

Buddha-*Dhamma*: The Teachings of the Buddha

HPRS4003 Asian Religious Traditions

The Buddhist *Dhamma/Dharma*

- The truth about the nature of existence.
- That truth to which the Buddha awoke.
- That which the Buddha taught and which all Buddhas teach.



The Buddhist *Dhamma*

- 'This *Dhamma* I have found is profound, hard to see, hard to understand: it is peaceful, sublime, beyond the sphere of mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise. But this generation takes delight in attachment, is delighted by attachment, rejoices in attachment and as such it is hard for them to see this truth, namely...*Nirvana*' (*Majjhima Nikaya* i. 167)

The Buddhist *Dhamma*

- Not a matter of intellectual study but the result of understanding on the basis of listening, reflecting, and spiritual practice.
- The aim of Buddhism is to put into practice a way of living in accordance with *dhamma*.
- The Buddha is understood to have been an embodiment of *dhamma*; likewise his disciples are seen to embody and live out the precepts of *dhamma*.

The 'Four Noble Truths' (or, 'Four True Realities')

'This is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, ageing is suffering, sickness is suffering, dying is suffering, sorrow, grief, pain, unhappiness, and unease are suffering; being united with what is not liked is suffering, separation from what is liked is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in short, the five aggregates of grasping are suffering.

This is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: the thirst for repeated existence which, associated with delight and greed, delights in this and that, namely the thirst for objects of sense desire, the thirst for existence, and the thirst for non-existence.

This is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: the complete fading away and cessation of this very thirst – its abandoning, relinquishing, releasing, letting go.

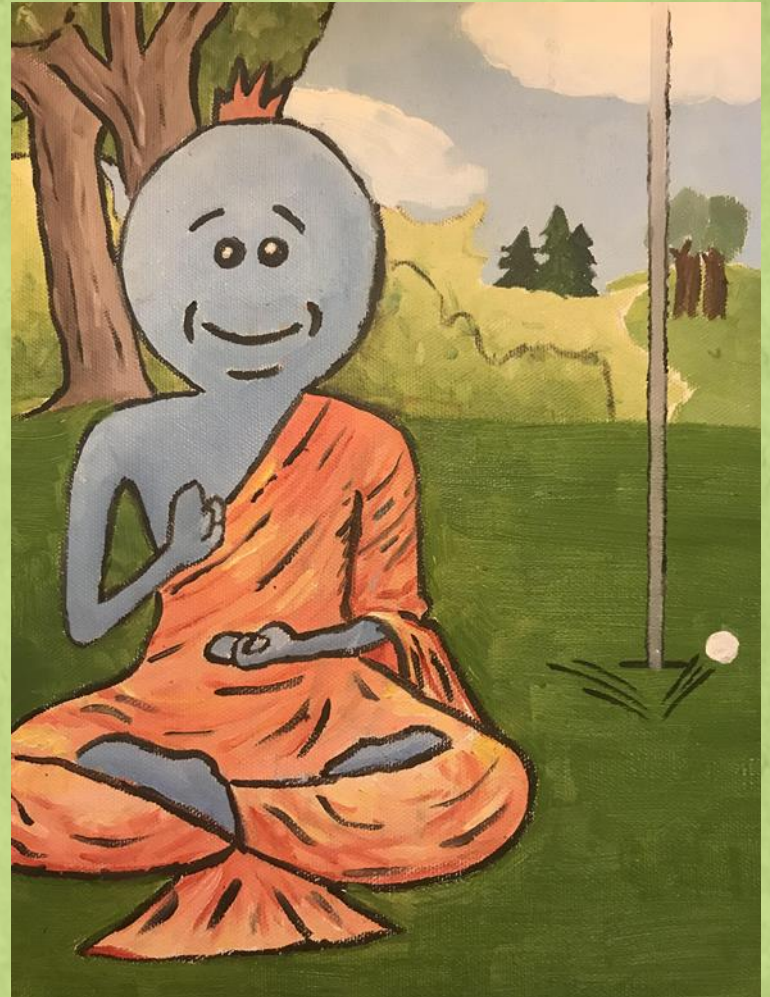
This is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: the noble eightfold path, namely right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.'

The First True Reality: The Disease

'This is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, ageing is suffering, sickness is suffering, dying is suffering, sorrow, grief, pain, unhappiness, and unease are suffering; being united with what is not liked is suffering, separation from what is liked is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in short, the five aggregates of grasping are suffering.'

The First True Reality: The Disease

- Human existence is characterized by *dukkha* [P].
- *Dukkha* is often translated as 'suffering' or 'pain' but actually refers to a deeper 'unsatisfactoriness'.



The First True Reality: The Disease

- It is because of the fact that things are impermanent (*anicca* [P]) that they are also *dukkha* (our attachment to them causes suffering).
- The changing, unstable nature of life is such that we are led to experience dissatisfaction, loss, disappointment and frustration.
- Happiness is real enough but does not last. In this way, even happiness can be seen to be *dukkha*.

The Three Defining Characteristics of Existence

- Impermanence – *anicca* [P], *anitya* [S]
- Pain, suffering, dissatisfaction – *dukkha* [P], *duhkha* [S]
- The changing self – *anatta* [P], *anatman* [S]

The 'Five Bundles of Grasping-Fuel'

- The person is the sum of changing physical and mental processes.
- The *upadana-khandhas* are 'bundles of fuel' which burn with the fires of *dukkha* and its causes – they are a sustaining object of grasping.
- Buddhist practice is concerned with the purification of the five 'bundles' through the cultivation of virtue and meditation.

The 'Five Bundles of Grasping-Fuel'

1.MATERIAL FORM

2.SENSATION or FEELING

3.PERCEPTION or MENTAL RECOGNITION

4.CONSTRUCTING or VOLITIONAL ACTIVITIES

5.BASIC SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

The 'Five Bundles of Grasping-Fuel'

- These physical and mental qualities that make up a person are continually changing.
- The sum of mental and physical configurations at each stage gives rise to the next, though the two are not identical.
- No unchanging, constant self or 'I' at the heart of this chain (continuity but not identity).
- The sum of aggregates we call 'Self' today has arisen from yesterday's bundle and is dependent on it.

Non-Self (*Anatman*)

- 'Material form is like a lump of foam, and feeling is like a bubble; perception is like a mirage, and the constructing activities are like a banana tree; consciousness is like a [magician's] illusion' (S.III.42; SB.220-2).
- Because the five *khandhas* are impermanent, they are seen as ***anatta/anatman***, non-Self.
- As each *khandha* is impermanent, *dukkha* and of a nature to change, it is inappropriate to consider this as 'Self'.
- Rebirth is a cause for the reconfiguration of the *khandhas*.

Non-Self (*Anatman*)

'Body is not a self. If body were a self then it might be that it would not lead to sickness; then it might be possible to say, "Let my body be like this, let my body not be like this." But since body is not a self, so it leads to sickness, and it is not possible to say, "Let my body be like this, let my body not be like this.'"

- *Samyutta Nikaya* iii. 66-7

Non-Self (*Anatman*)

'What do you think, monks? Are body...feeling...recognition...volitions...conscious awareness permanent or impermanent?'

'Impermanent, lord.'

'But is something that is impermanent painful or unpainful?'

'Painful, lord.'

'But is it fitting to regard something painful, whose nature it is to change, as "this is mine, I am this, this is my self"?''

'Certainly not, lord'.

'Therefore, monks, all body...feeling...recognition...volitions...conscious awareness whatsoever, whether past, present or future, whether gross or subtle, inferior or refined, far or near, should be seen by means of clear understanding as it really is, as "this is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self".'

Non-Self (*Anatman*)

- In the Buddha's day, the spiritual quest was seen as identifying and liberating a person's true Self (see the Upanishads where the *atman* is equated with *Brahman*)
- To cling on to a notion of an unchanging self is damaging – it leads to grasping, not letting go.
- This is Buddhism's biggest challenge to the Hindu notion of the eternal, permanent Self.

The Second True Reality: The Cause

'This is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: the thirst for repeated existence which, associated with delight and greed, delights in this and that, namely the thirst for objects of sense desire, the thirst for existence, and the thirst for non-existence.'

The Second True Reality: The Cause

- The key origin or cause of *dukkha* is ***tanha*** (which leads to 'grasping' or 'attachment', *upadana*).
- *Tanha* literally means 'thirst', and refers to those desires which are constantly on the lookout for gratification.
- The first sermon identifies three types of craving: craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being, and craving for non-existence.
- In order to overcome *dukkha*, the Buddhist path aims to uproot craving from the psyche altogether.

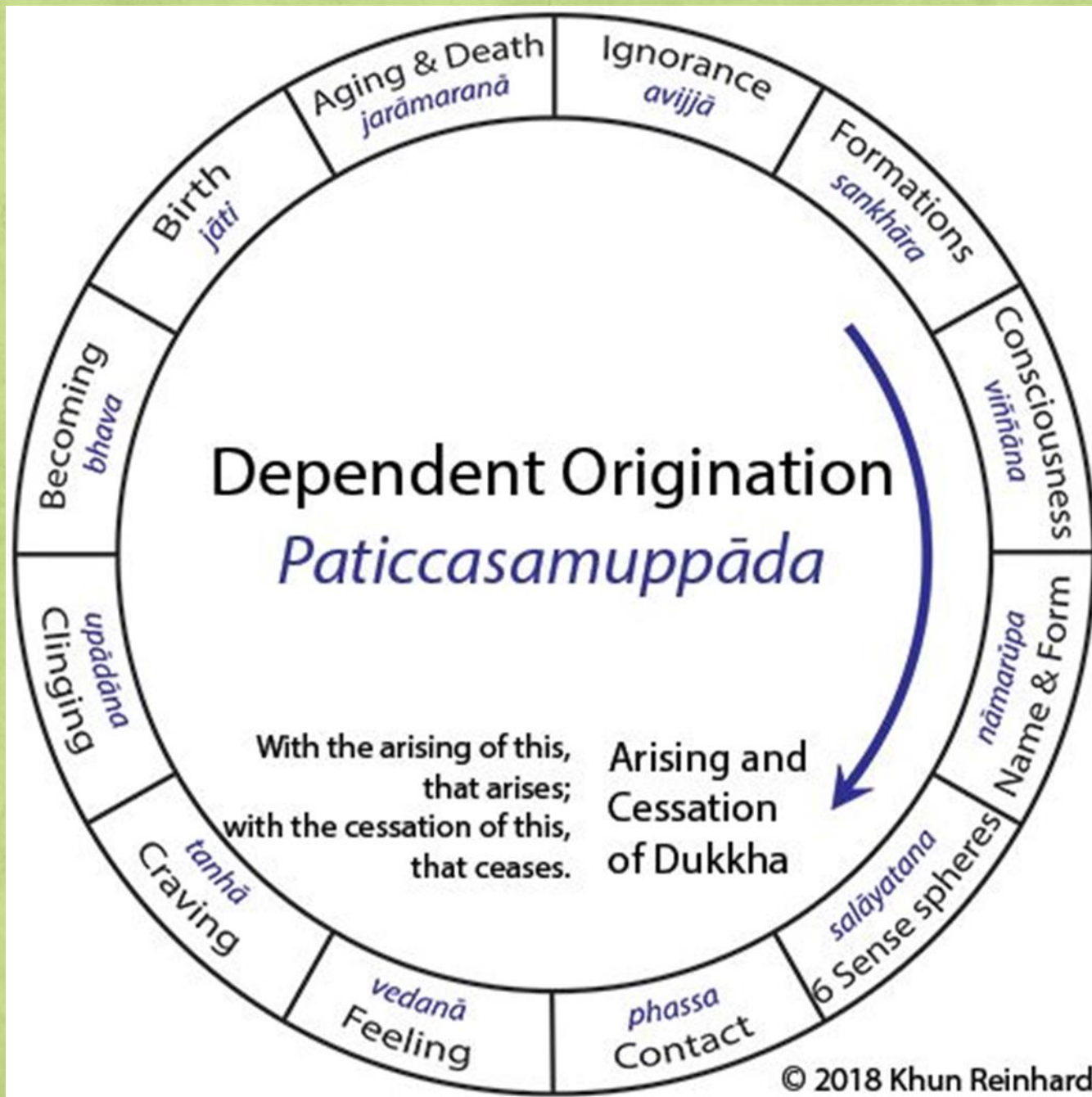
Conditioned Arising/Dependent Origination

- Related to the teaching on the four true realities, particularly the second, is the doctrine of **Conditioned Arising** or **Dependent Origination** (*patticcasamuppada*).
- The principle of conditionality or causality, i.e. that all things, mental and physical, arise and exist due to the presence of certain conditions, and cease once their conditions are removed.
- 'That being, this comes to be; from the arising of that, this arises; that being absent, this is not; from the cessation of that, this ceases' (*Samyutta Nikaya* ii. 28).

Conditioned Arising/Dependent Origination

'Conditioned by (1) ignorance are (2) constructing activities, conditioned by constructing activities is (3) consciousness, conditioned by consciousness is (4) the mind-and-body/sentient body, conditioned by the sentient body are (5) the six senses, conditioned by the six senses is (6) sensory stimulation, conditioned by sensory stimulation is (7) feeling, conditioned by feeling is (8) craving, conditioned by craving is (9) grasping, conditioned by grasping is (10) becoming, conditioned by becoming is (11) birth, conditioned by birth is (12) old-age and death – grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair come into being. Thus is the arising of this whole mass of suffering'

- *Samyutta Nikaya* ii. 1-2



The Third True Reality: The Cure

'This is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: the complete fading away and cessation of this very thirst – its abandoning, relinquishing, releasing, letting go.'

The Third True Reality: The Cure

- The ending of thirst and the abandoning of attachment.
- When craving and other related causes come to an end, *dukkha* ceases.
- This is ***Nirvana*** (*Nibbana* [P]), the ultimate goal of Buddhism.
- *Nirvana* is only attained when there is total non-attachment and letting go.

Nirvana

'There is, monks, a domain where there is no earth, no water, no fire, no wind, no sphere of infinite space, no sphere of nothingness, no sphere of infinite consciousness, no sphere of neither awareness nor non-awareness; there is not this world, there is not another world, there is no sun or moon. I do not call this coming or going, nor standing, nor dying, nor being reborn; it is without support, without occurrence, without object. Just this is the end of suffering'.

- *Udana 80*

Nirvana

- Literally, 'blowing out' or 'extinguishing'.
- The fires of which *Nirvana* is the extinction are described in the so-called 'fire sermon' (*Samyutta Nikaya* iv. 19-20).
- '*Nirvana* during life' (a temporary stopping of all conditioned states) is defined as the destruction of the 'fires' of attachment, hatred and delusion.
- When one who has destroyed these (a *Tathagata*) dies, he or she will have achieved '*Nirvana* beyond death' (***parinirvana***) and cannot be reborn.

The *Arhat*

- 'Worthy One'
- One who has attained the Nirvanic experience and been transformed by it.
- The destruction of the three defilements is given both as the definition of *Nirvana* during life and of 'Arhatness'.
- 'Calm is his mind, calm is his speech, calm is his behaviour who, rightly knowing, is wholly freed, perfectly peaceful and equipoised [balanced]' (Dhp.96).

The Fourth True Reality: The Medicine

'This is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: the noble eightfold path, namely right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.'

The Fourth True Reality: The Medicine

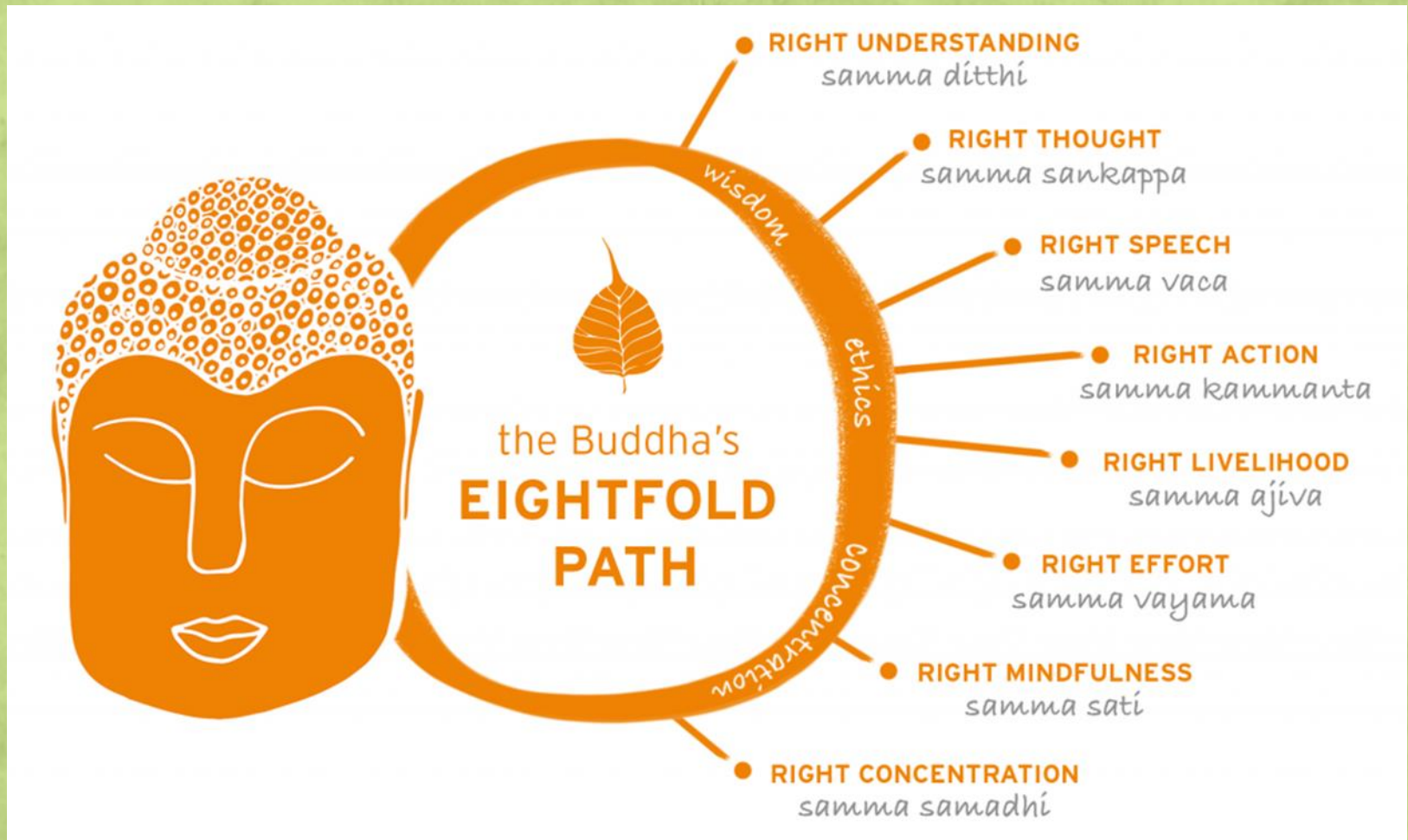
- The fourth True Reality deals with Buddhist practice proper. It is concerned with the practical means for attaining Nirvana.
- The **Noble Eight-Factored Path** is a 'middle way' that avoids a life of pursuing either sense-pleasures or harsh asceticism.
- This path leads to the cessation of *dukkha*.

The Noble Eight-Factored Path

'Monks, these two extremes should not be followed by one gone forth [into the renunciant life]. What two? That which is this pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of the ordinary person, ignoble, not connected to the goal; and that which is this pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, not connected to the goal. Monks, without veering towards either of these two extremes, the *Tathagata* has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to higher knowledge, to full awakening, to *Nirvana*. And what, monks, is that middle way...? It is just this noble eight-factored path...'

- *Samyutta Nikaya* v. 420

The Noble Eight-Factored Path



The Noble Eight-Factored Path

- The eight elements mark different dimensions of one's behaviour.
- They are interdependent.
- They represent the means and end of Buddhist practice – this is the way of living achieved by enlightened beings.
- Good conduct often seen as the basis for developing concentration and this in turn is seen as preparation for true understanding and wisdom.

Moral/Ethical Virtue (*Sila*)

RIGHT SPEECH

- REFRAINING FROM FALSE, DIVISIVE, HURTFUL SPEECH
- REFRAINING FROM IDLE CHATTER

RIGHT ACTION

- REFRAINING FROM HARMING LIVING BEINGS
- REFRAINING FROM TAKING WHAT IS NOT GIVEN
- REFRAINING FROM SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

RIGHT LIVELIHOOD: BASED ON RIGHT SPEECH AND ACTION

Meditation/Mental Development (*Samadhi*)

RIGHT EFFORT

- PREVENTING/ ABANDONING UNWHOLESOME STATES (GREED, HATRED, DELUSION)
- AROUSING/ DEVELOPING WHOLESOME STATES (NON-ATTACHMENT, LOVING KINDNESS, WISDOM)

RIGHT MINDFULNESS

- CONTEMPLATION OF BODY, FEELING, MIND, DHARMA

RIGHT CONCENTRATION

Wisdom (*Prajna*)

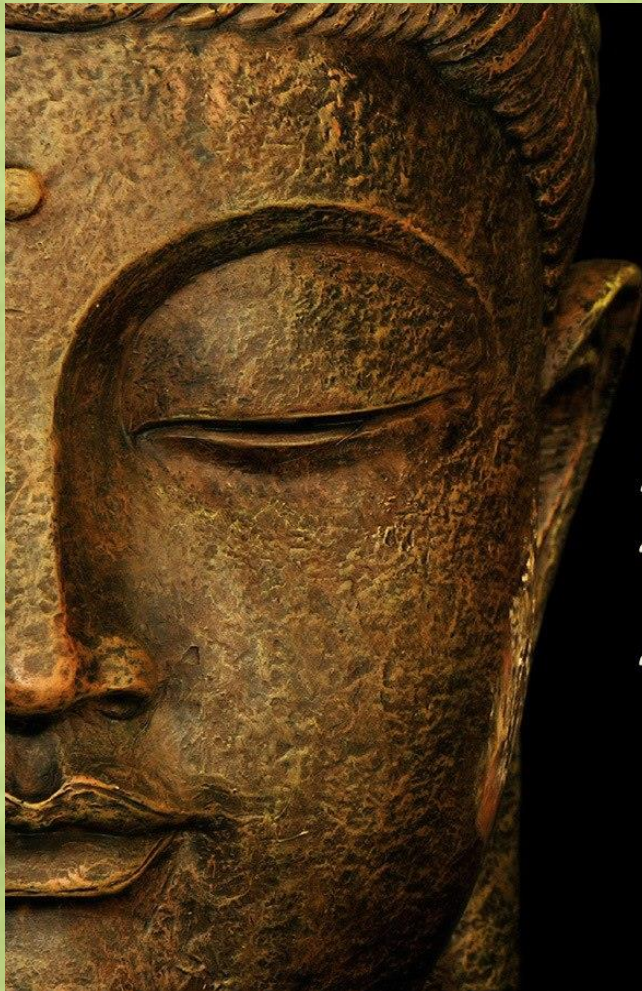
RIGHT VIEW

- SEEING THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

RIGHT INTENTION

- DESIRELESSNESS
- FRIENDLINESS
- COMPASSION

Summary: The Buddhist *Dhamma*



Buddha's Four Noble Truths:

- 1. Life has inevitable suffering***
- 2. There is a cause to our suffering***
- 3. There is an end to suffering***
- 4. The end to suffering is contained in the eight fold path***

Suggested Reading (see folder on Moodle page)

- Erricker, C., *Buddhism: A Complete Introduction* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2015), ch. 3.
- Gethin, R., *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), chs. 3 & 6.
- Keown, D., *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), ch. 4.