



For the First Noble Truth, ‘There is suffering’ is the first insight. What is that insight? We don’t need to make it into anything grand; it is just the recognition: ‘There is suffering’. That is a basic insight. The ignorant person says, ‘I’m suffering. I don’t want to suffer. I meditate and I go on retreats to get out of suffering, but I’m still suffering and I don’t want to suffer... How can I get out of suffering? What can I do to get rid of it?’ But that is not the First Noble Truth; it is not: ‘I am suffering and I want to end it.’ The insight is, ‘There is suffering’. Now you are looking at the pain or the anguish you feel – not from the perspective of ‘It’s mine’ but as a reflection: ‘There is this suffering, this *dukkha*’. It is coming from the reflective position of ‘Buddha seeing the Dhamma.’ The insight is

simply the acknowledgement that there is this suffering without making it personal. That acknowledgement is an important insight; just looking at mental anguish or physical pain and seeing it as *dukkha* rather than as personal misery – just seeing it as *dukkha* and not reacting to it in a habitual way.

The second insight of the First Noble Truth is: ‘Suffering should be understood.’ The second insight or aspect of each of the Noble Truths has the word ‘should’ in it: ‘It should be understood.’ The second insight then, is that *dukkha* is something to understand. One should understand *dukkha*, not just try to get rid of it.

We can look at the word ‘understanding’ as ‘standing under’. It is a common enough word but, in Pali, ‘understanding’ means to really accept the suffering, stand under or embrace it rather than just react to it. With any form of suffering – physical or mental – we usually just react, but with understanding we can really look at suffering; really accept it, really hold it and embrace it. So that is the second aspect, ‘We should understand suffering’.

The third aspect of the First Noble Truth is: 'Suffering has been understood.' When you have actually practised with suffering looking at it, accepting it, knowing it and letting it be the way it is – then there is the third aspect, 'Suffering has been understood', or '*Dukkha* has been understood.' So these are the three aspects of the First Noble Truth: 'There is *dukkha*'; 'It is to be understood'; and, 'It has been understood.'

This is the pattern for the three aspects of each Noble Truth. There is the statement, then the prescription and then the result of having practised. One can also see it in terms of the Pali words *pariyatti*, *patipatti* and *pativedha*. *Pariyatti* is the theory or the statement, 'There is suffering.' *Patipatti* is the practice, actually practising with it; and *pativedha* is the result of the practice. This is what we call a reflective pattern; you are actually developing your mind in a very reflective way. A *Buddha* mind is a reflective mind that knows things as they are.

We use these Four Noble Truths for our development. We apply them to ordinary things in our lives, to ordinary attachments and

obsessions of the mind. With these truths, we can investigate our attachments in order to have the insights. Through the Third Noble Truth, we can realise cessation, the end of suffering, and practise the Eightfold Path until there is understanding. When the Eightfold Path has been fully developed, one is an *arahant*, one has made it. Even though this sounds complicated – four truths, three aspects, twelve insights – it is quite simple. It is a tool for us to use to help us understand suffering and non-suffering. ■

—from *The Four Noble Truths*, by Venerable Ajahn Sumedho