

Right view as the truths

Source: (Chakka) Assāda Sutta (A 6.112, SD 62.10f), How we can be fully free from suffering, © Piya Tan, 2024.

5.2.1 The (Magga) Vibhaṅga Sutta (S 45.8) defines right view as the 4 noble truths, thus:

That which, bhikshus, is	
the knowledge [understanding] that is	suffering; ¹
the knowledge that is	the arising of suffering; ²
the knowledge that is	the ending of suffering; ³
the knowledge that is	the path leading to the ending of suffering. ⁴
This, bhikshus, is called <u>right view</u> .	(S 45.8,4), SD 14.5

5.2.2 The 4 truths are a description of true reality, thus:

5.2.2.1 The 1st noble truth is the reality of **suffering** (*dukkha*) is a universal natural truth that is significant in 2 key ways.

The first is the truth of **the physical universe** it is basically chaos, which contrasts with order. Thus out of the chaos of the universe, there evolve systems of stars and heavenly bodies. Despite the chaos, there are processes that are orderly that support life, such as the sun giving off heat, light and gravity so that life is possible. Yet all such processes are caught in time; they will one day end. In fact, even now, all universal processes are working towards its ending, only to rise again.

The 2nd truth is that of **our existential being**; since we exist, we are caught in a universal suffering—that of the 5 aggregates. Since our form (*rūpa*) arises from the earth, water, fire and wind that is the universe, it is subject to the same chaos as the external universe: “Form is *dukkha*” (*rūpaṃ dukkham*).⁵

Since the mind—comprising feeling, perception, formations and consciousness—works with body, the mind too is subject to the same chaos. The mind changes, becomes other, passes away; it is impermanent; it is *dukkha*.

5.2.2.2 The 2nd noble truth is the reality that is **the arising of suffering**. In the physical universe, *dukkha* rises from lack, which arises from space. Where there is space, matter arises to fill it. Filled with matter, the heavens assume form. Galaxies arise and revolve, filled with star systems. The stars give light. With light, arise worlds that revolve with their own gravity. Thus life evolves in seas of change.

As human life evolves, it is caught in this perpetual change. Change means *dukkha*; becoming pain, becoming pleasure, becoming other, growing. We learn through our sensing of pain and pleasure; our desire to overcome pain and maximize pleasure is the basis of all learning. As we deepen in our learning, in our growing wisdom, we begin to understand the need for freeing ourselves from both pain and pleasure, thus freeing ourselves from *dukkha*.

Our minds work to maintain **homeostasis**. We are happy and wise when we are able to regulate our “internal environment,” that is, maintaining a constant state of calm and clarity relative to the external environment. We call this mental cultivation, that is, mindfulness or

¹ *Dukkhe ñāṇaṃ.*

² *Dukkha, samudaye ñāṇaṃ.*

³ *Dukkha, nirodhe ñāṇaṃ.*

⁴ *Dukkha, nirodha, gāminiyā paṭipadāya ñāṇaṃ.*

⁵ S 3:56, 70, 114, 115.

meditation. In a sense, this is how we return our bodies (the physical elements) to the universe, and free our minds, which, in a sense, also return to the universe, as it were, when we awaken to true reality and mental freedom.

5.2.2.3 The 4th noble truth is the reality that is **the ending of suffering**. Our understanding of the 3rd noble truth may begin with an examination of how the physical universe naturally tends towards a relatively stable equilibrium between interdependent elements—basically matter, gravity, heat (and light) and motion—such as our living body is maintained by **homoeostasis**. For convenience, we may speak of the universe’s self-stabilizing tendency as **cosmoeostasis** (or cosmstasis).⁶

Theoretically speaking the universe that we see is one that is in cosmoeostatis. It will always be the same universe in the sense that its physical reality has neither definable beginning nor ending. We can imagine a kind of being “inside” the universe, but not any “outside.” Hence, there is really neither inside nor outside of the universe. As such, the universe can only be understood by our minds, whose consciousness evolves with the universe itself through our senses experiencing **the 5 elements**: earth, water, fire wind and space. The 6th element is consciousness.⁷

5.2.2.4 The 3rd noble truth is the reality that is **the path to the ending (or stilling) of suffering**. We can imagine this as describing a “**cosmoeostatic**” universe. It is in a kind of natural state of “nirvana,” in a physical sense.⁸ Yet, this is what the Buddha describes as *samsāra*, a universe of cycles of unstable *dukkha* seeking its own stilling. In this sense, this nirvana is samsara; samsara is this nirvana.

Hence, the suttas describe our universe as going through 4 stages of cosmic evolution: expansion, expanded state, contraction, contracted (or collapsed) state—as described in **the Aggañña Sutta** (D 27).⁹ This basic cycle repeats itself with neither beginning nor ending. In a sense, we are the tiny universe that arises, grows, changes, decays and dies; this is our life-cycle. Whether we are *growing, decaying or dying*, we can learn, know and accept this universal process and so be free of it forever. This is our nirvana, the 4th noble truth.

When we neither see this natural tendency for the universe to seek stability, and that we are part of this cosmoeostatic universe, then we try to work against this stabilizing and stilling tendency by seeking to fill the lack and vacuum we see by our own desires, dislikes and delusion. In understanding how the universe, the macrocosmos, works, we can also see how we, the microcosmos, works. Thus when we are at peace with ourselves, we are at peace with the universe.

R897 Inspiration 540

Piya Tan ©2025

⁶ From the Greek, *cosmos*, “the universe,” + *oeostasis*, “standing,” giving the sense, “universal stability.” Cosmoeostasis is pronounced “kos-mio-sta-sis.”

⁷ On the 6 consciousnesses, see **Mahā Rāhu’ovāda S** (M 62/1:420-426), SD 3.11.

⁸ We should not however confuse this interesting parallel as referring to nirvana (*nibbāna*)—the 3rd noble truth—that is taught by the Buddha.

⁹ D 27/3:80-97 (SD 2.19).