



# Detailed subject knowledge and teacher's notes

## The Buddha's teaching in a nutshell

The first teaching given by the Buddha after his enlightenment is called the **Four Noble Truths**. On that occasion, the Buddha spoke in a place known as Deer Park in Isipatana (modern-day Sarnath) near Benares, to five ascetics who had previously been his companions in the forest. The Four Noble Truths are the foundation and the heart of all the different teachings the Buddha gave over his 45 -year ministry. The **Four Noble Truths** are:

1. The truth of suffering or lack of satisfaction.
2. The truth of the causes of suffering.
3. The truth of the cessation (or end) of suffering.
4. The truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

The Four Noble Truths should not be seen as a set of dogmatic truths in which all Buddhists must believe. They are a profound teaching about truths that can be understood on deeper and deeper levels through personal life experience and meditational insights.

According to the teachings of the Buddha, existence is such that nothing brings lasting satisfaction. That produces restlessness and suffering. Because the restlessness and suffering lie in the mind, they can therefore be changed and ultimately eliminated. The way to free oneself from suffering is to follow the Buddhist path of moral discipline, meditation and wisdom, which forms the Noble Eightfold Path.



The Noble Eightfold Path sets out the main characteristics of the Buddhist way of life. The Buddha presented this path as the middle way, a way of life that does not fall into extreme views or extremes of behaviour but cultivates balance and moderation.

In order to introduce your students to the topic you can share this video “The Dharma”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSU7RmfWfjQ>

The video can also be viewed on the Windows into Buddhism website. It can be watched as a whole, or you can also choose to show it in different extracts:

Extract 1: Sarnath, the place where the Buddha gave his first teaching (0:00 min – 3:02 min)

Extract 2: The Four Noble Truths (3:03 min – 7: 52 min)

Extract 3: The Noble Eightfold Path (7:53 min – 10:10 min)

Extract 4: The Five Precepts (10:11 min – 14:08 min)

To explain the Four Noble Truths to children you can show extract 3 of the video about the The Noble Eightfold Path (7:53 min – 10:10 min).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSU7RmfWfjQ>



## The Four Noble Truths

## Wording used in the video

### The First Noble Truth

We all experience "dukkha" - dissatisfaction, unsatisfactoriness, suffering.

Things can't give us lasting happiness. In the end, they break, grow old, or let us down. This makes us unhappy.

### The Second Noble Truth

The origins of this dissatisfaction lie in desire, greed and selfishness. (Craving for things and experiences makes us frustrated and unhappy).

Wanting things stops us being happy.

### The Third Noble Truth

It is possible to stop this feeling of dissatisfaction which is caused by craving.

We **can** be happy if we stop being greedy and wanting.

### The Fourth Noble Truth

The way to the cessation of unsatisfactoriness and the attainment of Enlightenment (Nirvana) lies in following the Noble Eightfold Path.

It takes training to stop wanting things.

According to the video extract, the following two worksheets can be used in class (to be downloaded from the website):

- Worksheet: Schez and the bike
- Worksheet: Wanting

(for more details, see Teacher's notes for the two worksheets)



## **The Noble Eightfold Path**

1. Right<sup>1</sup> View
2. Right Attitude
3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood
6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration

These 8 different elements are depicted on the Eight-spoked Wheel, which symbolises the Buddhist religion (see Presentation Slides 8 and 9).

During his lifetime, the Buddha taught for some forty-five years and spoke to many different types of people: old and young, men and women, kings, peasants, and untouchables, educated and uneducated. It is therefore not surprising that, as a good communicator, he found different ways of expressing the teaching according to the needs of his audiences. This is the logic behind the Mahayana idea that the Buddha's teaching can be categorised into the three "vehicles" or yanas because, like a vehicle, these approaches serve as means to help different kinds of people in their journey on the path to enlightenment.

It is important to note that these three sets of teachings are not to be considered separate entities; it is one and the same subject presented in different ways and on different levels.

The three Vehicles are:

- Hinayana or the Lesser Vehicle (also known as Nikaya Buddhism) represented by Theravada
- Mahayana, or the Great Vehicle
- Vajrayana, or the Diamond Vehicle, sometimes also known as Tantric Buddhism.

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<sup>1</sup> The word "right" should be understood as "correct".



One way of characterising the three Vehicles is to relate each one respectively to the lines of the summary that the Buddha made of his own teaching in the *Dhammapada*.

“To do no harm whatsoever;

To cultivate good to perfection;

To tame this mind of ours:

This is the teaching of all the buddhas.

All three aspects of the Buddha's summary are present in every Vehicle so the difference between them is only one of emphasis.

For children (5–11 years old) we use a simplified version of these lines, (see presentation slides 10 and 11): 1. Do not harm 2. Do good 3. Tame your mind (or we can say train, transform, understand your mind)

- To **do no harm** whatsoever is the emphasis of Hinayana/Nikaya Buddhism: the principles of non-harming and non-violence (ahimsa), the ethics of refraining from harmful actions, and the practice of overcoming negative emotions through meditation and mindfulness.

For the students this aspect is illustrated by the story of ‘Siddhartha and the Swan’ and worksheets related to this story.

- To **cultivate good to perfection** is the emphasis of Mahayana Buddhism: perfecting virtuous actions so they become totally selfless (the paramitas), developing the positive qualities of one's “buddha nature,” devoting one's life to the altruistic benefit of others.

For the student this aspect is illustrated by the story of “Great gift and a wish fulfilling gem” and activities related to the story.

- To **tame this mind** of ours is the strength of Vajrayana Buddhism: working with the



mind and its perception of the world, and transforming confusion into enlightenment through meditation, mantra, visualisation, and Guru Yoga.

For the students this aspect is illustrated by the example of [taming a wild horse](#) (see presentation slide) and several activities (see presentation slide 15).

The distraction game can be downloaded from the website.