The Buddha's Four Liberating Insights: A Re-evaluation of a Central Buddhist Teaching

Gil Fronsdal

This paper is intended as a contribution to the growing understanding that passages in the Pāli canon that are usually understood to refer to the Four Noble Truths are in fact made up of two quite distinct teachings which, taken out of context, can easily appear to be the same. These teachings can be distinguished as comprising soteriological insights, on the one hand, and doctrinal principles on the other. The soteriological teachings occur in the context of discussions of meditation practice and liberative realization, most prominently in some descriptions of the Buddha's experience of awakening. In the discussion below I will refer to these as the "Four Liberating Insights." The doctrinal teachings, on the other hand, consist of expositions and definitions of four doctrinal propositions. It is the latter, I will argue, that can best be described as the "Four Noble Truths." As we shall see, in the Pāli scriptures the soteriological teachings are rarely labeled the "Four Noble Truths"; instead, this title is commonly used to describe a particular set of doctrinal teachings. By distinguishing between passages of these two types we can observe that the Four Liberating Insights are frequently discussed in the Pāli suttas, whereas the Four Noble Truths are, surprisingly, mentioned infrequently. In fact, the Buddha is so rarely portrayed as referring to the "Four Noble Truths" that it is reasonable to re-evaluate the common assumption that these "truths" comprised the central message of his teaching.

Over the last one hundred years a number of prominent scholars of Buddhism have suggested that something is awry with idea that the Four Noble Truths can be traced back to the earliest period of Indian Buddhism.[1] Rather, for these scholars, the

[1] e.g., Govind Pande (1957/2006: 398), André Bareau (1963: 180), Erich Frauwallner (1973: 155), K.R. Norman (1990: 4:218-225), Johannes Bronkhorst (1986: 100-101), Lambert Schmithausen (1981: 203), Peter Skilling (1993: 104-105), Carol Anderson (1999), Richard Gombrich (2009: 103-4).

surviving evidence suggests that the teachings now identified as the Four Noble Truths were the products of doctrinal and literary developments that postdated the Buddha. Among the earliest scholars to raise this issue was the great Pāli scholar Carolyn Rhys-Davids. In her 1935 article, "Curious Omissions in the Pāli Canon", she reports the surprising absence of the Four Noble Truths in the "Chapter of Fours" in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. If the Four Truths had played a prominent role in the early scriptures, she suggested, they should be mentioned among the fourfold lists in this chapter.[2] Several decades later Carol Anderson, in her 1999 study of the Four Noble Truths, writes, "[T]he four noble truths emerged into the Theravādin tradition at some point when the canon was being formed but not at its earliest stages."[3]

Most recently, Eviatar Shulman has argued that "the commonly accepted definition of the 4NT's is a relatively late doctrinal development" (Shulman, 2014: 187). Distinct from this doctrinal presentation of the Four Noble Truths, Shulman highlights "a meditative perception regarding the arising and passing away of mental events" that "explains the central description or theory of liberation" found in the suttas (*loc. cit.*).[4]

I. Associating the Four Noble Truths with the Buddha

The claim that the Buddha realized the Four Noble Truths during his enlightenment experience is often based on a passage from the *Bhayabherava Sutta*, the fourth discourse in the *Majjhima Nikāya*. This discourse is of special significance because it describes the events of the Buddha's enlightenment, including the content of his

---

[2] C. A. F. Rhys-Davids, "Curious Omissions in Pāli Canonical Lists", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 4 (Oct., 1935), pp. 721-724. Anālayo criticizes Rhys Davids' points in his article "The Chinese Parallels to the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* 1" (*Journal of the Oxford Center for Buddhist Studies*, 2012 (3): 12-46.

[3] Carol Anderson, *Pain and Its Ending* 1999: 78.

[4] I came across Eviatar Shulman's *Rethinking The Buddha: Early Buddhist Philosophy of Meditative Perception* (2014) during the final stages of preparing this paper for publication. Shulman's conclusions are similar but not identical to my own.

liberating insight. As translated by Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (2005: 106), the Buddha describes his experience as follows:

> I directed it [my mind] to knowledge of the destruction of the taints. I directly knew as it actually is: '**This is suffering'**: I directly knew as it actually is: "**This is the origin of suffering**; I directly know as it actually is: "**This the cessation of suffering**;' I directly knew as it actually is: "**This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.**' … When I knew and saw thus, my mind was liberated … . " (MN i 23)

While the Buddha does not refer to his four insights into suffering as "Noble Truths" here, the statements in boldface type appear so similar to what elsewhere is called the "Four Noble Truths" that it would seem reasonable to assume that these Truths are what the Buddha realized during the course of his awakening. And, in fact, this is what a number of scholars have concluded. For example, Peter Harvey states, "The central discovery of the Buddha's enlightenment experience … was the Four Ennobling Truths."[5] Likewise David Kalupahana has written that with his realization, the Buddha, "was able to perceive the world paying attention to the human predicament and the way out of it, which he summarized in the four noble truths."[6]

Distinct from the Buddha's experience of enlightenment, the primary source used to demonstrate that the Four Noble Truths were important teachings given by the Buddha is the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (SN v 420), a discourse traditionally understood to be the first sermon after his awakening (Vin i 10-12). Bodhi (2000: 1844) translates the relevant passage as:

> Now **this** bhikkhus**, is the noble truth of suffering**: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering, union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.
>
> Now **this,** bhikkhus, **is the noble truth of the origin of suffering**; it is this

[5] Peter Harvey, ed. 2001: 75.
[6] David Kalupahana, 1992: 26.

> craving which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination.
>
> Now **this,** bhikkhus, **is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering**: it is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it.
>
> Now **this,** bhikkhus, **is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering**: it is the Noble Eightfold Path: that is, right view … right concentration. (SN v 421-422)

Later in the same sutta these "noble truths" are referred to as "Four Noble Truths" (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*; SN v 423).

The primary differences between the passages cited above from the *Bhayabherava Sutta* and the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, respectively, is that the first describes a process of knowing (*abhijānaṃ*) leading to liberation, while the second comprises a four-fold teaching providing details on the meaning of four doctrinal propositions. In addition, while the first passage does not use the phrase "noble truth" to characterize each of the four statements concerning suffering, the second one does. Because these two passages are so similar in wording, they have been interpreted as referring to the same thing. This in turn, I believe, has obscured our understanding of how the early Pāli texts depict the Buddha's liberating experience of insight. It has also hindered an adequate evaluation of the teachings explicitly associated with the Four Noble Truths in the suttas. To avoid this interpretive confusion, I believe it is helpful to refrain from referring to all occurrences of these four items—*i.e.*, suffering, the arising (often, but probably incorrectly, translated as "origin") of suffering,[7] and so on—as "Noble Truths." We will be in a better position to understand their significance if we make a careful distinction between passages referring to the four "Liberating Insights," on the one hand, and those that set forth the four "Noble Truths" on the other.

[7] For a discussion of the term *samudaya* and its meaning in these passages see below, pp. ___.

II. The Four Liberating Insights

The suttas make frequent references to a type of knowing and understanding that is usually translated into English as 'This is suffering ; this is the origin of suffering; this is the cessation of suffering; this is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.'[8] A search for passages containing wording of this type yielded more than 200 occurrences in the Pāli suttas, some (but not all) of which describe the Buddha's own awakening.[9] This frequency suggests that these phrases held an important place in the communities that composed and edited these suttas.

As mentioned above, the description of the Buddha's liberating insights in the *Bhayabherava Sutta* follows a fourfold pattern similar to that of the standard explanation of the Four Noble Truths. In addition, these two set of teachings share a key word for each of the four statements making up the pattern. These words are *dukkha, samudaya, nirodha, and paṭipadā* (commonly translated as "suffering," "origin," "cessation," and "the way").

However, two of these key words, *samudaya* and *paṭipadā*, appear to have very different meanings in these two contexts. More precisely, the meanings of these words in the account of the Buddha's Awakening appear to be different from the way they are interpreted in the exposition of the Four Noble Truths as found, for example, in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*.

Samudaya

In English translations of the *Bhayabherava Sutt*a and the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, samudaya* is generally translated as "origin", apparently with the implied

[8] E.g. *idaṃ dukkhan'ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. 'ayaṃ dukkhasamudayo'ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodho'ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā'ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti* (MN i 348).

[9] Using the Digital Pali Reader I searched for *dukkhanirodhagāmin-* (omitting the case ending for purposes of the search) and then tabulated the passages which contained versions of the formula "This is suffering; this is the arising of suffering; this is the cessation of suffering; this is the way leading to the cessation of suffering."

meaning of 'source'. [10] Furthermore, because in these two contexts *samudaya* is frequently interpreted (and at times actually translated) as meaning "cause", the second Noble Truth is commonly understood as explaining the truth (*sacca*) of the cause of suffering. For example, the entry for *dukkha* in the *Pāli-English Dictionary* states, "The second Sacca gives the cause of this dukkha" (Rhys-David 1905: 324). More recently, in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* we find the statement that "The second truth is the origination (*samudaya*), or cause, of suffering" (Buswell and Lopez 2014: 304). Such wording can be traced back to the late 19th century, when T.W. Rhys Davids and Herman Oldenberg rendered the second truth as the "Noble Truth of the Cause of suffering" in their translation of the Pāli Vinaya (Rhys Davids and Oldenberg 1882: 95).

It is quite unlikely, however, that *samudaya* should be understood as 'origin' or 'cause' in accounts of the Buddha's enlightenment experience. Instead, I will argue that in this context it should be translated simply in the usual sense of the word, i.e., as 'arising'.

This is in fact how I.B. Horner rendered the term in her translation of the *Bhayabherava Sutta* (Horner, 1954-1959: 295). And even those translators who use 'origin' for *samudaya* here frequently translate it as 'arising' when it occurs in other contexts. For example, in their translation of *The Middle Length Discourses*, Ñānamoli and Bodhi render the phrase *samudaya vaya dhammānupassī* as "contemplating the nature of both arising and vanishing" in the refrain section of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, 1995: 146).[11] In the *Upāli Sutta* they again use "arising" to translate *samudaya* in the phrase "the spotless immaculate vision arose in him: 'All that is subject to arising is subject to cessation'." (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, 1995: 485).[12] In their translation of the *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta*, by contrast, they translate *samudaya* as

[10] One of the earliest uses of 'origin' to translate *samudaya* is the entry for *samudaya* in Robert Ceaser Childers' *A Dictionary of the Pali Language* which defines the word as "origin, commencement, origination, cause" (Childers, 1872: 441).

[11] At SN V 183 the Buddha explains that the development of mindfulness involves seeing the arising and vanishing of the four foundations of mindfulness.

[12] MN i 380, *virajaṃ vītamalaṃ dhammacakkhuṃ udapādi — 'yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ sabbaṃ taṃ nirodhadhamman'ti*.

both “arising” and “origin” in the same passage (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, 1995: 144).[13]

The passage from the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* cited above refers to an experience of direct observation (*anupassanā*), not to a doctrinal proposition. The term “spotless immaculate vision” in Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi’s translation of the *Upāli Sutta* cited above likewise refers to an ability to see directly (as indicated by the use of the term *dhammacakkhum* “Dharma eye”). And in the *Bhayabherava Sutt*a, the word *samudaya* refers to something that one knows directly (*abhijānāti*). These three examples suggest that, in the Pāli scriptures, *samudaya* is something that can be seen or known directly.

The word “this” (*idaṃ*/*ayaṃ*) that begins the *Bhayabherava Sutta’s* statements for each of the four insights into suffering serves as an emphatic pronoun, pointing to the experience of something immediate. That these insights can be understood to involve a sudden realization is suggested by the statement elsewhere in the suttas that it is a “mind like lightning” that sees them (AN i 124). That they are realizations that occur in a particular time and place is suggested by the passage where the Buddha instructs his monks to remember the place where they realized them (AN i 107). That these realizations occur all at once is explained in two suttas attributed to a monk named Govampati (SN v 436-437). That these realizations are direct, sudden, and occur all at once is also the view presented in both *The Path of Discrimination* (*Paṭsambidāmagga*; xii 6) and the *Points of Controversy* (*Kathāvatthu*; ii 9), two important Theravada treatises.[14]

The *Indriya-vibhanga Sutta* provides further evidence that in the context of the four liberating insights *samudaya* was understood not as “origin” (much less as ‘cause’), but as “arising”. This text equates the four liberating insights with having noble and penetrating understanding of arising and disappearance (*udaya* and *atthaṇgama;* SN v 199).

Many other suttas discuss of the immediacy of the perception of

[13] See also Bodhi 2012: 432 (AN ii 45).
[14] A.K. Warder discusses this point in his introduction to Ñānamoli, trans., *The Path of Discrimination*; (Oxford: The Pāli Text Society, 1997), p. xxv.

impermanence by describing it in terms of the coming and going of phenomena. This is commonly done through the pairing of concepts such as the following:

rising and passing away (*udaya* and v*aya*)

arising and passing (*samuppāda* and *atikkama*)

arising and disappearance (*samudaya* and *atthagama*)

arising and passing away (*samudaya* and *vaya*)

arising and cessation (*samudaya* and *nirodha*)

and in verbal rather than nominal form:

it arises and it ceases (*uppajjati* and *nirujjhati*) [15]

From this list it would seem reasonable to conclude that the last pair, *samudaya* and *nirodha*—i.e., the wording found in accounts of the Buddha's awakening experience—follows the pattern of the first five, i.e., that the first word refers to the appearance of something and the second to its passing away. All of these pairs refer to the direct apprehension of impermanence. If *samudaya* is translated as 'origin' or 'cause', *samudaya* and *nirodha* would then be mismatched concepts, one having to do with causality and the other with one aspect of impermanence.

The *Bhayabherava Sutt*a's fourfold insight into suffering can be formulated abstractly as "[there was] insight into X, the arising of X, the cessation of X, and the practice leading to the cessation of X." This formulation is applied to many other items throughout the suttas. In the *Bhikkhu Sutta* it is applied to aging-and-death, birth, becoming, clinging, craving, feeling, contact, the six sense bases, name-and-form, consciousness, and volitional formations (e.g. SN ii 44).[16] Elsewhere it is applied to other items, such as:

The taints (*āsava;* MN i 23)

The four elements of earth, water, fire, air (SN ii 176),

[15] The issue of whether these six pairs of words are identical or slightly different in meaning is beyond the scope of this paper.

[16] This insight into eleven of the twelve factors of dependent origination is repeated in many of the suttas of the twelfth chapter of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*.

The five faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom (SN v 196),

The faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind (SN v 206),

Pleasure, pain, joy, unhappiness and equanimity (SN v 208),

Views (AN iv 68).

Remorse (AN iv 69)

The great number of items that can be seen through this pattern of X, the arising of X, the cessation of X, and the method leading to the cessation of X is more suggestive of seeing the appearance and disappearance of each item rather than reflecting on the particular origin or cause of each. If the second element in the fourfold pattern refers to the *origin* of suffering, we would expect some of these passages to explain or state what this origin might be. But that is not the case.

Further support for the idea that the compilers of the suttas understood *samudaya* to mean simply 'arising' comes from the following verse, which appears in the *Samyutta Nikāya,* the *Dhammapada* and the *Itivuttika*, and where *samuppāda* (arising) is used instead of *samudaya* for the four liberating insights:

Suffering, the arising of suffering, the passing of suffering,

And the noble eightfold path leading to the stilling of suffering.[17]

Another context in which 'arising' again seems more appropriate than 'origin' as a translation for *samudaya* is that of the 'arising pentad' of "arising, passing away, gratification, danger, and escape" (*samudaya, atthaṅgama, assāda, ādīna, nissaraṇa*). In the *Pañcāyatana Sutta* seeing the six sense bases in these five ways is described as leading to "liberation through non-clinging" (MN ii 237). It is unlikely that *samudaya* could refer to the origin of the six sense bases; i.e., it does not seem relevant to discuss the 'origin' of the eyes and so on. In discussions of the 'arising pentad' the suttas never provide an explanation for what *samudaya* is. If it meant 'origin', we

[17] *dukkhaṃ dukkhasamuppādaṃ, dukkhassa ca atikkamaṃ, ariyaṃ caṭṭhaṅgikaṃ maggaṃ dukkhūpasamagāminaṃ*, (SN ii 185; Dhammapapda verse 191; Iti 17). That these verses are described as noble truths (*ariyasaccāni*) and the fourth item is called the noble eightfold path (*magga*) suggests that these verses were late additions to the canon (more on this below).

would expect the suttas to provide some explanation of what the origin of the items to be seen through the categories of the arising pentad might be. If *samudaya* means simply 'arising', on the other hand, no explanation is needed. In this case the term is self-explanatory, referring to the arising of something that is known directly in one's own experience.

In sum, the most appropriate translation of *samudaya* in the *Bhayabherava Sutta* is as 'arising', and the most plausible interpretation of the Buddha's liberating insight as described in this text is that he clearly saw suffering, its arising, and its cessation. The "practice that leads to liberation" would then simply be seeing and knowing the impermanence of suffering, i.e., directly perceiving its arising and cessation.[18]

The longstanding practice of translating *samudaya* as 'origin' in the *Bhayabherava Sutt*a is, I would suggest, the result of conflating accounts of the Buddha's Awakening with those describing his subsequent teachings on the Four Noble Truths. That is, in the context of the Buddha's account of his experience of realization, the translation of *samudaya* as 'origin' (which seems quite out of place here) was probably based on interpretations of the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* that understand the second Noble Truth as describing the 'origin' (or the 'cause') of suffering. However, even in the passages like this—which describe the Four Noble Truths rather than the Four Liberating Insights—there is little evidence that the second Noble Truthtruth was understood in this way at the time when these suttas were composed (to be discussed below).

<u>*Paṭipadā*</u>

In the descriptions of the Buddha's enlightenment, as exemplified in the *Bhayabherava Sutta*, there is no evidence that *paṭipadā* was understood as referring

[18] The explanation of the second truth in the *Abhidhamma Vibhaṅga*, a Pāli text in the *Abhidhamma* section of the canon" craving is discussed in terms of the fact that it arises (*uppajjati*), suggesting that *samudaya* should also be understood here as "arising" as well. (*Vibhaṅga*: 203).

to the Eightfold Path. The emphatic "this" (*ayaṃ*) in "*this* is the *paṭipadā* leading to the cessation of suffering" suggests that the fourth insight, like the first three, refers to something that is immediately present.[19] The statement by the Buddha that he directly knew (*abhijānāti*) "this" also suggests an immediate knowing. In the context of perceiving the immediacy of the arising and cessation of suffering, as given in the second and third liberating insights, the most plausible interpretations of the fourth insight is that it is a direct recognition that this practice – seeing the arising and ceasing of suffering – is what leads to the full cessation of suffering, i.e., it is liberating. *Paṭipadā,* therefore, should be interpreted simply as 'practice', and the fourth insight should be translated as "This is the *practice* leading to the cessation of suffering.

Rather than referring to a path gradually leading to the cessation of suffering, the fourth insight refers to an act or manner of practice that can lead to the cessation of suffering. A "path" is something one walks on, over a period of time, from one place to another; in contrast, seeing something cease occurs in a single moment, not over the course of time. In the *Bhayabherava Sutta,* the practice (*paṭipadā*) is directly knowing suffering, its arising, and its cessation as they occur in the present. In other words, *paṭipadā* here refers simply to the practice of having insight into impermanence.

The liberating potential of seeing the arising and ceasing of things is discussed in the *Vibhaṅga Sutta* where the "wisdom directed to arising and passing away" is described as "leading to the complete destruction of suffering".[20] Likewise, another sutta in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, the *Dutiya Vibhaṅga Sutta*, describes a disciple who has "noble wisdom directed to arising and passing away" as experiencing the same liberating insights as those found in the *Bhayabherava Sutta*, i.e., suffering, its arising, its cessation, and "the *paṭipadā* leading to the cessation of suffering" (SN v 199). In

---

[19] Margaret Cone's *A Dictionary of Pāli* defines *idam/ayam,* here translated as "this", as a demonstrative pronoun referring to "what is immediately present" (Cone, 2001:372).

[20] *udayatthagāminiyā paññāya samannāgato, ariyāya nibbedhikāya sammādukkhakkhayagāminiyā* (SN v 197)

other words, in these suttas and many others, it is the direct discernment of impermanence that is held up as liberating, not the variety of practices comprising the Eightfold Path.

In the *Aggivacchagotta Sutta* the Buddha states that he has put away speculative views and instead has seen the arising (*samudaya*) and disappearance (*atthaṅgama*) of each of the five aggregates and that this, in turn, leads to liberation (MN i 486).

Further evidence that early Indian Buddhists understood the liberating possibilities of having direct insight into arising and ceasing can be found in the story of the former Buddha Vipassi, who attained liberation through seeing the arising and passing of the aggregates (DN ii 35).[21] Given the great signficance ascribed to the insight into arising and cessation, it was undoubtedly important for practitioners to have direct, personal experience of this insight. In sum, the Buddha's fourth liberating insight can best be understood as an affirmation of realizing the value of seeing the arising and cessation of suffering as a direct experience which can lead to liberation.

The *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, by contrast, interprets the fourth Noble Truth, i.e., the *paṭipadā* leading to the cessation of suffering, as consisting of the various elements comprising the Eightfold Path (*ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*; MN iii 251). In this context it would seem justified to use 'way', with its connotation of 'path', to translate *paṭipadā*. Often, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta's* explanation of the fourth Noble Truth is assumed to apply to the Buddha's fourth liberating insight as well. But the set of practices that make up the Eightfold Path are very different from a direct insight into suffering, its arising, and its cessation. In that the Eightfold Path is a way that leads to the cessation of suffering, it may well be able to bring the practitioner up to the point of attaining the four liberating insights. This does not require, however, that the Buddha's fourth insight in the *Bhayabherava Sutta* be understood as referring to the Eightfold Path.

In many other sutta passages it is clear that *paṭipadā* does not mean 'path'. In

[21] That seeing the arising and passing of the aggregates can lead to liberation and the destruction of the taints is also found at AN 4.41.

the *Rathavinīta Sutta*, for example, *paṭipadā* is explicitly distinguished from *magga* ('path'; MN i 147). The sutta presents knowledge of what is the path and what is not the path (*magga*) as a precursor to the knowledge of or insight into the practice (*paṭipadāñāṇadassana*). This in turn is the precursor to knowing that one has lived the "holy life" (*brahmacariya*), i.e., that one has attained liberation. Listed between knowing what is and is not the path and knowing that one is liberated, it would make sense that 'knowledge of the practice' would refer to the practice of liberating insight. In other words, the path (*magga*) is the gradual training in a variety of practices that culminates in the ultimate practice (*paṭipadā*) of direct liberating insight, followed by the knowledge that liberation has actually been attained. The close association between *paṭipadā* and liberation is also seen in the *Greater Discourse to Sakuludāyin* where *paṭipadā* is used to refer to nineteen specific practices or abilities that lead to "the consummation and perfection of direct knowledge" (*abhiññāvosānapāramippattā*; MN ii 11-22).

Recognizing that *paṭipadā* can simply mean 'practice', Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi translate it this way in the phrases "conduct, practice, and austerities" (*iriyā*, *paṭipadā*, *dukkarakārikā*; MN i 172) and "unsurpassable vision, unsurpassable practice, and unsurpassable deliverance" (*dassanānuttariyena paṭipadānuttariyena vimuttānuttariyena*; MN i 235). [22]

To conclude the discussion so far, because *samudaya* and *paṭipadā* appear in different contexts with different meanings—in the *Bhayabherava Sutta*'s description of the Buddha's realization, on the one hand, and in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta's* teachings on the Four Noble Truths on the other—I would prefer to avoid referring to the Buddha's enlightening insights the "Four Noble Truths." Instead, I propose to use a separate term for these experiences, referring to them instead as the "Four "Liberating Insights." This same designation can also be applied to the many other sets of insights that follow the same fourfold pattern of "seeing X, the arising of X, the cessation of X, and the practice leading to the cessation of X" (a topic to be

[22] Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, 1995: 264 and 330.

discussed further below).[23] By distinguishing the Four Liberating Insights from the teachings on the Four Noble Truths, we will be in a better position to understand these two quite different sets in their own contexts.[24]

Before discussing the Four Noble Truths as they appear in the suttas, I would first like to offer further evidence to support the idea that the Four Liberating Insights involve not doctrinal propositions, but a direct insight into impermanence.

III. Impermanence and the Four Liberating Insights

The idea that the content of the Buddha's liberating insight was the direct knowing of the arising and ceasing of suffering is supported by numerous passages throughout the *sutta* collections that portray the direct perception of impermanence as leading to liberation.

For example, in the *Cūḷarāhulovāda Sutta* the Buddha leads his son Rāhula to liberation through a guided reflection on impermanence (MN iii 278-280). Similarly, the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* contains meditation instructions in which seeing impermanence is described as the insight that leads to liberation (MN iii 83).

The liberating role of directly seeing phenomena arising and passing away is emphasized in the following passage:

> One possesses wisdom that understands arising (*udaya*) and disappearance (*atthaṅgama)*, which is noble and penetrating, and which leads to the destruction of suffering. (AN iv 285)

In a number of suttas the Buddha gives clear instruction for developing insight into impermanence. For example, in the *Vibhaṅga Sutta*, the development of mindfulness practice is described in terms of observing the arising (*samudaya)* and

[23] An even broader use of the term "liberating insight" can be found in the work of Lambert Schmithausen, who has used this expression to refer the whole range of understandings or insights which early Indian Buddhism described as involved in the experience of enlightenment (Schmithausen: 1981).

[24] In the index of some modern English translations of the Four Liberating Insights are often listed under the entry for the Four Noble Truths (e.g. Bodhi, 2000: 2036). This gives the impression that the Four Noble Truths are more prevalent in the anthologies than they actually are.

passing away (*vaya*) of phenomena (SN v 183). This is also emphasized in the 'refrain' sections of *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* that follow each of the sets of meditation instructions set forth in the discourse. In the section on mindfulness of the body, the refrain includes the statement,

> One abides observing the phenomena of arising in reference to the body, or one abides observing the phenomena of passing away in reference to the body, or one abides observing the phenomena of arising and passing away in reference to the body.[25]

If the 'insight into the arising and cessation of phenomena' is equivalent to 'insight into impermanence,' then the fourfold liberating insight the Buddha describes in the *Bhayabherava Sutta* fits into one of the major themes repeated throughout the suttas, namely, the central importance of perceiving impermanence.[26]

IV. Explanations of the Four Noble Truths Found in the Pāli Canon

The main thesis of this article is that, in the Pāli suttas, the Four Liberating Insights are distinct from the expositions of the Four Noble Truths. Comparing these two sets of items is facilitated by the fact that in the five major sutta anthologies only five discourses present the Buddha as explicitly explaining or defining what is meant by the four statements comprising the Four Noble Truths. They are The *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN ii 290), the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (SN v 420), the

---

[25] MN i 56. *Samudayadhammānupassī vā kāyasmiṃ viharati. Vayadhammānupassī vā kāyasmiṃ viharati. Samudayavayadhammānupassī vā kāyasmiṃ viharati.*

[26] In a variety of ways, the discourse literature describes psychological processes leading to enlightenment that occur with seeing impermanence. In the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* the observation of impermanence is the basis for dispassion (*virāga*), cessation, (*nirodha*) and relinquishment (*paṭinissagga*; MN iii 83). Elsewhere, seeing impermanence is described as leading to "disenchantment" (*nibbida*), which then leads to liberation from the taints (e.g. MN iii 279-280.and SN iii 45). The Buddha, in the *Dīghanakha Sutta*, explains that final liberation can be attained through a process of disenchantment and dispassion with feelings through a process of insight that includes seeing hat they have the nature to vanish (*vaya*), fade away (*virāga*), and cease (*nirodha*; MN i 500). None of these descriptions of liberation mentions any role for insight into the origin or the cause for suffering or anything else. Nor do they include the Noble Eightfold Path as the means for liberation.

Khanda Sutta (SN v 425), the *Ajjhattikāyatana Sutta* (SN v 426), and the *Tittha Sutta* (AN i 173).

Surprisingly, the definitions given in these five suttas are not consistent. The two that are the most similar to one another – those found in the The *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* – are the two that have become the normative explanations both for the medieval and modern Theravāda tradition and for contemporary academic writers.

The explanations of the Four Noble Truths attributed to the Buddha in these five suttas share several features:

1. They explicitly refer to the Truths as "Noble" (*ariya*), repeating this label for each of the four statements.
2. All four of these "noble truths" are concerned with suffering (*dukkha*).
3. A detailed explanation is given for each of the four statements
4. These explanations utilize the same pattern as the Four Liberating Insights (X, the arising of X, the cessation of X, and the practice leading to the cessation of X).
5. The fourth Noble Truth is said to comprise the Noble Eightfold Path.[27]

These five commonalities, I would suggest, are what qualify a text as explicating the Four Noble Truths.[28]

---

[27] Three other suttas exhibit some similarities in form and/or content to texts where the Four Noble Truths are defined, but they should probably not be considered as part of the family of discussions of the Four Noble Truths in the strict sense. The *Upādāna Parivatta Sutta* (SN 22.56 at iii 59) utilizes the structure of the Four Liberating Insights to discuss the five aggregates (rather than *dukkha*), their arising, their cessation, and the practice leading to their cessation. Here the practice leading to their cessation is said to be the Noble Eightfold Path, though in the parallel text found in the Chinese Saṁyukta Āgama there is no mention of the Path at all (see T99 [41], 2.9b7-10c3). The other two suttas, the *Anta Sutta* (SN 22.103 at iii 157) and the *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* (MN 44 at i 299) explain identity (*sakāya*) through the pattern of the Four Liberating Insights using explanations also used in discussions of the Four Noble Truths.

[28] The first qualification, that it explicitly refer to the Four Noble Truths, is probably the least important and perhaps can be omitted. By omitting this qualification the *Dukkha Sutta* would also be included as a sixth explanation of the truths (SN 22.104; iii 158). However, as its content is the same as what is found in the *Khandha Sutta*, it does not add

In addition to the discourses on Four Noble Truths attributed to the Buddha, other suttas contain additional teachings on the Four Noble Truths expounded by the Buddha's disciple Sāriputta. These will be discussed below. For now, we will limit our focus to the explanations of the Four Noble Truths ascribed to the Buddha himself.[29]

In the five suttas where the Buddha explicates the Four Noble Truths, the fourth Truth is explained in the same way. The differences are in the explanations of the first three Truths. The following tables show the similarities and differences in how the Truths are presented. Not shown here is the extensive definition of terms used for the explanation of each of the Truths that is found in the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.

The First Noble Truth:

Discourse	Explanation of the Noble Truth of Suffering
Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta	Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering, union with what is displeasing is suffering, separation from what is pleasing is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.
Mahāsati-paṭṭhāna Sutta	Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow, lamentation, displeasure,[30] grief, and despair is

anything new to our study of the teachings on the Four Noble Truths attributed to the Buddha.

[29] The Buddha is portrayed as teaching a quite different approach in the *Dvayatānupassanā Sutta* (Sn 140-150), which describes various pairs of insights (*anupasannā*) in relationship to suffering that are more closely related to the Four Liberating Insights than to the Four Noble Truths. Similar to the standard interpretation of the Four Noble Truths, this sutta states that craving (*taṇhā*) is a condition (*paccaya*) for the arising of suffering. However, craving is just one of thirteen such conditions, and it is not given any special emphasis in the list.

[30] "Displeasure" translates *dukkha*. Because sorrow, lamentation, grief, and despair are all mental factors it is likely that *dukkha*, placed right in the middle of these four, should also refer to a mental experience. Only the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* lists these five in discussing the first Noble Truth. In the *Tittha Sutta* this list appears in the section on the second Noble Truth.

	suffering, union with what is displeasing is suffering, separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregate of clinging are suffering.
Khandha Sutta	The five aggregates of clinging; that is, the form aggregate of clinging … the consciousness aggregate of clinging.
Ajjhattikāyatana Sutta	The six internal sense bases. Which six? The eye base … the mind base.
Tittha Sutta	Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering, union with what is displeasing is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.

No two of these five discussions of the first Noble Truth are identical, albeit the differences among the three longest explanations are small. [31]

The Second Noble Truth:

Discourse	Explanation of the Noble Truth of the Arising of Suffering
Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta; *Mahāsati-paṭṭhāna Sutta;* *Khandha Sutta;* *Ajjhattikāyatana Sutta*	I, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is craving for sensual pleasures, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.
Tittha Sutta	With ignorance as a condition, mental formations [arise]; with mental formations as a condition, consciousness; with consciousness as a condition, name-and-form; with name-and-form as a condition, the six sense bases; with the six sense bases as condition, contact; with contact as condition, feeling, with feeling as condition, craving, with craving as condition, clinging, with clinging as condition, becoming; with becoming as a

[31] Sāriputta's discussion of the first Noble Truth differs from all five ways that discourses depict the Buddha explaining them. In both the *Saccavibhaṅga Sutta* (MN 141) and the *Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 28), Sāriputta explains suffering as "Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow, lamentation, displeasure, grief, and despair is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregate of clinging are suffering" (MN iii 249).

	condition, birth; with birth as a condition, old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, distress, grief and despair come to be. Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering. This is called the noble truth of the arising of suffering. (AN i 177)

Here the first four texts listed above all share the same wording, focusing on craving in their discussion of the second Noble Truth. The *Tittha Sutta*, by contrast, explains the second Truth in terms of the twelve factors of Dependent Arising.

The Third Noble Truth:

Discourse	Explanation of the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering
Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta; *Mahāsati-paṭṭhāna Sutta;* *Khandha Sutta;* *Ajjhattikāyatana Sutta*	It is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it.
Tittha Sutta	With the remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance [there is the] cessation of mental formations; with the cessation of mental formations [there is the] cessation of consciousness, … Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering. This is called the noble truth of the cessation of suffering.

Here again the first four suttas have the same explanation of the third Truth, while the *Tittha Sutta* explains it in terms of the cessation of the factors of Dependent Arising.

The fourth Noble Truth is described in the same way in all five suttas where the Buddha is represented as teaching the Four Noble Truths.

The Fourth Noble Truth:

Discourse	Explanation of the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering
Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta; *Mahāsati-paṭṭhāna Sutta;* *Khandha Sutta;* *Ajjhattikāyatana Sutta;* *Tittha Sutta*	It is the Noble Eightfold Path: that is, right view … right concentration

The differences between the explanations of the Four Noble Truths in these five suttas raise a variety of hermeneutical questions. Are the differences in the way the first Noble Truth is explained simply different ways of saying the same thing, or are they significantly different from one another? For example, could the five aggregates of clinging be understood as synonymous with the six sense bases? And if they not, could they be seen as referring to the same phenomena from another perspective?

Another issue is the implications of stating that the six sense bases are suffering. In what way might the sense organs of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind be described as suffering in and of themselves? What might be the relationship between the sense organs and the second Noble Truth?

Interpretations of the Second Noble Truth

Interpretive issues also appear when we try to understand the explanations of the second Noble Truth. In particular, what does the word *samudaya* mean in these passages? Is the common definition of *samudaya* as "arising" appropriate here? Also, what relationship does the word indicate between suffering and the way the *samudaya* of suffering is explained? The suttas do not provide definitive answers to these questions. Four possible interpretations can be identified, none of which is explicitly explained or supported in the suttas. These can be called

1. The correspondence theory
2. The causation theory
3. The origination theory
4. The requisite condition theory

According to the correspondence theory, craving—or, according to the *Tittha Sutta*, dependent arising—is itself a form of suffering: to crave is to suffer (or, from the perspective of the *Tittha Sutta*, all the factors of dependent arising are suffering). *Samudaya* would then mean "arising"—its ordinary meaning—and the second Noble Truth would be stating that suffering arises together with either craving or the factors of dependent arising. That is, when craving arises, suffering occurs as an aspect of the craving itself. Or, according to the *Tittha Sutta,* dependent arising somehow characterizes the "arising of this whole mass of suffering." Because the six sense bases are mentioned in both the *Ajjhattikāyatana Sutta*'s explanation of the first Noble Truth and the *Tittha Sutta*'s description of the second Noble Truth, the correspondence theory suggests that it is the arising of the sense bases (or at least a person's experience of them) which is the suffering.

The second interpretation, the causation theory, is that craving which leads to renewed existence is the cause for the appearance of suffering. That is, suffering occurs due to craving. In contemporary discussion of the Four Noble Truths, this theory is the most common interpretation of the second Noble Truth. Some writers will even render *samudaya* as "cause" even though the Pāli word does not mean this. In fact, if the composers of the discourses had intended to "cause" the word *samudaya* would seem to be a poor choice. Other terms—such as *hetu* or *kāraṇa*—would be better candidates than *samudaya.*

The third theory is that the second Noble Truth portrays the "craving which leads to renewed existence" as an originating source or starting point of a process that leads to suffering. This seems to be what is implied by translators who use 'origin' for *samudaya.*[32] Craving for renewed existence is the starting point for the process of

[32] I have not found any translator or writer who explains or justifies the choice of "origin"

rebirth, and is thus a kind of 'origin' for everything a living being experiences, including suffering. It is in this sense that the *Pāli Text Society Pāli-English Dictionary* describes *taṇhā* (craving) as "a state of mind that leads to rebirth" and "as the inciting factor of rebirth and incidental cause for *saṃsāra*" (Rhys Davids: 1905; p 294). However, *samudaya* is an unusual choice if "origin" was meant. In this case, Pāli words such as *paccaya* (requisite condition) or *mūla* (root) would be closer matches to this concept.[33]

The fourth theory is that the second Noble Truth describes what is the necessary prerequisite condition for the arising of suffering. In this explanation, while craving does not cause suffering, without craving suffering would not occur. The prose section of the *Dvayatānupassanā Sutta* (Sn 5.38) states explicitly "craving is a requisite for the arising of all suffering." [34] It should be noted that this relatively obscure and unusual text is the only sutta where craving is explicitly described as a requisite for the arising of suffering.[35]

---

for translating *samudaya*. Many writers will first refer to the second Noble Truth as the "origin of suffering" and then, without explanation or justification, switch to discussing the "cause of suffering." A related translation choice is "origination", a word commonly used to refer to a specific beginning of something.

[33] The *Mahāpuṇṇama Sutta* depicts the Buddha utilizing the word *mūla* to express the idea that the the five aggregates affected by clinging are "rooted in desire" (*chandamūlaka*), and the terms *hetu* and *paccaya* to describe the four great elements (*mahābhūta*) as the cause-and-condition for each of five aggregates affected by clinging (MN 109, iii 16-17). This suggests that for those suttas which explain suffering in the first Noble Truth as the five aggregates affected by clinging, we have here examples of more obvious words to use if the second Noble Truth was meant to describe either the cause or the origin of suffering. Interestingly, the root of the aggregates is said to be "desire" (*chanda*). The cause and conditions for the form aggregate is the four great elements, for feeling, perception, and mental formations it is contact, and for consciousness it is mentality-materiality (*nāmarūpa*; MN iii 17).

[34] *dukkhaṃ sambhoti sabbaṃ taṇhāpaccayāti*; Sn 5.38 (8).

[35] In the *Dvayatānupassanā Sutta* craving is not identified as the sole or even primary defining condition or requisite for suffering, as the sutta also states that attachments (*upadhi*), ignorance (*avijjā*), formations (*saṅkhāra*), consciousness (*viññāṇa*), contact (*phassa*), sensation (*vedanā*), clinging (*upādāna*), exertion (*ārambha*), food (*āhāra*), and agitation (*iñjita*) are requisite conditions for suffering.

The requisite condition interpretation of the second Noble Truth applies most clearly to the *Tittha Sutta* where, as noted above, the second and third Noble Truths are explained in terms of the twelve factors of Dependent Arising (AN i 173). Here, each of the eleven factors listed are the prerequisite condition (*paccaya*) for the preceding factor culminating in "old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair." (No prerequisite condition is given for ignorance [*avijjā*].) In this rendition, craving or *taṇhā* is not given the central place it has in the explanations of the second Noble Truth found in the other four suttas given in the table above. As the first condition mentioned, it would seem – if this were indeed a teaching about the *origin* of suffering – that ignorance (*avijjā*), and not *taṇhā*, would be the primary source.

If the *Tittha Sutta's* explanation of the Four Noble Truths had been important for the earliest compilers of the Pāli suttas,—or for that matter, for the Buddha himself—we would expect additional references to and discussions of this idea in other suttas. There is however, no evidence of this in other early Buddhist texts, which suggests that the *Tittha Sutta* and its version of the Four Noble Truths most likely did not play an important role in the formative period of Indian Buddhism. (The appendix contains further discussion of the *Tittha Sutta*.)

Of the four interpretations of the second Noble Truth, the Pāli suttas provide the least support for the common modern view that the second Noble Truth states that craving is the cause of *dukkha*, or, as the *Oxford Dictionary of Buddhism* states it, "suffering arises due to craving" (Keown 2003, 96). In fact, one of the five explanations of the Four Noble Truths occurs just after the Buddha has criticized the view that whatever a person experiences is caused by what was done in the past (*Tittha Sutta,* AN i 173). Reading some English translations of these five suttas gives the impression that the second Truth concerns causation because many translators assume this and so insert causal language where there is none in the original Pali text.[36]

---

[36] The Four Noble Truths, whether explicitly or implicitly, do not play a significant role in the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, the Theravada canonical scholastic elaborations on the early

Compared to the causal interpretation, the suttas provide more support for the correspondence theory, i.e., for understanding craving as being itself suffering. For example, two discourses – the *Dutiya Migajāla Sutta* state that "[W]ith the arising of delight there is the arising of suffering." (*nandi samudayā dukkha samudayo*; SN 35.64 at iv 47 and SN 35.88 at iv 60). A verse in the *Dvayatānupassanā Sutta* explicitly state that "Thirst is the arising of suffering" (*taṇhaṃ dukkhassa sambhavaṃ*; Sn v. 741/746). [37] Also, in the *Abhidhamma Vibhaṅga's* discussion of the Four Noble Truths, the mental factors and mental states listed under first Noble Truth are also used to illustrate the second Noble Truth. They are interchangeable in a way that should not be the case if one were the cause for the other. The difference between the

---

sutta teachings. Even more striking is the fact that the passages that discuss them, found in the *Saccavibhaṅga* of the *Vibhaṅga* (Vbh 99-112) and the *Saccapañňatti* of the *Pugglapañňatti* (P 2), do not do so in terms of the cause of suffering. If this had been the normative understanding during the time the *Abhidhamma* texts were composed, we would expect some statement to this effect. Furthermore, the expressions Four Noble Truths and Noble Truths are absent in the relatively late *Kathāvatthu*. This text discusses 200 contentious issues that surfaced in the centuries after the Buddha's death. The text does repeatedly refer to suffering, arising, cessation, and the practice (*dukkha, samudaya, nirodha* and *paṭipadā*). Sometimes these are referred to as "truths" and sometimes with no designation. The controversies concerning these 'truths' are never about what they mean, that is, how the statements are to be explained, nor are references made to the explanations of the Four Noble Truths found in the suttas. Moreover, nothing in the *Kathāvatthu* suggests that *samudaya* should be understood as 'origin' or 'cause' (in spite of English translations of the text that render *samudaya* as "cause"; e.g., Aung: 1997, 188). Rather, the issues debated are how the 'truths' are realized and the consequence of their realization. It seems that the composers of the *Kathāvatthu* viewed *dukkha, samudaya, nirodha* and *paṭipadā* as liberating insights. Discussion of the Four Noble Truths is absent in the text, suggesting that the Four Noble Truths were not an important concern of the composer(s) of the text.

The earliest evidence for interpreting the second Noble Truth as explaining the cause (*hetu*) of suffering appears to be found in the *Mahāpajāpatīgotamī Therīgāthā* in a verse attributed to the nun Mahāpajāpati (*sabbadukkhaṃ pariňňātaṃ, hetutaṇhā visositā. bhāvito aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo, nirodho phusito mayā*; KN 9.55; verse 158). The *Therīgāthā* has been estimated as dating from sometimes between between the 4th and 2nd Century B.C.E.(von Hinüber 2000: 53). It is not until the composition of the *Vimuttimagga* and the that the causal theory of the Four Noble Truths appears as normative in the Theravada Buddhist tradition (*Visuddhimagga* 513; ***Vimuttimagga …).***

[37] K.R. Norman translates this passage as "The arising of misery is because of craving" (Norman: 1984, 124), but nothing corresponding to "because" exists in the original.

first and second Noble Truths is that the second concerns the arising (*uppajjati*) of a particular mental factor whereas the first describes a mental factor when it is has already arisen (*Vibhaṅga* 206-214).

If the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths evolved out of the Four Liberating Insights, the correspondence theory of the Truths would suggest less of a leap from the Insights to the Truths than the causal interpretation. This is because the second Noble Truth would concern the arising of something. Where the second Liberating Insights is a perception of the arising of suffering, the second Noble Truth describes a specific form of suffering that is arising.

The origination theory of the Truths is supported by those passages that describe the second Noble Truth as being "this craving leading to renewed existence". The specific form of craving, i.e., craving that leads to rebirth, suggests that the second Noble Truth is not a universal claim about craving in general. Rather it concerns a craving that not only is a requisite condition for suffering, it is the craving which functions as a kind of beginning or origination of the process necessary for rebirth and a person's suffering in the life into which he or she is reborn.

The requisite condition theory has support from those passages in *Tittha Sutta* and *Dvayatānupassanā Sutta* (mentioned above) which refer to craving as a requisite condition (*paccaya*) for suffering. By describing the second Noble Truth by the twelve factors of dependent arising, the *Tittha Sutta* points to a possible direct relationship between the Four Noble Truths and other discussions in the discourses on dependent arising.

That the Pāli scriptures contain only five discourses depicting the Buddha explaining the Four Noble Truths suggests that these Truths were not central in the earliest traditions of what the Buddha taught. The absence of a standard, unequivocal interpretation of the Four Noble Truths similarly suggests that these were not an important focus during the formative period of early Indian Buddhism. A minor role for the Four Noble Truths stands out even more strongly if we consider the possibility that some of the passages explicating them may have been composed after the

lifetime of the Buddha, for example by taking into account the growing scholarly opinion that at least the passages on the Four Noble Truths in both the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta,* and the *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* are late interpolations. [38] The late providence of the *Tittha Sutta's* passage on the Four Noble Truths is discussed in the appendix to this article.

The paucity of detailed teachings on the truths by the Buddha in the sutta anthologies is echoed by how seldom they are explained in the *Sacca Saṃyutta* – the chapter of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* that is specifically focused on the theme of truth. In spite of its many references to the Four Noble Truths, the *Sacca Saṃyutta* contains only three suttas that offer any explication or analysis of their meaning (as discussed above).

All this suggests that care must be taken when we claim that the Four Noble Truths constituted the core of the Buddha's message. [39] If the teachings on the Truths attributed to the Buddha are both rare and not reliably associated with him, perhaps it is best to avoid claiming them to be central to his teachings.

V. The Frequency of the Expression "The Four Noble Truths" in the suttas

Not only do the suttas contain very few discourses where the Buddha explains the Four Noble Truths, these texts rarely depict him mentioning by name the *cattāri ariyasaccāni* (Four Noble Truths). Setting aside for now the chapter on "The Connected Discourses on Truth" (*Sacca Saṃyutta*), the phrase "Four Noble Truths" appears in only ten Pāli suttas in the remainder of the *Sutta Piṭaka*.[40] Two of these

[38] See, for example, Nakamura 2000: 251; Shulman 2014: 184-187.

[39] The Four Noble Truths, either explicitly or implicitly do not play a significant part of the teachings in *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, the Theravada canonical commentaries/elaborations of the early sutta teachings. They appear in the *Saccavibhaṅga* of the *Vibhaṅga* (Vbh 99-112), the *Saccapaññatti* of the *Pugglapaññatti* (P 2), and the *Kathāvatthu* (Katha 70 and 322). This rarity does not support the idea that the Four Noble Truths were central teachings during the time that these texts were composed.

[40] The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN ii 90); *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN ii 306); and *Dasuttara Sutta* (DN iii 276); *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN i 62); *Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta* (MN i 184); *Saccavibhanga Sutta* (MN iii 248-252); *Tittha Sutta* (AN i 177); and the *Baladaṭṭhabba Sutta* (AN iii 12); The *Daṭṭhabba Sutta* (SN v 196); and the Dhammapada, verse 190. In addition, SN ii 185 mentions the "noble truths" as being

discourses are spoken by Sāriputta.[41] It is unknown who composed the *Dhammapada* verse containing this title (verse 190). We are thus left with seven suttas that depict the Buddha mentioning the designation "Four Noble Truths". However, text-critical studies suggest that even some of these seven occurrences cannot be confidently attributed to the Buddha himself.

For example, the passages on the Four Noble Truths in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN i 62) and the *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN ii 306) are suspected to be late interpolations into the text. One reason for this is the absence of these passages in the Chinese parallels to these two discourses; because it is less likely that material was removed from the suttas rather than added, the absence in the Chinese versions suggests that earlier versions of these two scriptures did not mention the Four Noble Truths. Also, in the case of the *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta,* the exposition of the truths is stylistically out of place in both this sutta and in the early discourses in general. Rather, in both style and content these teachings are identical to the explanation of the Four Noble Truths found in the *Vibhaṅga*, a later *Abhidhamma* text. For these reasons, it seems likely that commentarial material was inserted into the *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta.*[42]

Aside from suttas in the *Sacca Saṃyutta* chapter of the *Connected Discourses* we are thus left with only five discourses where the Buddha explicitly mentions the title "Four Noble Truths". In three of these discourses only the title is mentioned with no explanation or elaboration of what the title refers to.[43]

"suffering, the arising (*samuppāda*) of suffering, passing beyond (*atikkama*) suffering, and the Noble Eightfold Path. MN 77 also refers to the "noble truths" instead of the Four Noble Truths".

[41] *The Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta and the Dasuttara Sutta.*

[42] The modern Burmese Edition of the Pāli canon provides a good example of how easy it is for teachings on the Four Noble Truths to be interpolated into the suttas. In 1954, Burmese Buddhists decided that the section explaining the Four Noble Truths that is found in the *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* should also be included in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta.* This section was then interpolated so, now, in the Burmese edition, both texts are identical. [reference for this?]

[43] *The Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN ii 90), *Daṭṭhabba Sutta* (SN v 196) and *Baladaṭṭhabba Sutta* (AN iii 12).

The rare mention of the Four Noble Truths is not what would be expected if the Truths were the core teachings the Buddha taught to a variety of people in a variety of contexts. If this infrequency indicates how important the teachings of the Truths were in the formative period of the Pāli sutta anthologies (*Nikāyas*), we would have to consider the possibility that they were not very important at all.

The exception to the rare scriptural occurrence of the phrase "Four Noble Truths" is in the twelfth and final chapter of the fifth book of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*. Here, in the *Sacca Saṃyutta*, the expression "Four Noble Truths" occurs approximately forty-nine times in 27 of the 131 discourses, including the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. The title is implied in another 50 suttas containing ellipsis (i.e. the Pāli text contains the word *pe* meaning "and so on") indicating that passages from a previous discourse should be inserted (SN 56.62-96 and 56.103-130). As the *Sacca Saṃyutta* is an anthology of discourses concerned with 'truth', it is not surprising to find suttas with the expression "Four Noble Truths". However the high number of suttas with this designation is curious. While it may simply be because in organizing the suttas it was natural for *the Sacca Samyutta* to be the repository for suttas with references to truth (*sacca*), there are enough peculiarities to the usage of "Four Noble Truths" in the *Sacca Samyuta* that other explanations may be warranted. For example, many of the suttas in the *Sacca Saṃyutta* chapter which contain the expression "Four Noble Truths" do so multiple times, whereas it occurs only once per sutta in eight of the ten suttas with this term in the rest of the canon. Also, the repetitive nature of many of the *Sacca Saṃyutta* discourses discussing the Four Noble Truths suggests that they were composed together in a highly stylized fashion, not given as distinct suttas (see, for example, the thirty-four suttas in the three *Āmakadhaññapeyyāla Vaggas;* SN v 465-474).

One explanation for the increased usage of the expression "Four Noble Truths" in the last chapter of the *Connected Discourses* is that this expression, and perhaps many of these suttas, were late additions into the canon dating from a time when the Truths had increased in importance within the early Indian Buddhist communities. The placement of the "Connected Discourses on the Truths" at the end of the *Saṃyutta*

Nikāya is a convenient location for adding late material. This growing emphasis on the Four Noble Truths is seen in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* and the *Peṭakopadesa,* two treatises composed some time after the life of the Buddha[44] In fact, the three texts that most frequently use the expression "Four Noble Truths" are these two treatises and the *Sacca Saṃyutta*, reinforcing the idea that the *Sacca Saṃyutta* may be a late anthology.

K.R. Norman has concluded that the phrase "Four Noble Truths" appeared late in the formation of the Pāli canon. Analyzing the syntax of the various formulations for the fourfold statements he refers to as suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation, Norman claims that the version represented in the *Bhayabherava Sutta* is the earliest. Because of the grammatical irregularities in the formulations of the Noble Truths, he argues that the words 'noble' and 'truth' were added gradually over time (Norman, 1984: 385-386). Furthermore he suggests that the compound *ariyasacca* (noble truth) represents a late addition into the canon dating from a time these texts were edited according to rules of Sanskrit grammar (Norman, 1990: 4:218-225). Bhikkhu Anālayo also suggests that Chinese translations of the early Indian sutras evidence a step-by-step addition, first of 'truth', then or 'noble' (Anālayo, 2006:151). Because many of the suttas in the *Sacca Saṃyutta* do little more than name and briefly extol the importance of the Four Noble Truths, if we accept Norman's conclusion we would have to view these suttas as also being late. In other words, if the expression "Four Noble Truths" is a late formulation, it is possible that many of the suttas in the *Sacca Saṃyutta* which do little more than mention them are also late – most likely originating at a time after the death of the Buddha.

Regardless of whether the occurrences of the title "Four Noble Truths" is late or not, in most of the suttas where this designation occurs in the *Sacca Samyutta,* it is easily possible that it is the Four Liberating Insights that are being referred. This is for three reasons. First, most of the suttas in this collection are concerned with the Four

[44] von Hinüber (2000) p. 60 and pp. 80-82

Liberating Insights. Second, in most of the suttas were the designation "Four Noble Truth" appears, no explanation for the Truths are given; it is only when they are accompanied with an explanation of what they mean that we can know they qualify as Four Noble Truths. Third, some of the verbs associated with realizing the Four Noble Truths, e.g., "breaking through", "awakening to", and "do yogic practice to know" seem to better fit attaining liberating insight than understanding a set of teachings.[45]

VI. The Role of Sāriputta

Modern discussions of the role of the Four Noble Truths in the Pāli suttas rely on a very small set of discourses to illustrate their place in the early Buddhist traditions. When these discussions emphasize the centrality of the truths in the Buddha's message, these quotations – presented outside of their literary context – lend credibility to the emphasis. When quoting teachings on the truths attributed to the Buddha, the most common passage cited is from the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. Occasionally, the *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is quoted. When referring to passages where the Buddha does not explicitly mention the truths, it is common to quote passages containing the standard wording for the Four Liberating Insights while equating these with the Four Noble Truths.[46] Other passages commonly used to represent the centrality of the Four Noble Truths are actually teachings by others, not by the Buddha himself. Most commonly these are by his disciple Sāriputta. One often-quoted statement about the importance of the Four Noble Truths occurs in the narrative portion of some suttas, i.e., they are provided by the unknown narrator of

[45] "breaking through" (*abhisamayāya*; e.g., SN v 415), "awakening to" (*abhisambuddham*: e.g., SN v 417) , and "do yogic practice" (*yogo karaṇīyo*; SN v 417).

[46] One example of a sutta passage often quoted as referring to the Four Noble Truths but which are actually about the Four Liberating Insights is MN 2.11 (i 9) where the Four Liberating Insights are presented as "wise attention" leading to stream-entry (see e.g. Richard Robinson, *The Buddhist Religions*, Belmont: California. 2005; p. 28). Another example is at SN 56.31 (v 437-8) where the Buddha uses the analogy of a handful of leaves compared to all the leaves in a forest to his teaching the Four Liberating Insights compared to all he knows.

these texts. This is the statement asserting that "suffering, arising, cessation, and the path" (*dukkhaṃ, samudayaṃ, nirodhaṃ, maggaṃ*) are the teachings special to the Buddhas.[47] This passage is sometimes cited by modern writers as evidence that the Four Noble Truths constitute the Buddha's unique message, not realizing the statement is the view of a particular narrator.[48]

The *Middle Length Discourses* differ from the other sutta anthologies by containing the greatest number of scriptures recording teachings attributed to the disciples of the Buddha. In thirty of the text's one hundred and fifty two suttas, disciples provide the main teaching. One of these is the "Discourse on the Analysis of the Truth" (*Saccavibaṅga Sutta*; MN iii 248), second only to the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* as the most commonly quoted source for the early Buddhist teachings on the Four Noble Truths.

The *Saccavibaṅga Sutta* opens with the Buddha stating that he first started teaching, i.e., "Turning the Wheel of the Dharma", by expounding the Four Noble Truths. Beyond simply listing the truths as "the noble truth of suffering, the noble truth of the arising of suffering, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, and the noble truth of the practice leading to the cessation of suffering," the Buddha does not provide any

---

[47] M i 380; M ii 145 (this teaching is also told by the householder Ugga in AN iv 209-210 and AN iv 213). Interestingly, here the word *magga* or path is used for the fourth item. This makes it ambiguous whether this four-word summary of the Buddha's teachings refer to the Four Liberating Insights or to the Four Noble Truths. Because Upāli realizes, as a result of the teaching, that "Everything that has the nature to arise, has the nature to disappear" (MN i 380), it is likely that the teachings concern the Four Liberating Insights. The use of *magga* may represent an early example of the Four Liberating Insights beginning to be conflated with the Four Noble Truths. The fact that it is the sutta's narrator who provides this passage suggests a late date for the composition of the passage.

[48] Interestingly, here the word *magga* or path is used for the fourth item. This makes it ambiguous whether this four-word summary of the Buddha's teachings refer to the Four Liberating Insights or to the Four Noble Truths. Because Upāli realizes, as a result of the teaching, that "Everything that has the nature to arise, has the nature to disappear" (MN i 380), it is likely that the teachings concern the Four Liberating Insights. The use of *magga* may represent an early example of the Four Liberating Insights beginning to be conflated with the Four Noble Truths. The fact that it is the sutta's narrator who provides this passage suggests a late date for the composition of the passage.

further explanation. However, this is subsequently provided by Sāriputta. But first the Buddha establishes a close association between Sāriputta and the Four Noble Truths:

> Sāriputta, monks, is able to describe, expound, declare, establish, make clear, analyze in detail the Four Noble Truths."[49]

In the sutta, Sāriputta defines or describes each of the truths in a detailed analytical fashion. For the first and fourth noble truths Sāriputta explains each truth by using additional concepts which themselves are also explained. For the fourth truth this pattern of further explanation continues, resulting in multiple levels of increasing analytical specificity. For example, the fourth truth is explained as comprising the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path is then enumerated as consisting of Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. Right Concentration, in turn, is described as consisting of the four states of meditative absorption known as the *jhānas*, and these in turn are described by the *jhānic* factors that characterize these states. This sequence can be depicted as

- The Four Noble Truths
    - The Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering
        - The Eightfold Path
            - Right Concentration
                - Four *jhānas*
                    - *jhānic* factors

It seems highly unlikely that this multi-layered analysis could be an accurate representation of what the Buddha realized at the time of his awakening, especially since his awakening is said to have occurred in the fourth *jhāna*, a state where abstract conceptual analysis does not normally occur. Nor does Sāriputta's analysis represent well the immediacy of direct knowing which the Buddha describes in the *Bhayabherava Sutta*. What then do the teachings of the *Saccavibhanga Sutta*

[49] *sāriputto, bhikkhave, pahoti cattāri ariyasaccāni vitthārena ācikkhituṃ desetuṃ paññāpetuṃ paṭṭhapetuṃ vivarituṃ vibhajituṃ uttānīkātun* (MN iii 248).

represent? Are they Sāriputta's own analysis? Is he reporting teachings he learned from the Buddha? Are these teachings the product of later writers and editors who attributed them to Sāriputta after his death? If these teachings are indeed derived from the Buddha, did he teach the Four Noble Truths in exactly this way, with the same multi-layered analytical structure? Or did Sāriputta, or a later editor, gather and organize a variety of related teachings of the Buddha? If the analysis originated with Sāriputta, how well does it represent the teachings or even the doctrinal emphasis of the Buddha himself?[50]

In attempting to understand what *samudaya* in the *Saccavibhaṅgha Sutta's* discussion of the second Noble Truth, it is significant that both of the Chinese translations corresponding to the Pāli *Saccavibhaṅgha Sutta* refer to craving (愛, here presumably a translation of *taṇhā*) in connection with suffering in their explications of the second Noble Truth, but neither uses causal language to connect the two. The 2nd century C.E. Chinese translation by An Shigao, entitled *The Four Truths Sutra* (*Si di jing* 四諦經, T32) describes this truth as "the noble truth that the arising of fondness is the arising of suffering" (愛習爲苦習賢者諦,1.815c23; here *xi* 習 translates samudaya as is standard in An Shigao's work). Virtually the same wording (possibly drawing on the earlier translation by An Shigao) occurs in the Madhyama Āgama, which refers to this truth as "the noble truth that the arising of suffering [is] the arising of craving" (愛習苦習賢諦, T26, 1.468b27-28). This translation also lacks any discussion of the cause of suffering. In other words, these Chinese translations suggest that the Chinese translators understood the second Noble Truth in terms of the correspondence theory, not the causal theory of the Four Noble Truths.

[50] We cannot be certain that the Pāli version of the *Saccavibhanga Sutta* represents the earliest version of this text. The Chinese parallel in the *Madhyama Agama*, contains significant differences in its explanation of the Four Noble Truths (T 1 467a-469c). For example, the second Noble Truth is explained as "Living beings truly have craving associated with the six sense bases, with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. When there is craving, affection, defilement, and attachment associated with these, that is called arising" (Bingenheimer, 2013: 241). That this may have been part of the original version of the *Saccavibhanga Sutta* is suggested by the fact that it reads as a continuation of Sāriputta's teaching on the six sense bases in relation to the first Noble Truth found in *Mahāhatthipodopama Sutta* (MN i 191).

A second sutta attributed to Sāriputta containing teachings on the Four Noble Truths is the *Mahāhatthipodopama Sutta* ("Greater Discourse on the Simile of the Elephant's Foot"; MN 28). Here, Sāriputta presents a multi-layered, analytical teachings on the first Noble Truths (MN i 184ff). In addition, he explains the "arising of suffering" and the "cessation of suffering" in very different terms than he explains the second and third Noble Truth in the *Saccavibaṅga Sutta*:

> The desire, attachment, inclination, and grasping based on the five aggregates affected by clinging is the arising of suffering. The destruction of desire and lust, the letting go of desire and lust for these five aggregates affected by clinging is the cessation of suffering.[51]

While it may be possible to harmonize this explanation with his explanations of the second and third Noble Truths in the *Saccavibaṅga Sutta*, it is noteworthy that it does not appear elsewhere in the suttas. The passage provides a further example of the variable teachings found in the suttas that relate to the Four Noble Truths. It is also noteworthy that the passage does not say that "desire, clinging, inclination toward, and holding" are the origin or cause of suffering; rather it seems to equate these with the arising of suffering. In other words, this is another example where craving is suffering, not the cause of suffering.

Even more noteworthy is the fact that in the *Mahāhatthipodopama Sutta* Sāriputta states that the Four Noble Truths are broad enough in importance that all skillful *dhammas* are included within them (MN i 184-5). He discusses this through the analogy of how the footprint of an elephant can contain the footprint of any other animal. This elevation the importance of the Four Noble Truth is unique to Sāriputta.[52]

---

[51] *Yo imesu pañcasupādānakkhandhesu chando ālayo anunayo ajjhosānaṃ, so dukkhasamudayo. yo imesu pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu chandarāgavinayo chandarāgappahānaṃ, so dukkhanirodho* (MN i 191).

[52] One of the remarkable facets of Sāriputta's teachings in the *Middle Length Discourses* is that in this anthology only he associates the fourth Noble Truth with the Eightfold Path. Nowhere in *Middle Length* anthology does the Buddha make this association, even though he does otherwise frequently mention the Eightfold Path.

In sum, the early Pāli scriptures contain enough evidence to suggest that Sāriputta was closely associated with the Four Noble Truths. While we cannot be certain that these are the actual teachings of this disciple of the Buddha, the teachings we now associate with the Four Noble Truths may well have been the developed over time by people other than the Buddha. Given the frequency of the Buddha's teaching on the Four Liberating Insights, it seems likely that as the early Buddhist tradition became increasingly analytical, there arose a need to provide definitions for each of these insights. In so doing, the Four Liberating Insights were transformed into a related but different set of teachings that became known as the Four Noble Truths. Over time the interpretations and elaborations of the Four Noble Truths increasingly diverged from the content of the original liberating insights. However, the difference between the Four Noble Truths and the Four Liberating Insights went unnoticed because the latter came to be seen as the same as the Four Noble Truths. The original meaning of the Four Liberating Insights was thus forgotten.

VII. Conclusion

The main thesis of this article is that the Four Noble Truths are distinct from what I have referred to as the Four Liberating Insights. The similarities between these two lists have led many readers to view these two teachings as the same. Because the Four Liberating Insights are often mentioned in the suttas, it has been taken for granted that the Buddha frequently taught the Four Noble Truths. However, if we understand the Four Liberating Insights to be quite distinct from the Four Noble

---

This observation may be easily dismissed as a peculiarity of the *Middle Length Discourses*. However, only five suttas in the other three main sutta anthologies have passages spoken by the Buddha that link the fourth Truth with the Eightfold Path. One of these passages is in the *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN i 311) and another is the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, neither of which we can confidently attribute to the Buddha in the form in which we have them. Two of the other suttas are simple repetition of the passages found in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (SN v 424 and 425). The fifth is a sutta in which the Buddha teaches the Four Noble Truths but in ways that are unique to the sutta, not referenced, discussed or elaborated elsewhere in the early discourses (AN i 177**)**. We are thus left then with the observation that not only are the Four Noble Truths rarely discussed in the suttas, their connection with the Eightfold Path is even rarer.

Truths and the detailed analytical expositions associated with them, we can then notice that the Four Noble Truths appear very infrequently in the suttas. Even if we assume that a few of the statements concerning the Four Noble Truths were actually spoken by the Buddha, their rarity should give us pause in claiming they were important or central to his teachings.

Understanding and interpreting the original teachings found in the Pāli canon requires careful consideration of the provenance of these texts. There is general agreement among scholars that they were composed, edited, and amended over the course of many centuries. Thus we cannot casually assume that all the teachings these texts attribute to the Buddha were actually spoken by him. This makes it difficult to establish with confidence what he actually taught. However, we can have more confidence concerning what he did *not* teach. If a given teaching is not found in the suttas at all, it is reasonable to refrain from connecting it with the Buddha. If a particular teaching is rare or if the evidence connecting it to the Buddha is weak, great care must be taken in asserting its importance in his message.

By raising the possibility that the Four Noble Truths were not as important to the Buddha's teachings as later Buddhists have believed I do not intend to dismiss the value and importance the Four Noble Truths have. On the contrary, I believe the Four Noble Truths to be a meaningful and effective teaching that lend itself to many useful applications. As interpretations of the Four Noble Truths have changed over the centuries, I hope that this paper will provide a new perspective for understanding some of these changes. We are in a better position to recognize the historical developments if we have a better understanding of the earliest known usage of the Truths. More importantly, I hope that highlighting the Four Liberating Insights will help provide a clearer idea of how the practice leading to liberation was understood in the early Buddhist tradition.

Appendix:

The Four Noble Truths in the *Tittha Sutta*:

An analysis of the *Tittha Sutta* suggests that its explanation of the Four Noble Truths is out of place with the rest of the teachings in the discourse. The discourse opens (AN i 173) with the Buddha reporting on three different views about the origins of what is personally experienced (*paṭisaṃvedeti*). The immediacy and directness of what is meant by experience is emphasized when this is described as that which is felt as pleasant, painful, or neither-pleasant-nor-painful. The first view is that the cause (*hetu*) of whatever one experiences is one's past actions. The second view is that whatever one experiences is caused by the Lord of Creation (*issaranimmāna*), i.e. the creator God. The third view is that whatever one experiences occurs without a cause or condition (*ahetuappaccayā*).

The Buddha rejects each of these views because they lead to disinterest in knowing what should or should not be done, i.e., in observing moral behavior.

In contrast to these three views, the Buddha offers teachings he emphatically states are "not refuted, not defiled, not blamed, and not censured by the wise" (AN i 175). These teachings consist of the six elements,[53] the six bases of contact,[54] the eighteen mental examinations, and the Four Noble Truths. The first three lists belong to the empirical world and are presented as things that can be experienced or known directly. Nothing is said about the causes, conditions, or origins for these items. In then discussing the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha first explains that he proclaims "This is suffering;" This is the arising of suffering;" "This is the cessation of suffering;" and "This is the practice leading to the cessation of suffering" (AN i 176). These four statements are the same statements used to describe the Four Liberating Insights.

If, indeed, these are the Four Liberating Insights they are then similar to the six elements, the six bases of contact, and the eighteen mental evaluations[55] in being things or experiences known directly, empirically, without the need for

[53] The six elements are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, the air element, the space element, and the consciousness element (AN i 176)

[54] The six bases of contact are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind (AN i 176).

[55] The eighteen mental evaluations (*aṭṭhārasa manopavicārā*) are considering whether sense experience at any of the six sense bases are the bases for joy, happiness, and unhappiness.

understanding their causes. The Buddha thus avoids discussing causality. Instead he describes the insight that is liberating, an insight that does not require understanding causes. In a sense, the Buddha doesn't offer an alternative doctrine, view, or philosophy to that of the three he criticizes. Instead he points to a way that direct experience can be liberating. This is the same pedagogical strategy the Buddha uses in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN 1). After describing sixty-two views held by other ascetics and brahimins, he then presents a practice for "going beyond all these views" This he describes as follows:

> "When, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* knows as they really are the arising and passing away of the six bases of contact, their gratification and danger, and the liberation from them, he knows that which goes beyond all these views."
>
> (DN i 45)

Here again we see the emphasis on the direct experience of arising and passing, this time with the six bases of contact.

In the *Tittha Sutta,* after teaching the Four Liberating Insights, the Buddha then provides an explanation of the Four Noble Truths. However we understand this explanation, it introduces teachings that seem out of place with the rest of the sutta. Most likely the dependent arising explanations of the Four Noble Truths was a late interpolation into the sutta.

Bibliography:

Anālayo, Bhikkhu

2006. "The *Ekottarika-āgama* Parallel to the *Saccavibhanga-sutta* and the Four (Noble) Truths". In *Buddhist Studies Review,* vol 23(2), pp. 145-53

2012 (3). "The Chinese Parallels to the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* (*Journal of the Oxford Center for Buddhist Studies* 3)

Anderson, Carol

1999. *Pain and Its Ending* (U.K: Curzon Press)

Aung Shwe Zen and Mrs. Rhys Davids

1997. Points of Controversy or Subjects of Discourse (Oxford: The Pali Text Society.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu

2000. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications).

2012.

Bareau, André

1963-70. *Recherches sur la biographie du Buddha dans les Sūtrapiṭaka et les Vinaypiṭaka anciens*. 2 vol. Publication de l"Ecole Français d'Extreme-Orient, vol. 53 and 77 (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient).

Bingenheimer, Marcus, Editor in Chief

2013. *The Madhyama Āgama (The Middle-Length Discourses) Volume 1* (Berkeley, CA: Bukkyo Dendo Kokai)

Bodhi, Bhikkhu

2000. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* (Somervile, MA: Wisdom Publications)

Bronkhorst, Johannes

1986. *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag)

1993. *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India.* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass).

Buswell Jr., Robert and Lopez Jr., Donald

2014. *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press)

Childers, Robert Caesar

1872. *A Dictionary of the Pali Language* (London: Trübner & Co)

Conze, Edward

1961. *A Short History of Buddhism*. (Bombay: Chetana Ltd). Originally published in Italian *as Buddhismo* in *Le Civilta dell' Oriente I*. (Rome: 1958).

Frauwallner, Erich,

1973. *History of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass).

Gethin, Rupert

1992. "The *Mātikās*: Memorization, Mindfulness, and the List" in Gyatso, Janet (ed.) *In the Mirror of Memory :Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indiana and Tibetan Buddhism* (Albany, New York: State Universtity of New York Press) pp. 149-172.

Gombrich, Richard

2009. *What the Buddha Taught* (London: Equinox Publishing).

Harvey, Peter, ed.

2001. *Buddhism* (London: Continuum)

Horner, I.B.

1954-1959. *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings* (*Majjhima-Nikāya*) 3 vol. (London: Pāli Text Society).

Hinüber, Oskar von

2000. *A Handbook of Pāli Literature*. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter)

Kalupahana, David

1992. *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press)

Keown, Damien

2003. *Oxford Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

Nakamura, Hajime

2000. *Gotama Buddha" A Biography Based on the Most Reliable Texts*, Vol 1. (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co.)

Ñāṇamoli

1997. *The Path of Discrimination* (Oxford: The Pāli Text Society)

Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi

2000. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publishing)

Norman, K.R.

1984. *The Rhinoceros Horn and other Early Buddhist Poems* (London: Pali Text Society)

1990. *Collected Papers*, 6 vols. (Oxford: Pāli Text Society)

Pande, Govind Chandra

1957/2006. *Studies in the Origin of Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass).

Rahula, Walpola

1959. *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove Press, Inc.).

Reynolds, Frank, John Strong, and John Holt,

1981. *Guide to Buddhist Religion* (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co)

Rhys-Davids, C.A.F.

1935. "Curious Omissions in Pāli Canonical Lists", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 4 (Oct.)

Rhys-Davids, T.W.

1905. *Pāli Text Society Pāli-English Dictionary*

Rhys-Davids, T.W. and Herman Oldenberg

1882. *Vinaya Texts: Part I, The Pātimokka, The Māhavagga, I-IV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Schmithausen, Lambert

1981. "On some aspects of the descriptions or theories of 'Liberating Insight' and 'Enlightenment' in Early Buddhism." In *Studien zum Jainismus und Buddhismus: Gedenkschrift für Ludwig Alsdorf*, (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner).

Shulman, Eviatar

2014. *Rethinking the Buddha: Early Buddhist Philosophy as Meditative Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Skilling, Peter

1993. "Theravadin Literature in Tibetan Translation." In *Journal of the Pāli Text Society* 19: pp. 69-201.

Thanissaro Bhikkhu

2002. *Handful of Leaves,* vol 1 (California: Sati Center for Buddhist Studies and Metta Forest Monastery).