



STUDY ON THE NOBLE TRUTH OF SUFFERING (*DUKKHA SACCĀ*)

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ABSTRACT

It is the nature of human being that they dislike suffering (dukkha) but covet happiness (sukha). Hence they search for happiness and invent assorted enjoyment. When they gain the enjoyment, they rejoice in it. These happiness cannot subsist long time, however, when these happiness vanish, people face ever with the original experience, dukkha. In reality, life is suffering and whatever existence we possess we are inescapable from numerous dukkha. We have known that statement since old days. We, as the knowledge of worldings, accept that we have to suffer in life and die finally. We are very lucky to be human beings in the Buddha's dispensation. It is essential to know the noble truth of suffering (Dukkha Sacca) thoroughly to eradicate sufferings and to attain supreme bliss.

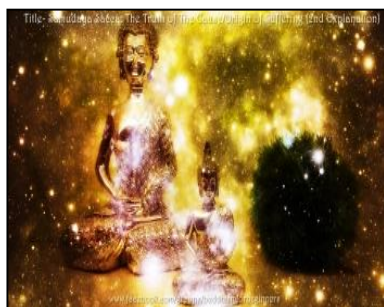
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INTRODUCTION

The four noble truths constitute the very important aspect of the teaching of the *Buddha*. Their importance has been affirmed by the *Buddha*. He said that we have run on so long in this cycle of birth and death because we fail to understand the four noble truths. It is extremely important to realize *Dukkha Sacca* clearly among living beings, because, as the *Buddha* says, he who sees *dukkha* sees also the arising of *dukkha*, sees also the cessation of *dukkha*, and sees also the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*. The first noble truth essentially points out that suffering is inherent in the very fabric of life. Buddhism rests on the pivot of suffering. The suffering may be exceedingly subtle, perhaps an underlying subtle restlessness. Or it may be more obvious.

Bodily pain and mental suffering due to the changeability of things are forms of *dukkha* which are more obvious, in fact, *Dukkha Sacca* pertains to all physical phenomena and mental states which are impermanent. They are unsatisfactory because, after they have arisen, they exist merely for an awfully short moment and then disappear completely. *Dukkha Sacca* is deep and difficult to understand. Even the Blessed One knew about *Dukkha Sacca* totally only when He attained enlightenment.

Owing to realizing *Dukkha Sacca*, *Nirodha Sacca* is more clear. Thus, *Dukkha Sacca* is like poison and



Nirodha Sacca is like medicine which can destroy the effect of poison, because *Dukkha Sacca* has the nature of destroying as well as rebirth. One who desires for freedom from suffering needs to know the nature and characteristic of suffering thoroughly at first; having known them, he must discover the root of suffering; then he must follow the way that can dispel the suffering to achieve the supreme bliss finally. On the other hand, it can be said that only by discerning suffering thoroughly, one is attainable *Nibbana*. Thus, whoever wishes for the annihilation of suffering, must understand about the real suffering (i.e. *Dukkha Sacca*).

The Noble Truth of Suffering (*Dukkha-Sacca*)

The commentary to the *Patisambhidāmagga* renders *dukkha* as vile and empty. It is combination of two words - the prefix 'du' used in the sense of 'kucchita' means vile being the haunt of various misfortunes, oppressions and dangers (*upaddava*); and the term 'kha' representing 'tuccha' means empty being devoid of lastingness (*dhuva*), beauty (*subha*), pleasure (*sukha*) and self (*attabhava*).¹ Thus it is admitted that the *pali* word 'dukkha' in ordinary usage means suffering, but in addition it also includes deeper ideas such as emptiness, imperfection, misery or insubstantiality as opposed to the word *sukha* meaning happiness, comfort, or ease.²

In cognizing *dukkha*, headache, toothache, back pain, losing properties, death of son, daughter, wife, husband etc., are regarded as suffering by the knowledge of ordinary person.

People think without doubt in spite of suffering, the world is beautiful and enjoyable. They cannot be understandable that life is identical with suffering but it is something fundamentally different. In reality, life and suffering in the last analysis are identical concepts.

There are three different categories of *dukkha*-

- (1) *Dukkha-dukkhata*- the suffering as pain,
- (2) *Sankhara-dukkhata*- the suffering inherent in the formations.
- (3) *Viparinama-dukkhata* - the suffering in change.³

Dukkha-dukkhata means both bodily (*kayika*) and mental (*cetasika*) pains as actually felt.⁴ In another way, all types of physical and mental suffering are universally accepted as ordinary suffering (*dukkha-dukkha*). Such kind of *dukkha* always occurs while one is living. But nobody is noticeable the *dukkha* because it is the mark of suffering (*dukkha*) which is absent because of covering of posture. In reality, because of changing of posture (*iriyapatha*) (i.e. from sitting to standing posture etc.), suffering is hidden. Therefore, in practising meditation, the meditator should try to continue the posture to notice the characteristic of *dukkha dukkha*. But by knowing such kind of *dukkha*, he cannot say that it is obtaining insight knowledge (*vipassanāñāna*). Only when knowing *viparinama dukkha* and *sankhara dukkha*, he can say that it is obtaining insight knowledge (*vipassanāñāna*) or the basis of path (*magga*) and fruition (*phala*).

Sankhara dukkha refers to the oppressive nature of all formations of existence (i.e. all conditioned phenomena), due to their continual arising and passing away; this includes also experiences associated with neutral feeling or neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling (*upekkha vedana*) for worldlings. In fact, *saakhara dukkha* is the suffering inherent in the formations as well as a significant philosophical facet of *Dukkha Sacca*. According to the Buddha's teaching: *sabbe saakhara dukkha*⁵ it is clear that all conditional things are sorrowful or suffering. Thus, one should see that whatever feeling: either pleasant (*sukha*) or unpleasant (*dukkha*) or neutral feeling (*upekkha vedana*) - arises, there is *saakhara dukkha*. *Sankhara dukkha* could not be known merely by reasoning and reflecting. Only with the path of insight (*vipassann magga*) and wisdom of fruition (*phala ñāna*), it could be known. By perceiving *sankhara dukkha*, would *Dukkha sacca* be perceived.

Viparinama-dukkhata refers to bodily and mental pleasant feeling, because they are the cause for the arising of pain when they change. On the other hand, *viparinama-dukkhata* is the state of destruction or the state of death after conception, if circumstances are favourable to the same at any time, day or hour. It is pleasant feeling regarded by the ordinary person though, it is quite the contrary for the noble person. To give an example, in *alavite Suuta*, when the evil *Mara* told a *bhikkhuni* named *alavite*, an *arahat*, to enjoy the sensual pleasure for she was still young, she replied that she was upset about sensual pleasure because she had already dispelled ignorance and craving. Thus to discern the actual nature of *viparinama dukkha*, ignorance and craving should be driven away.

All the existences, or the bodies of men, *devas* and *brahmas* are the real suffering, since they are subject

¹ Mahanama, Bhadanta, *Patisambhidamagga-Atthakatha*, Vol. I, P.51.

² Rahula, Walpola, *What the Buddha Taught*, P.17.

³ Rhys Davids, Mrs, Trans, *The Kindred Saying*, Vol.V, P.45.

⁴ Nyanamoli Bhikkhu, Trans, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, P.568.

⁵ *Dhammapada Pali*, P.91.

to the said three marks of *dukkha*.

In another way, seven types of suffering are also described thus:

- (1) *Jati-dukkha* - the suffering of birth
- (2) *Jara-dukkha* - the suffering of age
- (3) *Marāṇa-dukkha* - the suffering of death
- (4) *Dukkha-dukkha* - bodily suffering and mental suffering
- (5) *Sankhara-dukkha* - the suffering of conditioned state
- (6) *Viparinnaṃa-dukkha* - the suffering of changing
- (7) *Samsara-dukkha* - the endless suffering along the cycle of rebirths

Of these, *jati* means birth or reproduction. Why it said birth is suffering? Because it is the very beginning of various sorts of suffering. To be more precise, birth is of three kinds, to wit: *kilesajati* - birth of defilements, *kammajati* - birth of actions, and *vipakajati* - birth of effects.⁶

Of them, *kilesajati* is the birth or the reproduction of defilements such as greed, hate, delusion, conceit, and so forth. In *kammajati*, immoral actions of body, speech, and thought are the developments of the defilements. Therefore, they are equally as fierce as the defilements. Hence this *kammajati* is a real suffering to be feared by all noble persons (*ariya*). *Vipakajati* is the birth of reproduction of different kinds of diseases, different kinds of ailments, and different kinds of painful feelings in the body, or the reproduction of mean and low existence such as those of birds and animals, and so forth. Of the *vipakajati*, owing to the awfulness of *kilesajati* and *kammajati*, the rebirth into the planes of misery is always a terrible thing in the revolution of existences. Therefore, the existences of men and so forth, to which *vipakajati* together with *kilesajati* and *kammajati* are joined, are real suffering.

Concerning with *jara-dukkha* and *marāṇa-dukkha*, these are the momentary decays and deaths which follow a being from the moment of conception, and are at all times ready to cause him to fall in decay, death, or unfortunate realms whenever opportunities occur. All living beings also obtain in connection with *viparinnaṃa-dukkha*, and since they were born as living beings in every existence from the moment of conception, the existences of men, *devas* and *brahmas* are real suffering.

Samsara-dukkha means the endless suffering along the cycle of rebirths. All living beings are incapable to escape changing from one existence to another along the cycle of rebirths, whether they want another existence or not. There is no one who has not experienced in thirty-one abodes at least once. As living beings, sometimes they became in the human existence, sometimes they fell down to the four abodes (hell, animal world, hungry ghost, and miserable existence), sometimes they were born in the celestial world as well as the *brahma* world. Living beings have to born incessantly in the cycle of rebirths, ups and downs. That is why, it is certain that every existence along the cycle of rebirths is real suffering.

The whole doctrine of the *Buddha*, He mostly preached about suffering. In *Dhammacakkapavattana sutta*, the very first sermon of the Lord *Buddha*, He proceeds from this self-evident definition of suffering. In the first of the four excellent truths, suffering is regarded as follows; birth (*jati*) is suffering, old age (*Jara*) is suffering, disease (*byadhi*) is suffering, death (*marāṇa*) is suffering, to be united to the disliked is suffering (*apiyehi sampayogo-dukkho*), to be separated from the liked is suffering (*piyehi vippayogo-dukkho*), not to get what one desires is suffering (*yampiccham nalabhati tampi-dukkham*).⁷

Man only knew these three kinds of *dukkha* and no more. They were, therefore, afraid of these three *dukkhas*, they wanted to be freedom from those *dukkhas* and sought ways to find refuge or ways to escape from them. They tried to find out seeking refuge as *brahama* or *devato* to be free from all dangers, to possess worthy sons and daughters, to be prosperous and wealthy and to be reborn in the *deva* realms. They did not aim at liberation (*mokkha*) from the *samsara*. Up to this time, they still do not know *mokkha*. They thought that the *devas* worshipped by them will save them to be free from those *dukkhas*. The *dukkhas* that they were suffering from were not light in any way. They were severe enough to arouse emotional awakening. They were concerned merely with the release from the three dangers - internal dangers, external dangers and the dangers from the *devas*.

⁶Ledi Sayadaw, *The Manuals of Buddhism*, P.49.

⁷Rhys Davids, Mrs, Trans, *The Kindred Saying*, Vol.V, Pp.356,357.

When the *Buddha* appeared, He taught, *Atta hi attano na tho*⁸ means There is no refuge other than oneself. This is the key that unlocks the door of deliverance for all suffering humanity. This is the light that shows up the way to all creatures grouping in the darkness of ignorance. This is the world outlook that teaches man to rely on his own effort for ultimate and absolute liberation from the unending round of birth and death.

Dealing with *Dukkha Saccā*, the Buddha preached that there are two sorts of suffering-

“*kāyika* □ *dukkha* □ *cetasika* □ *dukkha* □, *thapetvā avasesa* □ *dukkha- sacca* □ *na dukkha* □, *kāyika* □ *dukkha* □ *cetasika* □ *dukkha* □, *dukkheñceva dukkha- saccañca*.”⁹

According to this *pāṭi*, two sorts of suffering are described as followings:

- (1) the phenomenon exception of bodily suffering and mental suffering is *Dukkha saccā* but not *dukkha*, and
- (2) Bodily suffering and mental suffering are *Dukkha saccā* as well as *dukkha*.

Herein, bodily suffering (*kāyika dukkha*) is defined changing of matter (*rūpa*) such as birth (*jāti*), decaying (*jarā*), illness (*byādhi*) and death (*maraṇa*). *Cetasika dukkha* is referred, to as sorrow (*soka*), lamentation (*parideva*), suffering (*dukkha*), grief (*domanassa*) and despair (*upayāsa*). *Dukkha Saccā* is not merely suffering caused by bodily and mental pain, but it also pertains to all phenomena of life which are impermanent and they arise and fall away immediately. Only when the arising and falling away of physical phenomena and mental phenomena can be directly experienced, one can begin to grasp the truth of suffering.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

The *Buddha* expounded that mind and matter subject to changing is the noble truth of suffering (*Dukkha Saccā*). Man is starting with mind and matter, living with the work of mind and matter and ending with mind and matter. Knowing impermanence, suffering and non-self by discerning the sensual sense, the five aggregates, and all conditional things with insight knowledge is beginning of the way to the cessation of suffering. Thus, whatever sense appears from the six sense doors, must be contemplated with three characteristics and it is called realizing suffering (*Dukkha Saccā*). By knowing that, craving cannot arise and it is dispelling craving (*Samudaya Saccā*) for a while. Because of dispelling craving, clinging, becoming, etc., have no chance to appear for a while and also he will rejoice the taste of cessation of suffering (*Nirodha Saccā*) for a while.

In fact, contemplating repeatedly with insight knowledge is following the middle way (*Magga Saccā*). When insight wisdom becomes higher by realizing four noble truths, noble path of supramundane (*lokuttara ariya magga*) develops and finally *Nibbāna* is attainable. *Dukkha Saccā* profoundly taught by the *Buddha* is very beneficial for those who want to attain the complete cessation of suffering. Only when they know the bitter taste of *Dukkha Saccā*, they will try to find out the root of suffering (craving). Again, to cut off it, he will use a sharp knife (i.e. the middle way). By using this weapon, he can cut off the root of suffering and no more suffering can arise. It is the ending of suffering (*Nibbāna*). Hence, realizing *Dukkha Saccā* is crucially important to attain *Nibbāna*.

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⁸*Dhammapada Pali*, P.57.

⁹*Yamaka pali*, P.208.

¹⁰Nina Van Gorkom, *The Buddha's Path*, P.16.



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