life. I used to think that Buddhism was meant only for monks or spiritual experts like Buddha. When I came across the Four Noble Truths, I realized that they are actually very simple and practical. As a beginner, I could relate the Four Noble Truths to my own experience. In this article, the Four Truths are explained in a simple way using references from some books and class notes about the Buddhist philosophical teachings. One important book is What the Buddha Taught by Walpola Rahula, which explains how the understanding of the Four Noble Truths has changed over the centuries. This article is written from a beginner's perspective and focuses on a basic understanding of the Four Noble Truths rather than deep philosophical analysis.

The Foundation of Buddhist Teaching

The Four Truths is a core Buddhist teaching that the Buddha first taught after he attained enlightenment in his first sermon, known as the Dharmaçakra

Pravartana Sutta. The Four Noble Truths form the core of philosophy and are considered the starting point for understanding life and suffering. The Four Noble Truths are as follows:

- 1) Life involves suffering, which is also known as Dukkha
- 2) Suffering has a cause, which is also known as Samudaya
- 3) Suffering can end, which is also known as Nirodha
- 4) There is a path to end suffering, which is also known as Magga

At first these ideas may seem obvious or even too simple. As explained in What the Buddha Taught, the Four Noble Truths contain deep insights into human life.

The First Noble Truth: Life Involves Suffering

As a beginner, the truth confused me at first. I thought Buddhism was saying life is only suffering, which did not match my experience with the Four Truths. I enjoy things in life like friends, hobbies, and achievements. So how can life be suffering; I thought about the Four Truths. But after reading The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching, I understood

that "suffering" does not just mean pain. It includes stress, dissatisfaction, and impermanence, which are all part of the Four Noble Truths.

For example:

- Feeling anxious before exams is a form of suffering, as the Four Noble Truths teach
- Being disappointed when something does not go as planned is a form of suffering as the Four Noble Truths teach
- Feeling insecure about the future is a form of suffering, as the Four Noble Truths teach
- Even happy moments that do not last are a form of suffering, as the Four Noble Truths teach.

This truth helped me accept that these feelings are natural according to the Four Truths. By trying to avoid them completely, I started seeing them as part of life as the Four Noble Truths teach.

The Second Noble Truth: The Cause of Suffering

The truth explains that suffering is caused by desire and attachment, which is a key part of the Four Noble Truths. At first, I thought wanting things was normal. It is. I realized the problem is not desire itself but being overly attached, as the Four Noble Truths teach.

Books like Buddhism for Beginners explain this in a simple way and relate

it to the Four Noble Truths. They show how attachment creates stress, which is a key part of the Four Noble Truths. For example:

- Wanting grades is normal, but being obsessed with them causes anxiety, as the Four Noble Truths teach
- Wanting approval from others is natural. Depending on it leads to insecurity, as the Four Noble Truths teach
- Wanting things to go our way creates frustration when they do not, as the Four Noble Truths teach.

I started noticing this in my life and relating it to the Four Noble Truths. At times, my stress comes not from the situation itself but from my expectations about it, which is a key part of the Four Noble Truths.

The Third Noble Truth: The End of Suffering

This truth gives hope and is a part of the Four Noble Truths. It says that suffering can end if we let go of attachment, as the Four Noble Truths teach. At first, I misunderstood this. Did not fully understand the Four Noble Truths. I thought it meant we should stop caring about everything, which's not what the Four Noble Truths teach.

That is not true according to the Four Noble Truths. It means we should not be controlled by our desires, as the Four Noble Truths teach. According to The

Eightfold Path, freedom comes from understanding and letting go, not from avoiding life, which is a key part of the Four Noble Truths. For example:

- If I fail, I can learn to feel completely defeated, as the Four Noble Truths teach
- If something does not go my way, I can accept it as overreacting, as the Four Noble Truths teach.

I have tried this in small ways, and it does help. I relate it to the Four Noble Truths. I still feel emotions. They do not control me as much, which is a key part of the Four Noble Truths.

The Fourth Noble Truth: The Path to End Suffering

The fourth truth gives a guide called the Eightfold Path, which is a key part of the Four Noble Truths. It includes:

- 1) Right Understanding, as the Four Noble Truths teach
- 2) Right Intention, as the Four Noble Truths teach
- 3) Right Speech, as the Four Noble Truths teach
- 4) Right Action as the Four Noble Truths teach
- 5) Right Livelihood as the Four Noble Truths teach
- 6) Right Effort, as the Four Noble Truths teach

7) Right Mindfulness, as the Four Noble Truths teach

8) Right Concentration, as the Four Noble Truths teach

As a beginner, I see this as advice for living better and relating it to the Four Noble Truths.

For example:

- Right Speech reminds me to speak as the Four Noble Truths teach
- Right Action encourages me to behave as the Four Noble Truths teach
- Right Mindfulness helps me stay present as the Four Noble Truths

While studying or talking to others, mindfulness practice has helped me to feel more focused and calm and I used to relate it to the Four Noble Truths.

Changes in Understanding Across Centuries

One interesting thing I learned is that the interpretation of the Four Truths has changed over time.

Early Buddhism

In the early Buddhist period, these teachings were preserved in the Pali Canon. However, the focus was on ending suffering and attaining enlightenment, which is a key part of the Four Noble Truths. This approach was stricter and often connected with monastic life.

Mahayana Buddhism

When Mahayana Buddhism was developed, it emphasized to compassion and helping others for understanding the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths were understood in a broader and more flexible way. Instead of focusing only on personal liberation, this tradition encouraged working for the liberation and well-being of all beings.

Modern Understanding

In the modern age, master Thich Nhat Hanh has practically explained the Four Noble Truths and related them to daily activities. It is often used to understand for:

- Stress and anxiety, which are key parts of the Four Noble Truths
- Mental health, which is a key part of the Four Noble Truths
- Daily life challenges, which are a key part of the Four Noble Truths

This makes Buddhism more accessible to beginners like me and helps me understand the Four Noble Truths.

Applying the Four Truths in Daily Life

As a beginner, I try to apply the Four Noble Truths in small ways:

- When I feel stressed, I try to understand why and relate it to the Four Truths
- When I feel disappointed, I remind

myself not to cling much and relate it to the Four Noble Truths

- When things go wrong, I try to accept them and relate it to the Four Noble Truths

These small steps help me feel more balanced, and I relate it to the Four Noble Truths.

Challenges in Practice

Even though the ideas are simple, applying the Four Truths is not easy, and I struggle with the Four Noble Truths. Letting go of attachment is difficult. Is a key part of the Four Noble Truths

- Emotions are strong and automatic and are a part of the Four Noble Truths
- Society encourages more desire, not less, and is a key part of the Four Noble Truths

Sometimes I forget everything. React emotionally and do not fully understand the Four Noble Truths. I think that is normal for a beginner. I am still learning about the Four Noble Truths.

A Small Reflection: Buddhism in Today's World of Conflict

In today's world, we see many conflicts and wars, and the Four Noble Truths can help. These situations create suffering not for individuals but for entire societies and are a key part of the Four Noble Truths. As a beginner, I feel that the teachings of Buddhism are

still very relevant, and the Four Noble Truths can help.

The Four Noble Truths remind us that suffering often comes from desire, anger, and attachment, which are all key parts of the Four Noble Truths and exist at a global level. If people and leaders practiced a small part of Buddhist teachings like mindfulness, compassion, and non-attachment, it might reduce hatred and conflict, and is a key part of the Four Noble Truths. For example:

- Understanding others of reacting with anger as the Four Noble Truths teach
- Letting go of ego and the need to dominate, as the Four Noble Truths teach
- Practicing compassion in difficult situations as the Four Noble Truths teach

Of course, it is not easy, especially in times of war, and it is an important teaching of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths. Small changes in our thinking can help, and the Four Noble Truths guide us. For beginners, these teachings are simple but powerful.

The Four Noble Truths have changed my life. They are not just ideas, but practical teachings that helped us understand life. They have helped me gain a deeper understanding of the Four Noble Truths. Books like What

the Buddha Taught, The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching, and Buddhism for Beginners helped me to understand the Four Truths.

Learning about the development of the Four Truths across centuries has also shown me how adaptable the Four Noble Truths are. If I am still making mistakes, but the Four Noble Truths have already changed how I see stress, expectations, and life itself, and I am grateful for the Four Noble Truths.

Buddhism does not expect perfection; it encourages awareness, and the Four Noble Truths teach this. And for someone starting out that is more than enough, and the Four Noble Truths are a great guide.

In conclusion, the Four Noble Truths is a simple but powerful way to understand suffering and helped to improve daily life. As a beginner, I have learned they are practical teaching that help to develop awareness, reduce stress, and bring balance in life.

Reference

- What the Buddha Taught by Walpola Rahula
Available at: <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/rahula/what-the-buddha-taught.pdf>
- The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching by Thich Nhat Hanh More info: <https://plumvillage.org/books/the-heart-of-the-buddhas-teaching/>
- Buddhism for Beginners by Thubten Chodron,
More info: <https://thubtenchodron.org/books/buddhism-for-beginners/>
- Pali Canon Access: <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/>
- Four Noble Truths – Overview <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Four-Noble-Truths>