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(Koṭi,gāma) Pariññeyya Sutta

The (Koṭi,gāma) “To Be Fully Understood” Discourse | S 56.29
or **Abhiññeyya Sutta**, the Discourse on the To Be Directly Known

Theme: The 4 truths should be fully comprehended

Translated by Piya Tan ©2018

1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 THE TRUTHS ARE TO BE “FULLY UNDERSTOOD”

1.1.1 The (Koṭi,gāma) Pariññeyya Sutta (S 56.29), the (Koṭi,gāma) “to be fully understood” discourse, is a short statement by the Buddha that the 4 noble truths are “**to be fully understood**” (*pariññeyya*). Like most of the suttas in **the Koṭi,gāma Sutta** (S 56,11-27), the Sutta opens with a statement of the 4 noble truths [§1], followed by the 4 functions (*kicca*) are listed [§3].

1.1.2 Then, comes the key passage which answers the question, “**What is the noble truth that is to be fully understood?**” [§3]. The answer is that:

(1) the 1 st truth,	suffering,	is to be	<u>fully understood;</u>
(2) the 2 nd truth,	craving,	is to be	<u>abandoned;</u>
(3) the 3 rd truth,	nirvana,	is to be	<u>realized;</u> and
(4) the 4 th truth,	the path,	is to be	<u>cultivated.</u>

1.1.3 It is clear from this statement [§3; 1.1.2] that at an early period of the Buddha’s ministry—clearly, during the 1st period, that is, the 1st 10-20 years¹—the Buddha simply taught that the 4 noble truths were to be “fully understood” (*pariññeyya*). If this were the case, then, we may be able to chart some kind of chronology of evolution of how the 4 noble truths were taught by the Buddha or the early teachers.

2 The evolution of the 4 noble truths

2.1 SUFFERING AND ITS ENDING

2.1.1 The earliest formulation of the noble truths (*ariya,sacca*) is probably given at the end of **the Anurādha Sutta** (S 22.86 = S 44.2), SD 21.13, where the Buddha declares:

“Good, Anurādha, good! Before, Anurādha, and now, too,
Only suffering and the ending of suffering do I declare!”²

Apparently, the Buddha summarized his teachings as being simply twofold, that is, **suffering** (*dukkha*) and its ending (*nirodha*). While the former includes both the 1st truth (suffering) and the 2nd truth (the

¹ On the 2 periods of the Buddha’s ministry, see SD 1.1 (2.2) & SD 40a.1 (1.3).

² Sādhū sādhu anurādha pubbe cāhaṃ anurādha etarahi ca | dukkhañ c’eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhan’ti. See SD 21.13 (2).

arising), the latter encompasses both the 4th truth (the path) and the 3rd truth (the ending).³ This key remark (in bold) is explained in terms of the 5 aggregates in **the Yamaka Sutta** (S 22.85,37), SD 21.12.

2.1.2 Ignorance and knowledge. The 2nd stage of the evolution of the noble truths is probably reflected in **the (Koṭi,gāma) Pariññeyya Sutta** (S 56.29), SD 53.40, where we see both the listing of the 4 noble truths [§1] as well as their full comprehension (*pariññeyya*) [§3]. Hence, we see only the dichotomy between ignorance (*avijjā*) of the 4 noble truths and the full knowledge (*vijjā*). While **the ignorance** aspect is highlighted in **the (Sacca) Avijjā Sutta** (S 56.17), SD 53.30, **the knowledge** aspect is found in **the (Sacca) Vijjā Sutta** (S 56.18), SD 83.31.

2.2 THE TRUTH ARE TO BE FULLY UNDERSTOOD

2.2.1 The “practice sequence”

2.2.1.1 Although we are familiar with the sequence of the 4 noble truths as: (1) suffering, (2) its arising, (3) its ending and (4) the path—that is, the “teaching sequence”—the oldest sequence is probably that of (1) suffering, (2) its arising, (4) the path (the practice) and (3) the ending—that is, the “practice sequence.” This older 1-2-4-3 “practice sequence” of the 4 noble truths is found, for example, in **the Mahā Saḷ-āyatanika Sutta** (M 149,11 etc).⁴

2.2.1.2 The Buddha’s earliest listeners who were right and ready, on account of their past good karma, quickly understood when he taught them about “suffering and its ending” [2.1.1]. They easily understood how suffering arose from craving; they understood that with the ending of craving, suffering ends, too. With such understanding, they were moved to follow the path the Buddha had laid out for them. Walking that path—the noble eightfold path—they became saints and arhats. Essentially, this progress is what we may call the “**practice sequence**” of the truths [2.2.1.1].

2.2.2 The “teaching sequence”

2.2.2.1 The Buddha is said to have taught the Dhamma in a gradual manner (*ānupubbī,kathā*).⁵ In the early years of the Buddha’s ministry, he must have taught the truths first in 2 stages [2.1]. In due course, for the benefit of listeners who lack the conditions for arhathood or who are not so quick in seeing true reality—and for our benefit today—elaborated the truths into a set of 4—suffering, its arising, its ending and the path to its ending.

2.2.2.2 The logic of this “**teaching sequence**” is clear enough. The listener is explained the meaning of life—it is fraught with *unsatisfactoriness* arising from craving. The purpose of life then must surely be to end such suffering. Understanding this, we finally are motivated to practise Dhamma and walk the path. This must clearly have been the truth-progress of those early listeners who became **the “come bhikshus”** (*ehi-bhikkhu*), the earliest de-facto monks in the world: after becoming arhats, they sought admission into the order. The Buddha accepted them by the *ehi,bhikkhu pabbajjā* (going-forth by the “Come, bhikshu!” formula).⁶ [2.3.1.1]

³ This is to follow the oldest truth-sequence (2.2.2).

⁴ Also SD 41.9 (2.4). For details, see SD 53.26 (2).

⁵ **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14,3.15), SD 49.8a. For the pericope, see SD 49.8b (7.3 esp 7.3.2).

⁶ On the “Come, bhikshu” admission, see SD 45.16 (1.2); for a list of such monks, see SD 45.16 (1.3).

2.3 THE TEACHING SEQUENCE OF THE 4 TRUTHS

2.3.1 Origin of the teaching sequence

2.3.1.1 As the number of arhats in the Buddha’s community grew, it attracted more people to renounce the world and become monks and nuns under the Buddha. Most of these converts were still ordinary untutored worldlings. Since they were not so right and ready as the *ehi, bhikkhu* arhats [2.2.2.2], they had to be carefully tutored.

They were instructed on the true nature of the world (unsatisfactoriness) and what brought about this (craving). Often enough, they heard teachings on these 2 first truths and were moved to renounce the world. Then—either before or after they renounced—they heard teachings on how to end such suffering (nirvana). They were then motivated to cultivate the path. From this, indeed, arose the familiar “**teaching sequence**” of the 4 truths as we know them today, that is, suffering, its arising, its ending and the path.

2.3.1.2 An example of the first developed version of the 4-truth formula (S 56.29) [2.2.1] can be seen, for example, in **the (Khandha) Dukkha Sutta** (S 22.104), SD 42.10, and **the (Sacca) Khandha Sutta** (S 56.13), SD 53.26. The truths are simply defined respectively as (1) the 5 aggregates, (2) craving, (3) the utter fading away of craving (nirvana) and (4) the noble eightfold path. Most of them were quick intuitive learners (*ugghaṭitaññū*) who have no difficulty understanding what the Buddha teaches them.⁷

The 4 truths are slightly elaborated in **the Sammā Diṭṭhi S** (M 9,14-19), SD 11.14, with a refrain that says when the noble disciple has understood the 4 truths, he overcomes the latent tendencies of lust, aversion, and the view and conceit “I am.” The Sutta then gives an alternate method of reflection where the 4 truths are applied to the 12 links⁸ beginning with decay-and-death and ending with ignorance.⁹ In other words, the 4-truth formula is applied as a “**meaning and purpose**” template for the 12 links of dependent arising.

2.3.2 The developed versions of 4-truth formula

2.3.2.1 A more developed version [2.3.1.2] of the 4-truth formula (S 56.29) [2.2.1] can be seen in **the (Sacca) Tathāgata Sutta** (S 56.12), SD 53.25. This Sutta presents each of the 4 truths at 3 levels: a statement of the truth, its practice or task (*kicca*) and its realization. Hence, the 1st truth (suffering) is to be fully *understood*; the 2nd truth (craving) is to be *abandoned*; the 3rd truth (nirvana) should be *realized*; and the 4th truth (the path) is to be *cultivated*. This pattern is that of the “**teaching sequence**”¹⁰ [2.2.2].

2.3.2.2 The most detailed exposition of the 4 noble truths is given in **the Sacca Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 141), the discourse on the analysis of the truths (SD 11.11). This Sutta teaching is given in the Deer Park

⁷ On *ugghaṭitaññū* and the 4 kinds of learners, see **Ugghaṭitaññū S** (A 4.143), SD 3.13(3.3).

⁸ We usu speak of the “12 links” although there seems to be only 11 “links” (*nidāna*) since the 12th “factor” is seen on as a result. But the 12th link (decay-and-death etc) connects back to ignorance, and the cycle repeats over and over in a single lifetime. Suffering, too, arises conditioned by ignorance through craving. Hence, it is known as the “12-link cycle” (*dvā, dasa paccay’ākāra*). **Paccay’ākāra** lit means “dependent mode.” The 12 factors are **links** also in the sense that the “reverse” (*anuloma*) series, works backwards to show how the last (decay-and-death, etc) is linked to birth, and so on, back to ignorance. In the next life, decay-and-death conditions the new rebirth, and so on (the cycle seen over 3 lives). *Pacca’ākāra* is, however, a late term, first appearing in **Apadāna** (ThīAp 18.18/2:545*, 19.86/550). See SD 5.16 (1.4.2.2). On the 12 links and 11 propositions, see SD 5.16 (4.1).

⁹ M 9,20-67 (SD 11.14).

¹⁰ On the truth-sequences, see SD 1.1 (6.2.2.2).

at Isipatana to an unspecified group of monks (no “5 monks” are mentioned). The Sutta opens with the Buddha declaring the supremacy and incontrovertibility of the 4 noble truths. Then, the Buddha advises the monks to emulate Sāriputta (who is “like a child-giver” or mother) and Moggallāna (who is “like a child’s nurse”). “Sāriputta trains others for the fruit of streamwinning, and Moggallāna for the supreme goal.”¹¹

The 4 truths are then listed in the “teaching sequence” [2.2.2]. This is followed by a definition of each of the 4 truths. For each truth, its factors or details are then defined; that is, the kinds of sufferings are listed and each defined; the 3 cravings are listed; nirvana is defined as “the utter fading away and ending” of craving; and finally the eightfold path is listed, and each of the 8 factors defined.

2.3.2.3 Significantly absent from **the Sacca Vibhaṅga Sutta** is the set of 12 aspects of the truths, which are prominently featured in **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11) [2.3.3]. This omission gives us good reason to surmise that the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta as a text is a later compilation than the Sacca Vibhaṅga Sutta. This is merely a chronological history of the compilation of the **texts** of the teaching (as literature), and not the age of the teachings themselves.

2.3.3 The 12 aspects of the 4 truths

2.3.3.1 It is likely that **the 1st discourse** given to the 5 monks at the Deer Park was so familiar to the early arhats and other monastics during the 1st period [1.1.3] that it was taken for granted. However, the monastics who were ordained in the 2nd period (that is, the last 25-20 years of the Buddha’s 45-year ministry) must have asked about this 1st discourse. The Buddha or the elders then re-formulated it and presented the 1st teachings to the 5 monks.

Understandably, the Buddha, as a living teacher, is unlikely to have given a verbatim recital of the 1st discourse to the 5 monks—this must have been a very engaging series of dialogues between the Buddha and the 5 monks. The essentials were recalled, and to this were added new teaching aids already known at the time of the teaching or compilation of what the texts refer to simply as **Paṭhama tathāgatena vutta**, “what was spoken by the Tathagata (1),” and which we today famously know as **the Dhamma,-cakka Pavattana Sutta**, the discourse on the turning of the wheel of truth.

2.3.3.2 The Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta (S 56.11) or, Dhamma,cakka Sutta for short, as a text (as literature), is clearly a late canonical work but it presents the earliest discourse by the Buddha with useful appendices, especially that of the 12 aspects, that is, 4 functions (*kicca*)—theory, practice and realization—of each of the 4 truths, as, for example, laid out in **the (Koṭi,gāma) Pariñeyya Sutta** (S 56.29) [1.1]. The 1st discourse was thus presented, not as a historical testimony, but as a Dhamma instruction based on the earliest teachings updated by the council elders as a discourse for the edification of the new generation of monastics and for us today.¹²

The Dhamma,cakka Sutta presents each of the 4 truths in the format of theory, practice and realization.¹³ This is likely to be the kind of “truth-process” that would arise in an average person who is being taught these truths or who is learning the Dharma, or who is mindful enough to reflect on the spiritual significance of his experiences. Since the last set concerns *cultivation*, this is clearly a “**gradual**” truth-

¹¹ *Sāriputto bhikkhave sotāpatti,phale vineti, Moggallāno uttam’atthe*. Here **uttam’attha**, “highest goal,” refers to arhathood. Sāriputta makes it a point to train the newly-ordained monks rather than those who are already more spiritually developed. On his compassion, see SD 11.11 (3).

¹² See SD 1.1 (8.1.1.1).

¹³ See SD 53.39 (2.2.3.1).

process of learning and understanding them. Hence, it is useful to call this the Dhamma,cakka truth-sequence, or simply, **the teaching sequence**¹⁴ [2.3.1].

2.3.3.3 Here is a schematic listing of the “truth-process” as laid out in **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11,9-12), SD 1.1, showing how the 4 truths are related to the 3 functions (*kicca*) of theory, practice and realization), giving a total of the 12 aspects (*dvādas’ākāra*) of gradual comprehending or breaking through into the truths:

<i>dukkha</i>	<u>the 1st noble truth: suffering</u>	theory
<i>pariññeyya</i>	suffering should be fully known	practice
<i>pariññātya</i>	suffering has been fully known	realization
<i>taṇhā</i>	<u>the 2nd noble truth: craving</u>	theory
<i>pahātabba</i>	craving should be abandoned	practice
<i>pahīna</i>	craving has been abandoned	realization
<i>nibbāna</i>	<u>the 3rd noble truth: nirvana</u>	theory
<i>sacchikātabba</i>	nirvana should be realized	practice
<i>sacchikata</i>	nirvana has been realized	realization
<i>paṭipadā</i>	<u>the 4th noble truth: the path</u>	theory
<i>bhāvetabba</i>	the path should be cultivated	practice
<i>bhāvita</i>	the path has been cultivated	realization

Figure 2. The 12-aspect “truth-process” (S 56.11,9-12), SD 1.1

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(Koṭi,gāma) Pariññeyya Sutta

The (Koṭi,gāma) “To Be Fully Understood” Discourse

S 56.29

The 4 noble truths

1 Bhikshus, there are these 4 noble truths.
What are the four?

- (1) The noble truth that is **suffering.**
- (2) The noble truth that is **the arising of suffering.**
- (3) The noble truth that is **the ending of suffering.**
- (4) The noble truth that is **the path leading to the end of suffering.**

These, bhikshus, are the 4 noble truths.

¹⁴ On the various truth-sequences, see SD 1.1 (6.2.2.2).

The tasks with the 4 truths

2 Of these 4 noble truths, bhikshus,
there is the noble truth that is to be **fully understood**;
there is the noble truth that is to be **abandoned**;
there is the noble truth that is to be **realized**;
there is the noble truth that is to be **cultivated**.

*atthi ariyasaccam pariññeyyam
atthi ariyasaccam pahātabbam
atthi ariyasaccam sacchikātabbam
atthi ariyasaccam bhāvetabbam*

3 And what, bhikshus, is the noble truth to be fully understood? [1.1]

The noble truth that is suffering	is to be <u>fully understood</u> .
The noble truth that is the arising of suffering	is to be <u>abandoned</u> .
The noble truth that is the ending of suffering	is to be <u>realized</u> .
The noble truth that is the path leading to the ending of suffering	is to be <u>cultivated</u> .

Reflection on the truths

4 Therefore, bhikshus,
You should devote yourself (to the reflection):¹⁵ “This is suffering.”
You should devote yourself (to the reflection): “This is the arising of suffering.”
You should devote yourself (to the reflection): “This is the ending of suffering.”
You should devote yourself (to the reflection): “This is the path leading to the ending of suffering.”

— evaṃ —

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¹⁵ Idam dukkhan’ti yogo karaṇīyo.