

The Sutra of Turning the Wheel of Dharma

Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One was dwelling near Varanasi at Deer Park. There, he first turned the wheel of dharma for five ascetics.

O ascetics, those who go forth into homelessness do not indulge in sense-pleasures or asceticism, which bring no benefit. Thus I follow the middle way and have realized the four noble truths.

The truth of suffering is the truth of birth, old age, sickness, and death. It is the truth of sorrow, pain, grief, and despair. It is the truth of meeting those we hate, losing those we love, and not having what we want. In short, suffering is the truth of pain, change, and anxiety.

The truth of origin is the truth of ignoring and craving. Afraid of death, we cling to the five skandhas as an ego, seeking happiness from our projections.

The truth of cessation is realizing the truth of suffering, impermanence, and egolessness, and thus craving and ignoring cease.

The truth of path is the truth of complete view, complete intention, complete speech, complete action, complete livelihood, complete effort, complete mindfulness, and complete meditation. In short, the path is training in the truth of discipline, meditation, and discriminating awareness.

Suffering must be recognized, and I have fully recognized it. Origin must be abandoned, and I have fully abandoned it. Cessation must be realized, and I have fully realized it. Path must be discovered, and I have fully discovered it. Now that I have realized the four noble truths and have proclaimed my complete awakening, true wisdom has arisen and the freedom of my heart is deathless.

Thus the Blessed One spoke. The five ascetics rejoiced, the whole world trembled, and boundless light shone forth. The ascetic Kaundinya saw the truth, and thus the Blessed One rejoiced.

Based on the Dhammachakkappavattana-sutta (Samyutta-nikaya 56:11), but simplified and expanded, inspired by Thich Nhat Hahn's version in Old Path White Clouds. © John Rockwell 2024.