

## 257hh- Only The Noble Truth Of Pain

By Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero

(A Summarised Transcription of a Hillside Hermitage Dhamma Talk)

Q: The four noble truths, you're saying, are four aspects to one insight.

Nm: The insight being the way out of suffering. You see how to escape from it without trying to get rid of it. If you want to understand the way out of suffering, first you need to understand the suffering, and you can't understand the suffering if you can't give up the pressure, the need, the urge, the craving to get rid of it, to manage it, to prevent it. You need to endure and not act out of the pressure towards more pleasure when you're feeling agreeable. You need to endure and not act out of the pressure towards getting rid of the pain when you're feeling disagreeable. You need to endure and not act out of the pressure to ignore the neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling. That type of endurance is the hardest thing to do.

*“Patient endurance is the supreme austerity. Khantī paramam tapo titikkhā..” - [Dhp179-196](#)*

That's why people find sense-restraint difficult because you have to endure that pressure of craving. That's why they find it difficult to NOT try and manage their suffering, but instead explain it or psychologize it, because that endurance is very difficult. That's why people find it really hard to not distract themselves when they're feeling neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant, to not find something to do, to not find an activity to keep them occupied, because it just becomes too unpleasant.

If you endure things on the level of not acting out of craving towards whatever is felt or out of unwholesome intentions, you are practising the highest of all ascetic practices, and the only one that matters. That is the endurance that results in the uprooting of craving and the cessation of dukkha.

If you endure things on that right level, you will not need much of an instruction because you already have the right basis, which can lead to the obvious aspects of your situation being revealed, such as, “Okay, so I am liable to suffering and everything I've been doing so far, has not uprooted it, has not even been in the direction of uprooting that suffering, it was all only on the level of management and distraction from it, and the Dhamma is the direction of uprooting, so it's completely the opposite direction in which I have been going so far.” But for that insight to arise, you first need to endure things on the right level.

You have to understand the suffering first, in order to see the way out. In order for you to understand suffering, you need to stop trying to get rid of it and trying to manage the suffering. You need to allow it to be, to endure, because it takes time to understand it. By covering up the suffering, by trying to get rid of it, by trying to manage it, you are not uprooting it, if you were, it would not return.

Can you endure the pain without expressing it, without trying to repress it or trying to get rid of it, without psychologizing it, without hateful thoughts, without turning away and ignoring it? Can you just stay with it?

Q: Can I endure my liability to suffer without doing anything on account of it? I could say, “Ok, I am now going to endure the suffering so that I can get rid of it!”

Nm: So, you started enduring the suffering, maybe for one second, in the right way? And then the next second, you fall into, “Now I’m enduring it because I want to get rid of it”. So what do you do then? Well, you include that into your endurance of suffering that you don’t want to get rid of.

You can endure the suffering, rightly, but then you can endure it wrongly if you become motivated by different reasons, such as, you’re not enduring it for its own sake, you’re doing it to get rid of it, which means that you have just returned to the old attitude. So how do you stop that? By enduring it, it’s not going to be perfect but for as long as you know that you are supposed to endure it without acting out of it, then even that mind that makes that ‘endurance’ as an act of craving, will calm down if you endure it sufficiently enough without turning away.

Q: “...*This is the dukkha ariya-sacca/noble truth of suffering:*

*1- jāti/birth is dukkha,*

*2-jarā/decaying is dukkha,*

*3-maraṇa/death is dukkha,*

*4-association with the disliked is dukkha,*

*5-separation from the liked is dukkha,*

*6-not getting what one wants is dukkha;*

*7-in short, the pañcupādānakkhandhā/ five assumed aggregates are dukkha...”*

Nm: Basically, your life is the basis for your dukkha. That’s it. It’s not like particular things are the basis for your dukkha, the ‘five aggregates’ are the basis for the dukkha. In other words, you haven’t done anything wrong, you were just born. Birth is dukkha, that’s it. Even if you don’t do anything particularly wrong, you’re already affected with dukkha because you’re already here. Everything else that comes throughout your life is kind of a secondary reminder of what the dukkha already is and that you are already liable to it. That’s why a person needs to develop the state of mind that recognises this and restrains themselves from trying to address those myriad of individual instances of suffering, “Oh, he said, that upset me, she didn’t do that which upset me, I’ll go talk to her, I’ll tell him off,...all so that I can address the suffering”.

*“He abused me, he attacked me, he defeated me, he robbed me.” Those who harbour such thoughts will never end their hatred.*

*“He abused me, he attacked me, he defeated me, he robbed me.” Those who do not harbour such thoughts will end their hatred.*

*Hatred never ends through hatred; by non-hatred alone does it end. This is an eternal truth.” - [Dhp 1 Yamaka Vagga](#)*

All of these things that you experienced throughout the life that involved suffering are not the reason for your suffering, if they were, freedom from suffering would not be possible. It’s your craving in regard to how you feel on account of these things in the world, that’s the root of suffering. For as long as you keep acting out towards him or her or this or that, or particular instances of suffering, you’re not allowing yourself to see it on the right level, which means you cannot address it correctly. You’re still blaming the individual circumstances.

A view needs to be developed, whereby you recognise that it’s not about instances of suffering, it’s about the fact that you are liable to suffer. That’s it. If it’s not this instance that you suffer in regard to, it would have been something else and it will be something else. You, trying to manage and perfect your ways of managing your environment, the way you speak to people, the way they speak to you, all of that is basically rooted in the fact that you know deep down, that you don’t know the escape from suffering, and you just want to minimise the pain, you want to manage it. And for as long as you value that management, you will not force yourself to look for the direction of uprooting suffering. That’s the trap of thinking, “Oh, this management

technique is helpful. My psychotherapy is helpful, psychology is helpful, watching my breath is helpful, etc...". All these management's are helpful to manage your pain, but if you become dependent on management of the symptoms, you are not going to be able to endure the symptoms so to reveal the source of your illness, because you immediately cover up the symptoms, you manage it, you take a pill, you deal with the symptoms, and they're gone and now you don't see the illness and think that 'you suffering less than you used to' means that the illness is ending, yet you are still as liable to dukkha as before, that hasn't changed.

You need to endure the symptom by resisting the pressure to manage it and by not managing the discomfort, you get to understand, "Right, now it's this that I'm suffering over, yesterday was something else, tomorrow it will be something else, the point is, I am liable to suffering and even if I perfectly address this and that issue, I cannot prevent circumstances from making me uncomfortable in the future and that's the problem." You can realise that it's not about particular sufferings, it's about the nature of suffering.

Q: I am infected by craving and affected by feeling. I am thus liable to suffering.

Nm: These particular instances of affections are just the reminders of your situation that's already within that liability. Birth, as in manifestation, is already suffering, you are manifested from the moment you're born. For as long as your manifestation is here, dukkha is here. That's it. Even if you don't experience anything uncomfortable, no incidents, you are still within dukkha, you are still liable. That's why a person doesn't need great misfortunes and so on to recognise the nature of their situation, "I am liable to suffer".

Q: I'm affected by things. Things happen. I feel them.

Nm: You feel them either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Which means at any given time, there is some pressure placed on you. Even though you might say, "Oh, see now it's all fine. I'm not affected by suffering.", but just ask yourself, "Am I feeling something? Yes", Well, to that extent, suffering is implicit, you are pressured to that extent. You are liable to feelings. Can you even conceive being in control of your feelings? Saying I should feel this and I should not feel that? No, that's only on the level of wishful thinking. Liability to feelings means liability to suffering. You have no say in what feeling arises and how long it persists. You know that they change. For example, you might have a pleasant feeling, you had it so many times before, but you also know that it has to cease at some point, which means, if you're honest with yourself, that through a mere change of feeling, whatever feeling is there, you will have to experience suffering to some extent.

Are you able then to not be pressured by anything that you feel at any given time? Even pleasure pressures you. It makes you nervous, "What if I lose this? What if it doesn't last long enough? I want more of it? How to protect it? How do I get it again?" That's not actually a peaceful state. Pain, obviously it's not a peaceful state either, and in terms of neutral feeling, one thinks that it's boring, which is very much not peaceful, although it's peaceful, there's nothing happening. Yet, nothing happening is the most frightening thing for the ignorant mind.

Q: There are just three types of feeling, just three types of pain.

Nm: Well, three types of feeling means one type of pain, one dukkha. As it says in the Suttas, "Whatever is felt counts as suffering in the discipline of the noble one." If you have the right view, if you understand the nature of feelings, you understand that whatever is felt is unpleasant because it's felt.

*“..Good, good, bhikkhu! These three feelings have been spoken of by me: pleasant feeling, painful feeling, neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling. These three feelings have been spoken of by me. And I have also said: ‘Whatever is felt is included in suffering.’ That has been stated by me with reference to the impermanence of sankharas. That has been stated by me with reference to sankharas being subject to destruction ... to sankharas being subject to vanishing ... to sankharas being subject to fading away ... to sankharas being subject to cessation ... to sankharas being subject to change...”*  
[-Sn36.11](#)

Q: If you feel, that means you are affected, and therefore you can know that you are infected, you have a disease.

Nm: Exactly. Feeling is a symptom of an underlying problem. You're subjected to and imprisoned by, trapped within a disease. But if you don't see that as a symptom, as I said, if you still feel justified and have the view that management of suffering, management of symptoms, doing something about it so to overcome it when it arises, if you don't abandon that view, and if you don't restrain yourself, you're not going to see how deep the illness goes. Which means you're not going to see the source of it.

Q: If I am aware of feeling, I am aware of dukkha.

Nm: If you're aware of feeling correctly. What is the feeling? Most people would, through those views of management, proliferation and confusing information for understanding, would think that feelings are physical sensations that they have in their body. No, feeling is a state of mind, feeling is always mental. Feelings in regard to the body are always mental. And there's only three types of feeling on that level, which is the level of feeling agreeable, disagreeable, and neither-agreeable-or-disagreeable.

*“...It's for one who feels that I declare: ‘This is suffering’ ... ‘This is the origin of suffering’ ... ‘This is the cessation of suffering’ ... ‘This is the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering...’.* [-An3.61](#)

Q: *“This is the dukkha-samudaya ariya-sacca/the noble truth of the origin of suffering:  
 1-Taṇhā/urge/inclination/craving,  
 2-which perpetuates being,  
 3-connected with craving and passion,  
 4-finding delight here or there,  
 5-that is to say: kāma-taṇhā/sensual desire, bhava-taṇhā/desire for being and vibhava-taṇhā/desire for non-being.”*

Nm: That brings us to the point I've already said, the origin, the source, the basis, the necessary condition for presence of dukkha is presence of craving. It's not what you've seen, smelt, tasted, touched, thought about, remembered, etc. It's about craving towards whatever is felt there and then, that's the root of dukkha. The world or samsara is not the dukkha. It's not the cause of suffering. It's your attitude, on that emotional level, towards samsara, that's what suffering is. It's your craving towards it. What craving? Craving for more pleasure in pleasant feeling, craving for less pain in a painful feeling, craving for ignorance and distraction in a neutral feeling. That's it, that's the root of the entire universe of suffering. But in order to get to the root, you need to stop acting out of that craving, which is trying to manage your suffering.

The gradual training, the prerequisites in the form of a lifestyle that the Buddha outlined, is the way of rounding up, towards the centre of that suffering, which is your craving, which is an internal thing. However, if your lifestyle still revolves around the pursuit of sense pleasures, management of your suffering, trying to get rid of pain, acting out of pain through unwholesome acts of anger, distracting activities, avoidance of boredom and solitude, etc. There's no way you're going to uproot craving, when you're still physically, still passionately engaged in maintaining it. First, you need to physically stop acting out of it, then

verbally, then mentally, then you can eventually see the roots, see your own attitude towards what's currently felt.

You want to act out of craving because you feel confined within it. You can escape from that confinement by giving up sensuality, when it's pleasant, by giving up management of pain when it's unpleasant, and by giving up distraction and indolence when it's neutral. That will reveal your confining situation and the fundamental resistance you have towards the senses that we spoke of before. And if you continue not to act out of craving, the mind will calm down within that and then you get to see the escape.

*“Near Sāvattḥi. As he was standing to one side, Pañcālacaṇḍa the deva’s son recited this verse in the Blessed One’s presence: “Truly in a confining place, he found an opening—the one of extensive wisdom, the awakened one who awakened to jhāna, the chief bull, withdrawn, the sage.”*

*The Buddha: “Even in a confining place they find it, the Dhamma for the attainment of Nibbana. Those who have gained recollection, are rightly composed.” -Sn2.7*

That's wisdom, it's not a magical result of some method or some accidental insight. When you get to see dukkha for what it is through your act of non-craving, then that craving, that dukkha will begin to evaporate because it requires you to ignore it for its maintenance. You remove it indirectly by not providing a basis for craving to grow and then it will dry up.

*Q: This is the dukkha-nirodha ariya-sacca/the noble truth of the cessation of suffering:*

- 1-the complete virāga/dispassion,*
- 2-nirodha/cessation,*
- 3-cāgo/abandoning,*
- 4-paṇinissaggo/giving up,*
- 5-mutti/release and*
- 6-anālayo/detachment from that very taṇhā.*

Nm: Cessation of craving means cessation of the possibility to suffer on account of anything, that the senses, the aggregates, the world brings you, good or bad, doesn't matter. You cannot suffer because you cannot crave.

*Q: This is the dukkha-nirodha-gāminī paṭipada ariya-sacca/ the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering: just this ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga/ noble eightfold path, that is to say:*

- 1-sammā-dīṭṭhi/right view,*
- 2-sammā-saṅkappa/right resolve,*
- 3-sammā-vācā/right speech,*
- 4-sammā-kammanta/right action,*
- 5-sammā-ājīva/right livelihood,*
- 6-sammā-vāyāma/right effort,*
- 7-sammā-sati/ right recollection,*
- 8-sammā-samādhi/ right composure.*

Nm: The right view comes first. You need to know, “The root of the craving is not in the world. It's not due to insufficient management or not having a perfect meditation technique or something else. It's in the craving towards what I'm feeling, nothing else.” Therefore, you first need to stop acting out of craving, and then your resolves, your speech, actions, livelihood and efforts need to start matching that principle. That's the noble eightfold path.

Then in the pleasure, there will just be the pleasure, there will be no more implicit craving for wanting more of it. There's nothing more there's nothing less because you're not resisting it, nor leaning towards it. It's not touching you, it's not yours anymore, which means it's not pressuring you. There's nothing wanted in regard to it and nothing not wanted in regard to it either. Not touching or being touched by it, it is no longer felt.

*"...Ven. Udayin said to Ven. Sariputta, "But what is the pleasure here, my friend, where there is nothing felt?"*

*"Just that is the pleasure here, my friend: where there is nothing felt..." -[An9.34](#)*