

Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dhamma Sutta (Dhammachakkappavattana Sutta, the Buddha's First Teaching)

Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One was living in the Deer Park at Isipatana, near Vārānasi. There he addressed the group of five monks: 'Monks, these two extremes ought not to be practiced by one who has gone forth from the worldly life. What are the two? There is devotion to pursuing sense pleasures, which is degrading, common, the way of ordinary people, unworthy and unprofitable; and there is devotion to self-mortification, which is painful, unworthy and unprofitable.

'Avoiding both these extremes, the Tathāgata has realized the Middle Way: it gives vision, it gives knowledge, and it leads to peace, to insight, to awakening, to freedom. And what is that Middle Way...? It is simply the Noble Eightfold Path, namely, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is the Middle Way realized by the Tathāgata, which gives vision, which gives knowledge, and which leads to peace, to insight, to awakening, to freedom.

'The Noble Truth of suffering is this: Birth is suffering; aging is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; association with the unpleasant is suffering; separation from the pleasant is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering – in brief, grasping the five aggregates is suffering.

'The Noble Truth of the origin of suffering is this: It is craving which produces renewal of being, bound up with passionate greed. It finds fresh delight now here and now there, namely, craving for sense-pleasures; craving for being; and craving for non-being.

'The Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering is this: It is the complete cessation of that very craving, giving it up, renouncing it; letting go of it, emancipating oneself from it.

'The Noble Truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering is this: It is simply the Noble Eightfold Path, namely right view; right thought; right speech; right action; right livelihood; right effort; right mindfulness; right concentration.

‘ “This is the Noble Truth of suffering”: such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the awareness, the light, that arose in me with regard to things not heard before. “This suffering, as a noble truth, must be fully understood”: such was the vision ... “This suffering, as a noble truth, has been fully understood”: such was the vision ...

‘ “This is the Noble Truth of the origin of suffering”: such was the vision ... “This origin of suffering, as a noble truth, must be abandoned”: such was the vision ... “This origin of suffering, as a noble truth, has been abandoned”: such was the vision ...

‘ “This is the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering”: such was the vision ... “This cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, must be realized”: such was the vision ... “This cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, has been realized”: such was the vision ...

‘ “This is the Noble Truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering”: such was the vision ... “This way leading to the cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, must be followed”: such was the vision ... “This way leading to the cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, has been followed”: such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the awareness, the light, that arose in me with regard to things not heard before.

‘As long as my vision of true knowledge was not fully clear in these three aspects, in these twelve ways, regarding the Four Noble Truths, I did not claim to have realized the perfect awakening that is supreme in the world with its gods, devils, and highest divinity, in this world with its contemplatives and priests, with its monarchs and people. But when my vision of true knowledge was fully clear in these three aspects, in these twelve ways, regarding the Four Noble Truths, then I claimed to have realized the perfect awakening that is supreme in the world with its gods, devils, and highest divinity, in this world with its contemplatives and priests, with its monarchs and people. And the vision and knowledge arose in me thus: My heart’s deliverance is unshakable. This is my last birth. Now there is no more renewal of being.’

This the Blessed One said. The group of five monks was glad, and they rejoiced at his words.