

Suffering and Its Arising from The Buddhist Perspective

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One question that people who are interested in Buddhism may ask is what is the main idea of Buddha's teaching? In the passage of Nikaya, it claims that Buddha's teaching is all about two things, which are suffering ('dukkha' in Pali's term) and the cessation of suffering. Rupert Gethin states: "The Buddhist tradition has sometimes compared the Buddha to a physician and the four truths to a medical diagnosis: the truth of dukkha is like a disease, the truth of the origin of dukkha is like its cause, the truth of the cessation of dukkha is like the disease's being cured, and the truth of the path leading to the cessation of dukkha is like the medicine that brings about the disease's cure."¹ It is the wish to relieve the suffering of the disease and eradicate its causes that is the starting point of Buddhist practice."² It shows the fundamental Buddhist teaching and practice: the wish to alleviate suffering can ultimately come only from the sympathy or compassion for both self-suffering and suffering of others. This sense of sympathy for suffering is not only the reason for Buddha's teaching but also ultimately for all those who try to put his teaching into practice.

The early Buddha's teaching presents the solution to the crucial problem of being. The problem is dukkha which is termed in Pali. This term can be translated approximately as "suffering", and can be seen as a basic expression of Buddhism at any time, any place. There is a classic teaching about the Four Noble Truths: the truth of the essence of suffering, the truth of the essence of its cause, the truth of the essence of its cessation, and the truth of the essence of the path leading to its cessation. Within the scope of this essay, we only concentrate on the Buddha's teaching about suffering and its arising, more specifically, on the first and second noble truth. In the first part of this essay, we will talk about suffering in Buddhism. And in the second part, we will try to explain the cause of suffering according to Buddha's teaching.

Part I Suffering: The First Noble Truth

In this section, we first look at the different categories of suffering and the content of each category within the First Noble Truth. Secondly, we will analyse the characteristics of suffering.

In this essay, we will use one of the popular typologies for the illustration of

¹ Lalitavistara ii. 525, 538 – 9 (Lefmann ed. 351, 358 – 9); Visuddhimagga xvi. 87

² Rupert, Gethin *The Foundations of Buddhism* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 pp. 63-4

dukkha within the first noble truth is as follows:

1. The states of birth, aging, illness, and death are dukkha;
2. The feelings of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are dukkha;
3. The fact of not getting what is wanted is dukkha;
4. In conclusion, the Five Groups of Existence are dukkha.

In the first category, the Birth not only means the birth of life but also means the existence and emergence of their existence, the performance of living groups, the generation of meaningful activities; aging and illness represent aging, weakness, gloomy and wrinkle, loss of vitality, loss of reason; death presents the destruction of Beings, disappearance, the completion of their life cycle, the disintegration of the life group, the separation and elimination of the abandoned body. All of these dukkhas are related to biological changes in the body.

In the second category, the Sorrow arises from the loss or misfortune of mankind, his own anxiety, the state of panic, the inner sadness and the inner sorrow. The Lamentation is the state of sorrow and lament. It laments and remains lamenting; the Pain shows pain and unhappiness, Pain and unpleasant feeling caused by physical contact; the Grief is mental anguish and unpleasantness, painful and unpleasant feeling caused by mental contact; Despair is pain and despair caused by the suffering and unfortunateness that people encounter. All of these dukkhas are about physical or psychological feelings.

When there incurs mental or physical pain, the dukkha arises with no question. These situations are where we experience manifestly unpleasant feelings. Buddha considers the unpleasant or uncomfortable physical or emotional feelings inherent in life. They are not problems in themselves. Instead, dukkha is the pain we add to unpleasant feelings in ways that are relevant to them. For the most part, this is the pain, not the unpleasant feeling itself, which is the main source of our unhappiness. The Buddha said: When an uneducated secular was touched by a painful (physical) sensation, he was worried and saddened. He lamented, beating his breasts, shedding tears and upsetting. Therefore, he experienced two kinds of feeling, a kind of body and a kind of mental feeling. It is as if a person was pierced by an arrow and after the first piercing, he was hit by another arrow. So that person will experience the feeling of two arrows. But for a well-educated noble disciple, he would not worry nor grieve and sigh when touched by a painful feeling that he would not beat his chest and weep, nor would he be distracted Chaos. This is a feeling he experiences, a physical feeling, but not a mental feeling. The person is seemingly was pierced only by one arrow but was not hit by a second arrow after the first one. Therefore, the feelings this person experienced will be only caused by a single arrow. (Sallatha Sutra)

In the third category, suffering is ‘not getting what you need’. Beings given to birth, desires arise appears as a result. These desires are unwilling to be corrupted, sick, dead, sad, feeling sorrow, and desperate. Our experiences of the world are inherently unreliable and conditional. This means that what happens in our inner and outer world depends on a series of extremely complex and interdependent changes in conditions, many of whom we are unaware of, most of whom we have no control over. From this it can be seen that there is a fundamental unreliability in our experience; as it is never possible to know or control all the conditions that affect the occurrence of things, no matter how much we try, we simply cannot rely on anything that works in a particular way.³ However, wishes are not to be realized by mere desire to get it; it is suffering that ‘not to get what one wants’.

In the fourth category, the Five Groups of Existence (the five skandhas) are “Corporeality, Feeling, Perception, Mental Formations, and Consciousness. Any corporeal phenomenon, whether one's own or external, gross or subtle, lofty or low, far or near, belongs to the Group of Corporeality; any feeling belongs to the Group of Feeling; any perception belongs to the Group of Perception; any mental formation belongs to the Group of Formations; all consciousness belongs to the Group of Consciousness.”⁴ These groups are the classification in which the Buddha summarizes all existing physical and psychological phenomena, especially those that appear to his ignorance to be his ego or individuality. Therefore, birth, aging, illness, and death are also included in the five groups that actually make up the entire world.

The first Group of the Five Group of Existence is Corporeality. “The Corporeality is derived from four primary elements which are the Solid Element, the Fluid Element, the Heating Element, the Vibrating Element. The four elements may be rendered in English as Inertia, Cohesion, Radiation, and Vibration. The twenty-four corporeal phenomena which depend upon them are, according to the Abhidharma: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, visible form, sound, odor, taste, masculinity, femininity, vitality, organ of thinking, gesture, speech, space (cavities of ear, nose, etc.), agility, elasticity, adaptability, growth, duration, decay, variability, change of substance.”⁵

“1. The solid element could be one's own, or it may be external. One's own solid element has the dependent properties, which on one's own person and body are hard and solid, as the hairs of head and body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, stomach, bowels,

³ Nyanatiloka Mahathera, *Word of the Buddha* Buddhist Publication Society, Sri Lanka, 2016 pp.8

⁴ Ibid. pp.9

⁵ Ibid. pp.9

mesentery, excrement. whether it be one's own solid element, or whether it be the external solid element, they are both only the solid element.

2. The Fluid Element could be one's own, or it may be external. One's own fluid element has the dependent properties, which on one's own person and body are watery or cohesive, as bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, lymph, tears, semen, spit, nasal mucus, oil of the joints, urine. Whether it be one's own fluid element, or whether it be the external fluid element, they are both only the fluid element.

3. The Heating Element could be one's own, or it may be external. One's own heating element has dependent properties, which on one's own person and body are heating and radiating, as that whereby one is heated, consumed, scorched, whereby that which has been eaten, drunk, chewed or tasted, is fully digested. Whether it be one's own heating element, or whether it be the external heating element, they are both only the heating element.

4. The Vibrating Element could be one's own, or it may be external. One's own vibrating element has dependent properties, which on one's own person and body are mobile and gaseous, as the upward-going and downward-going winds; the winds of stomach and intestines; in-breathing and out-breathing. Whether it be one's own vibrating element, or whether it be the external vibrating element, they are both only the vibrating element.”⁶

After introducing the Group of Corporeality, the second group of the Five Groups of Existence is the Group of Feeling, which includes three types of mental feeling: pleasant, unpleasant, and neither pleasant nor unpleasant (Samyutta-Nikaya. XXXVI, 1) The third group of the Five Groups of Existence is the Group of Perception, which comprises six class of perception: perception of forms, sounds, odors, tastes, bodily impressions, and of mental objects. (Samyutta-Nikaya. XXII, 56) The fourth group of the Five Groups of Existence is the Group of Mental Formations, which has six classes of volitions: will direct to forms, to sounds, to odors, to tastes, to bodily impressions, and to mental objects.

Lastly, the Group of Consciousness includes six classes of consciousness: consciousness of forms, sounds, odors, tastes, bodily impressions, and of mental objects. (Samyutta-Nikaya. XXII, 56) Imagine in one occasion, while one's eyes are open, if there is nothing in a specific form fall into the field of view, and in this case, no corresponding aspect of consciousness is formed. Or, while the eyes are intact and the extrinsic form belongs to the field of view, in

⁶ Ibid. pp.9-11

the absence of a corresponding combination, in that case, no corresponding aspect of consciousness is formed. However, if the human eye is intact and the external form falls within the field of vision and the corresponding connection occurs, a corresponding aspect of consciousness arises in that situation. Therefore, the emergence of consciousness depends on the conditions; without these conditions, there is no awareness. No matter what the conditions, the generation of consciousness is dependent, and then call it. Awareness arises from the eye and the form, the ear and the sound, the olfactory organs and the smell, the tongue and the taste, the contact between the body and the body and the mind and the mind are called "eye consciousness", "ear consciousness", "nose consciousness" "tongue Consciousness", "Body Consciousness," and "mind Consciousness." We will see that consciousness depends on the other four emotions, that no one can account for the disappearance of a being, the entry into a new existence, or the growth, and development of consciousness without relying on the corporeality, feeling, perception, and mental formations.

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These five Groups of Existence are interdependent and have three characteristics. With regard to these three characteristics, they are all impermanent, conditional and with no self. If each group has a self, then everything should be permanent. It is short-lived and susceptible to pain and change, it cannot be correctly said: 'It belongs to me; I am; it is my self'. We hope that our happiness and happiness will continue indefinitely, but they will not. We want our new clothes, our new cars always the same as the ones we bought them, but they will get old, outdated, old and worn. We hope our relationship will always be as close and warm as the day we first fell in love, but they will inevitably rise and fall, and eventually, our loved ones will die. All of these changes are further cornerstones of dukkha.

The characteristic of change of the Five Groups of Existence makes the suffering unavoidable as long as we think the Five Groups of Existence are permanent. We can find the explanation of the doctrine of the first Seals of Buddha's teaching.

The four Buddhist Seal are four characteristics that reflect the true Buddha's teachings. It is said that if a teaching contains these four characteristics, it can be regarded as Dharma. The first one shows that all the compounded things are impermanent.⁸ Every phenomenon we can think of is compounded and therefore impermanent. Some aspects of impermanence, such as changes in the weather, we can easily accept, but there are many common things that we do not accept. For example, our bodies are clearly impermanent and grow older

⁷ Ibid. pp. 11-3

⁸ Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, *Buddhism In a Nutshell: The Four Seals of Dharma*
<https://www.lionsroar.com/buddhism-nutshell-four-seals-dharma/>

every moment, but this is something we do not want to accept. Some popular advertisements that attract teenagers and beauty take full advantage of this attitude. People who believe the commercial view about the advance of science and technology of keeping youth may think in terms of not aging or in some way getting out of the aging process. However, enlightened people may think this is absurd and based on the wrong view.

Concerning these different perspectives of being impermanent, aging and dying, the changing of the appearance, etc., the fact that Buddha states in the first seal that all compound beings are impermanent. When we say “compounded,” that compromises the dimensions of time and space. Anything that is compounded will be subject to being apart.

Every "being" or "individual" as we did with the name "chariot" does not exist except for shafts, wheels, axles, etc. Take it as an example, because the word "house" is just a handy way to patch together a variety of materials to enclose space, and there is no separate housing entity in existence. A person named after himself is nothing more than a changing combination of physical and mental phenomena and has no real existence in himself. Time is combined with past, present, and future, therefore it is impermanent: there is no such thing as there is no past or future. If it is permanent now, then there is no future, because it will always be there. Everything has a beginning, a middle and an end. Without the beginning, the middle or the end, there is not such a thing as a movie. This means that the movie is compounded. That should not be a problem for Buddhism if there is no start, middle or end. But it will be a problem that when something is compound and impermanent, it means uncertainty and suffering if it is unwilling to change by someone.

Whether we like it or not, things change in any occasion. when we enjoy something or even something that causes us to be particularly unpleasant: things we enjoy may disappear, and annoying things may happen at any time — that is dukkha coming from changes. As a result, every phenomenon of the world and what we have experienced are rapidly changing. nothing is forever. As we begin to be affected by the reality of such events, the things that once brought us tremendous happiness are tarnished, no longer give us pleasure in the ways we have done. The world has become an uncertain place. We cannot determine what will happen next. This is a place where transformation and instability are the conditions. Its essence is that we can never be completely assured. In this case, we face with dukkha when everything is about to change and only exists in condition. In other words, I might drink beer after working for several hours without drinking anything. The reason I enjoyed so much is that I had such a long and tiring working without drinking anything. One bottle, two bottles, or three bottles... How much beer I drink makes me feel satisfied? After drinking a certain quantity, the more I drink, the more I feel painful

instead of being satisfied. All in all, if someone likes physicality, feeling, perception, mental form, or awareness, it's the same as saying that he likes suffering.

When we do not accept that all the compounded things are impermanent, there will be an illusion. But when we realize this fact with a throughout understanding rather than just intellectually, this is what we call liberation which is free from the single, narrow minded faith of permanence. Even Buddha and Buddha's teaching are compounded because they all have a start, a middle and an end. When we do not understand "all the compounded things are impermanent", we are not getting ready to embrace the reality of life with change and loss. While everything is impermanent, suffering can arise when the fact is contradicted to what is expectations.

The other characteristic of the Five Groups of Existence is conditional existence. This is related to the third seal which states "all phenomena are empty; they are without inherent existence."⁹ When we say "all," that means everything, including all the Five Groups of Existence. Buddhists define a phenomenon as something with characteristics, and as an object that is conceived by a subject. To hold that an object is something external is ignorance, and it is this that prevents us from seeing the truth of that object.

Every phenomenon shares the same truth which is called shunyata, emptiness. This means the phenomena do not have the real nature of existence. When an unenlightened being encounters an object, he will interpret and treat the object like it really exists. Meanwhile, the existence of this subject is a false assumption. This assumption is based on various of conditions under which the object appears to be real; however, this is not the authenticity of the object. Like we see a mirage: Even if it looks like real, there is no real object. Buddha states that things do not really exist while we mistakenly believe that they do exist and that they do not have a false existence. This is because we believe our confused perception of our world. In short, in according to the Buddha's teaching about the emptiness, the appearance of things is not what is like when they are observed.

Therefore, one area of dukkha is dissatisfaction with the conditions. Everything in this world within our experience is inherently unreliable and conditional. This means that what happens in our inner and outer world depends on a series of extremely complex and interdependent changes in conditions. We are unaware of most of these conditions which we have no control over. From this

⁹ Dzongsar, *Buddhism In a Nutshell* <https://www.lionsroar.com/buddhism-nutshell-four-seals-dharma/>

point of view, our perception and experience of this world is fundamentally unreliable.

Although the unreliable and conditional experience will not necessarily create any problem, the way that our mind willing or not willing to see something to happen becomes a source of suffering. Our mind is concerned with how we get what we want, which means building some control and predictability in our inner and outer world. By this means, certain parts of our mind diminish the immense complexity of the conditional world which is not just complex but also with many dynamically changing conditions. The world then is treated with separate Categories of things and becoming reliable, with lasting existence and fixed characteristics and nature. In reality, both the world and our experience are full of unreliability and conditions, and it means that we have strict limits on our ability to predict and control over them. Although people never give up the willingness to control both the external and inner world, we will never know or control all the conditions that affect the occurrence of things.

This gap between the perception of both the world and our experience and the true nature of reality is one aspect of what Buddhism calls 'ignorance' which is a very deep-rooted, omnipresent source of dukkha. Given our current thinking structure, we say that dukkha is inevitable. As our experiences change over time, one of the most damaging aspects of ignorance is that we tend to identify our emotions, our feelings, our thoughts as just as self-contained things that reflect who I am. In sum, the fact of no self and emptiness are always in contradiction with what we conceive in our daily life. As a result, as long as we think all phenomenon really exist and is subject to be controlled by a self, there is suffering.

Part II The arising of suffering: The Second Noble Truth

After examining the different types and characteristics of suffering in Buddhism, we are going to investigate on the arising of suffering: what is the cause? what characteristics the cause has? Where the cause takes root? Here we come to explore the Second Noble Truth: the truth of the cause of suffering.

The Second Noble Truth states that the origin of suffering is an attachment to desire. There are three types of desire: Desire for Sense Pleasure (kama tanha) which is the desire for the enjoyment of the five sense objects: visual objects, sounds, smells tastes, bodily impressions, mind objects, Desire to become (bhava tanha) which is the desire for becoming a state which is not reached at the moment, and Desire for getting rid of which is the outcome of pursuing to become a wanted state by willing to change the current situation.

Kama tanha is not hard to understand. This desire is through the body or other senses that we want sensual pleasure, and always seek things that inspire or please our senses. We can always seek something that may give us physical or mental pleasure. For example, if you are hungry when you are eating, the food tastes delicious and you may want to eat more.

When we consider the temptation of becoming something (bhava tanha), it means not the desire to seek delicious food or hear wonderful music, but the feeling of falling into a state of ambition, which is the desire for becoming. We get caught up in an effort to be happy, trying to get rich, or we may try to make our life important by trying to make the world right. This is the feeling of wanting to become something other than our present state. There are many examples of bhava tanha in our daily life: I want to become an enlightened person; I want to become a husband and a father; I want to become a successful and admirable scholar.

The desire to get rid of somethings arises when we are disappointed with trying to become something. Vibhava tanha, the willingness to get out of the unwanted situation, is the desire to eliminate something in order to become an ideal state. For instance, I want to get out of my anger to become a kind person; I want to get rid of my pain to become a healthy person; I want to get rid of hatred, anxiety, and fear to become a tolerant, peaceful and brave person. Note that this is a reflection of vibhava tanha. We are actually thinking about what we want to get out of ourselves. One may want to conquer his anger, kill the devil and get rid of his greed so that he becomes the man he wants to be. As we can see that the desire to become and the desire to get rid of are closely related to each other. ¹⁰

These three types of desire: the desire for sense pleasure, the desire to become and the desire of getting rid of, are just skilful ways of understanding desire. They are not completely different forms of desire but different perspectives of it. The key nature of tanha is drawn to by the unquenchable desire - a thirst that can never be completely satisfied or ended - but unfortunately, we still have to meet. The combination of the unquenchability of the desire is fatal. This is accompanied by our hesitation to simply get rid of something that brings us suffering. Nyanatiloka states: "Attachment to desire has a compulsive quality which is a sense that we need things to be one way or another. This compulsion is reflected in our felt experience and inner language which are dominated by a sense of must, should, ought ... The key message of the Second Noble Truth is this: Experience itself is not the problem. The problem is our relationship to it, our need to have it be a particular way. As an idea, this message of the Second Truth is not too difficult to grasp or remember. But for this truth to be actually

¹⁰ Ajahn Sumedho, *The Four Noble Truth* Amaravati 1992, pp.28-9

liberating, we have to embody that understanding experientially right at the moment that we encounter unpleasant feelings.”¹¹ This can be very difficult. When we face the reality of knee pain, tiredness, or deep sorrow, it's easy to think of an unpleasant experience as a problem. Then, we try our best to get away from such feeling, rather than noticing our relationship with them. From the Second Noble Truth, the combination of desire for sense pleasure, the desire of becoming and the desire of getting rid of is indispensable for the suffering to come into being.

After examining the types of desire, let's explore what is the root of desire (tanha).

In part one, we know our world and our experience is composed of the Five Groups of Existence. If anything within these Five Groups of Existence, such as eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind, visual objects, sounds, smells tastes, bodily impressions, mind objects, consciousness, sense impression, feeling born of sense impression, perception, will, craving, thinking, and reflecting becomes the object that we really want, then desire arises and takes root.

According to the Buddha's teaching, the three poisons (triviṣa) refer to the three root kleshas which are respectively delusion (Moha), Greed (Raga), and Aversion (Dvesha). These three poisons: Greed, Aversion, and Delusion are symbolically drawn at the centre of Bhavachakra in Buddhist artwork, represented with cock, snake, and pig, respectively. They are considered three kinds of pain or personality defects that exist in life, which are the root cause of the desire and are therefore part of the source of suffering.

¹¹ Nyanatiloka, *Word of the Buddha* pp.19-20



Figure 1 Bhavachakra

In according to the Mula Sutra, Greed, Aversion, and Delusion are the three roots of what is unskilful. Greed is unskilful because “whatever a greedy person fabricates by means of body, speech, or intellect, that too is unskilful...whatever suffering a greedy person — his mind overcome with greed, his mind consumed — wrongly inflicts on another person through beating or imprisonment or confiscation or placing blame or banishment... 'I have power. I want power,' that too is unskilful. Thus, it is that many evil, unskilful qualities/events — born of greed, caused by greed, originated through greed, conditioned by greed — come into play.”

Aversion itself is unskilful because “whatever an aversive person fabricates by means of body, speech, or intellect, that too is unskilful. Whatever suffering an aversive person — his mind overcome with aversion, his mind consumed — wrongly inflicts on another person through beating or imprisonment or confiscation or placing blame or banishment, ... 'I have power. I want power,' that too is unskilful. Thus, it is that many evil, unskilful qualities — born of aversion, caused by aversion, originated through aversion, conditioned by aversion — come into play.”

Delusion itself is unskilful because “whatever a deluded person fabricates by means of body, speech, or intellect, that too is unskilful. Whatever suffering a deluded person — his mind overcome with delusion, his mind consumed — wrongly inflicts on another person through beating or imprisonment or confiscation or placing blame or banishment ... 'I have power. I want power,' that too is unskilful. Thus, it is that many evil, unskillful qualities — born of

delusion, caused by delusion, originated through delusion, conditioned by delusion — come into play.”

A person with Greed, Aversion, and Delusion will have wrong thought, and speak at the improper time, and say what is untrue, what he says is contradicting to Dharma. When denied what is the truth, he denies and does not recognize that when It is unfounded to say that he is not enthusiastic about solving it when he is told what is untrue. That is why one such person is called a person “who speaks at the wrong time, what to say is untrue and what is irrelevant, contrary to Dhamma, his mind overcome with evil, unskilful qualities born of greed... born of aversion... born of delusion, his mind consumed feeling threatened, turbulent, feverish, and at the break-up of the body, after death, can expect a bad destination.”¹²

After examining the root cause of desire, here we need to be very careful because we often make desire equals to suffering. But desire is not suffering. Only the attachment of desire brings us suffering. Desire is not necessarily become suffering. In addition, without carefully investigating of desire and to know for what it is, it is easy to be confused about what is the normal and necessary desire which has real value for us to survive and have a meaningful life and other desires for neither we need to have nor bring us real benefit. Then people may find it absurd and idealistic to think that even the need for food is something related to suffering and therefore is harmful to us to have. Instead of being an idealist, Buddha shows us a middle way which not let us get rid of all desire but only eliminate the attachment of desire. Buddha did not try to condemn anything. What he wants is to guide us for awakening and let us have a clear view of the real world.

Ven. Ajahn states: “Attaching means being deluded by it, thinking it’s really ‘me’ and ‘mine’: ‘These desires are me and there is something wrong with me for having them’; or, ‘I don’t like the way I am now. I have to become something else’; or, ‘I have to get rid of something before I can become what I want to be.’ All this is desire.” However, the suffering does not necessary arise “if we listen to it with bare attention, not saying it’s good or bad, but merely recognizing it for what it is.”¹³

When the clarity is missing and the perception of our world is in the wrong way, the suffering arises. It is not wise to say that the desire of having food is the cause of suffering so that we should keep away from that desire. On the contrary, if we are not willing to eat food, our body will become very weak and even get destroyed. With the understanding that the body is not self, the suffering will not arise when we have the desire to feed the body. In another word, we can still have a feeling of hunger, we can still willing to eat, as long

¹² Mula Sutta <https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.069.than.html> 2005

¹³ Ven. Ajahn Sumedho, *The Four Noble Truth* Buddha Dharma Education Association pp.30-1

as there is not such an attachment to that desire, there will not have a problem of suffering.

The first two Noble Truths, which is the truth of suffering and the truth of the causes of suffering, reflect the law of cause and effect, of action and consequence. “If, whenever perceiving a visual object, a sound, odour, taste, bodily impression, or a mind-object, the object is pleasant, one is attracted; and if unpleasant, one is repelled. Thus, whatever kind of ‘Feeling’ one experiences—pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent—if one approves of, and cherishes the feeling, and attaching to it, then while doing so, lust springs up; but lust for feelings means ‘Clinging’, and on clinging depends on the (present) ‘process of Becoming’; on the process of becoming depends (future) ‘Birth’; and dependent on birth are ‘Decay and Death’, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. Thus, arises this whole mass of suffering.”¹⁴ Similarly, the dependent origination complies the same principle and describes in more details about the mechanism of the whole process of the emergence of suffering. All the phenomena of suffering arise according to the law of cause and effect and rely on many causal factors. For instance, the fact that the sprout arises relies on the seed, water, sun, earth, and air. And there exists no phenomenon which is not an example of dependent origination within this world and human experience. In other words, every existing phenomenon is the effect of dependent origination. To better understanding the cause of suffering, it is essential to first explain the twelve components that make up dependent origination. They are ignorance, mental formation, consciousness, name and form, the six senses, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, and old age, and death.

According to the Bhavachakra, all of these twelve factors are linked with each other and construct a chain of reactions. Each one of the factors arises due to the others and provokes the next. So, for example, where there is birth which is followed by becoming produces old age, and death will be provoked thereafter.

Illustrated by the Buddhist art of Bhavachakra, in the external link of the wheel of life, the first factor, ignorance, is a symbol of a blind man exploring the road with his cane. This ignorance also appears symbolically at the center of a revolving wheel of samsara. Based on ignorance, the latent elements still have impacts on the fundamental consciousness. With the reaction of the experience of individual consciousness, these elements remain in the basic consciousness identified as karma after death and the disappearance of universe and self-consciousness.

¹⁴ Nyanatiloka, *Word of the Buddha* pp.20

In the stage of death, the impacts of karma temporarily disappear. This is followed by mental formation which is the second link. At this moment, the mind is reconditioned and remodelled in the individual consciousness and along with its productions. Then habits are formed with these factors. Here, the mental formation which is the starting point, reproduce the karma illusions 'I am' and sense of individual consciousness. Then the process continues with other activities throughout the cycle. The mental formation or reproduction of the individual consciousness is depicted as a pottery moulded by potter's work with clay. This link corresponds to the end of the bardo of emptiness with the consciousness regained itself until it migrates into the bardo of becoming.

The third link is the "individual" consciousness, which is the condition for name and form. Consciousness is symbolized by the excited monkey, a cognitive model that experiencing everything from both the subject and the object, which in turn triggers all activities with duality.

Name and form, which is the condition for the six senses, is the fourth link. It is symbolized by a ship, and two people represent consciousness and the mental body in the bardo of becoming respectively. The subject of consciousness is identified as the name, and the form is the body recognized in the experience of "I am that", just as "I am that body."

The fifth link is the six senses, which is the condition of contact. It is symbolized by a house with six doors. They correspond to six sense fields in which the consciousness in the bardo of becoming is developed.

The sixth link, contact, which is the condition of feeling, serves as the connection between the subject of consciousness and its projectile, or objects of the projectile, between the consciousness with the identification of the mental body and the external world which is an illusion of being outside of the body. Contact is symbolized by an individual's eye which is touched by an arrow. Feeling, the seventh link is the condition of craving. It represents a man and a woman who are embracing. It shows the original experience produced by the connection of a subject and its objects.

Craving, the eighth link, which is the condition of clinging, is symbolized by a man who is drinking. It shows the emergency when the willingness of seizing an object is provoked by the subject. Clinging, the ninth link, which is the connection of becoming, is the real fixation upon an object from a subject point of view, symbolized by a man who is picking fruit from a tree. Generally, these links suggest our observations and perspectives until the beginning of the bardo of becoming.

Becoming which is the tenth link is the condition of birth. It is represented by a pregnant woman. The birth of a new life is the result of grasping, the fixation of clinging.

Birth is the eleventh link and is the condition of aging and death. All the being of the world is created and come into existence in terms of birth. It is symbolized by a woman who is giving birth. All the living things which are the result of birth are subject to death. As a given state of existence, birth is generated by the energy of all the previous links which serves as an electrical current. When this current is exhausted, the being goes to the next stage of death and disappearance.

After the eleventh link, birth, life develops, deteriorates to old age, and in the end dies. Aging, and death, which is the twelfth and last link, is shown by a corpse being carried off to the charnel ground. There come emptiness and another round of dependent origination after the moment of death. Samsara, the wheel of reincarnation turns constantly.¹⁵

There are different ways to interpret the relationship between the twelve links of dependent origination in Buddhism. The way we choose here is called cyclical interpretation by splitting the twelve links into three categories naming defilements, actions, and sufferings. In according to this typology, ignorance, craving and clinging are put into the group of defilements. The group of actions is composed of the mental formation and becoming. The group of suffering is constructed by the rest seven components, which is respectively, consciousness, name and form, the six senses, contact, feeling, birth, old age, and death. Through this scheme, we can get a comprehensive interpretation of the truth of the arising of suffering, which is in connection with the notion of karma and rebirth. It can provide us a complete illustration of the emergence of the origination of suffering and rebirth.

In the group of defilements, we can find the three components, naming ignorance, craving and clinging, are the root cause of suffering. In addition, ignorance is the most fundamental factor. As a result of ignorance, we desire for sensual pleasure, we crave for existence or non-existence. Also, due to ignorance, we cling to sensual pleasure, to pleasurable experiences and ideas, and perhaps most importantly, we will uphold the idea of our independent and permanent self. Thus, actions take root from this ignorance which followed by craving and clinging.

The group of actions includes two components of dependent origination which are the mental formation and becoming. Mental formation represents the habits

¹⁵ Kalu Rinpoche, *Luminous Mind: The Way of the Buddha*, Wisdom Publications 1997 pp.71-4

and impressions formed from the flow of our consciousness. The repeated actions form these habits and impressions. This process can be interpreted by means of an example. For instance, the river is formed by multiple processes of a repeated phenomenon. The rain gathers into a flowing water after falling on the ground. Little by little, this flowing water makes a channel and gradually brings into a stream. As the water flows gradually, the channel of water deepens and expands to a stream. After this process repeats for a while, a river is formed by the stream, and there develop more and more rivers. Similarly, our personalities and our habits, after multiple lives, is formed as mental formation.

Our behaviours within this life depend on the mental formation or habits formed in innumerable past lives. Therefore, if we go back to the example of the river, the mental formation can be symbolized by the channel of the river, while our deeds of this life are created by the previous operations by erosion of the again flowing freshwater channel. The acts we show throughout this life are characterized by what we call becoming, the combination of the habits we develop in countless lives and the new acts of our life that together lead to suffering and rebirth.

In short, the defilements that we have can be represented as impurities of our mind. These defilements, or mental impurities, such as ignorance, craving and clinging, lead to actions. The resulted formation and habitual energy by the actions of past lives, determine the actions that are done in the present life. And this present life reconciles with the patterns established in past lives. Rebirth is the results of the combination of these mind impurities and these actions. Alternatively, consciousness, name and form, six senses, contact, feeling, birth, old age, and death are all the effects of the impurity of mind and these actions. In this illustration, the five components of defilements and actions result in consciousness, in name and form, in the six senses, in contact between the six senses and the objects of the six senses, in feeling which is born of that contact, in birth, and in old age, and death.

Altogether, the combination of the defilements of mind and actions represents the root of suffering and the reason of the specific rebirth which we are born in and where we can find ourselves. Although all the being shares the common defilements of mind, actions among different individual vary. While every unenlightened being is a prisoner of reincarnation or samsara as determined by the fact of the defilements of mind, the combination of different actions and degree of defilements of mind are responsible for which realm to be reborn. As a result, every being has a specific sense of suffering generated by its individual actions. In sum, the suffering and samsara take roots from defilements and actions. So long as there is an appearance of ignorance, craving, clinging and actions, there will be suffering and rebirth.

In the first part of this essay, we introduce the first Noble Truth about what is suffering in according to Buddha's teaching and different types of suffering. We also discuss the Five Groups of Existence which initially brings us suffering. This is mainly due to the mismatch of our perception and the characteristics of the Five Groups of Existence which are impermanent, conditional existence and without self. By further exploring the Buddha's teaching about some contents of the Four Seals, we find there is a gap between the perception of both the world and our experience by unenlightened being and the real nature of impermanence, emptiness and no-self makes suffering inevitable.

In the second part, we explore the second Noble Truth about the arising of suffering which is the attachment of desires. Firstly, we define different categories of desire which are Desire for Sense Pleasure, Desire to become and Desire for getting rid of the unwanted situation. Secondly, we investigate the root of desire which are the three poisons (Greed, Aversion, and Delusion). At the same time, we notice that the suffering is not a direct result of desire but is created by the action of attaching to desire. Thirdly, in order to show the mechanism of the emergence of suffering, we analyse the dependent origination in according to the Bhavachakra.

With the illustration of the relationship among the twelve components of dependent origination, we can find that the aggregate of this compounding phenomena leads us to create karma and to generate defilements of mind and actions. And all our suffering can be traced back to these aggregates of attachment. Therefore, suffering is rooted in a complex environment where many conditions mutually reinforce the pattern of interactions. We can see suffering as the result of specific processes with the combination of defilements of mind and actions in a dynamic structure (samsara). With a specific set of condition, this dynamic structure is full of suffering and is actively created, from moment to moment, again and again. Above all, only after fully understanding of the suffering and the arising of suffering, we can start the Buddhist practice for the ultimate goal of Buddhism which is the end of suffering.