

Buddhism as an Oriental Philosophy: A Review of Selected Theravada Buddhist Teachings

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Abstract

Theravada Buddhism is widely regarded as the oldest and most authentic school of Buddhist thought, preserving the original teachings of the Buddha as recorded in the *Pali* Canon. *Theravada* Buddhism presents a comprehensive philosophical framework centered on the understanding of human existence and the cessation of suffering. Its teachings, collectively known as the *Dhamma*, are founded upon key doctrinal principles, including the Middle Path (*Madhyamā-pratipadā*), the Four Noble Truths (*Cattāri Ariya Saccāni*), and Dependent Origination (*Paṭicca Samuppāda*). These principles provide a rational and systematic approach to understanding the nature of reality, suffering, and liberation. The ultimate objective of *Theravada* Buddhist practice is the attainment of *Nirvana*, the state of complete liberation from suffering and the cycle of rebirth. According to *Theravada* philosophy, the realization of Dependent Origination and the Four Noble Truths through adherence to the Middle Path constitutes the essential pathway toward achieving *Nirvana*. This paper examines these foundational concepts and their significance within the *Theravada* Buddhist tradition.

Keywords—*The middle way (Madhyamā-pratipada)*, *Four noble truths (Chathuraryā-Sathyā)*, *Loving-Kindness (Mettā)*, *Compassion (Karunā)*, *The Ethical Conduct (Sīla)*

1. Introduction

Buddhism is one of the earliest emerged religious philosophies in the world.¹ Among other main streams of Buddhism, most scholars believe that *Theravada* Buddhism is the school which contains the pure and original doctrines of Buddhist philosophy.² The *Theravada* School of Buddhism took root in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia in the 3rd century BC.³ The teachings of *Theravada* Buddhism are an approximately 2600-year-old revelation of universal rationality, succinctly referred to as the *Dhamma*.⁴ It adheres strictly to the original teachings of Buddha as contained in the *Pali* canon (scripture) and emphasizes the goal of personal salvation for the individual.⁵

The middle way (*Madhyamā-pratipada*), four noble truths (*Chathuraryā-Sathyā*) and dependent origination (*Paṭicca Samuppāda*) can be outlined as core philosophical ideas in the *Theravada* Buddhism. The sole objective of *Theravada* Buddhism is attainment of *Nirvana*. According to the *Theravada* Buddhist philosophy, realizing the dependent origination (*Paṭicca Samuppāda*) and the four noble truths (*Chathuraryā-Sathyā*) through adherence to the middle path (*Madhyamā-pratipada*), leads to *Nirvana*.⁶

2. The Buddha: 'the Enlightened One'

The *Buddha*, whose personal name was *Siddhartha Gotama*, was lived in Northern India during the 6th century B.C. He was the heir to the throne of the *Sakyan* kingdom, located in what is now modern-day Nepal. *Siddhartha's* father was King

¹ Yishwanath Prasad Varma, *Early Buddhism and Its Origins*, (Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1960).

² Oliver Abeynayake, 'The *Theravada* Tradition: Its Identity'. *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies*, Sri Lanka (2009), 90.

³ Harvard University, The Pluralism Project, *Theravada: The Way of the Elders*, (Harvard, 2020), 1.

⁴ P. Saliya Sumanathilake, *A Universal Philosophy of Law*, (2023) 9.

⁵ Dublin City University, *An Introduction to World Religions: Buddhism*, 4.

⁶ Ajahn Amar, *Theravada Buddhism in a Nutshell*, adapted from a talk given on a retreat held at the Angela Center, Santa Rosa, California, November 1997, 5-6.

Suddodhana and his mother was Queen *Maha Maya*.⁷ Following the customs of the time, *Siddhartha* was married at the age of sixteen to a princess named *Yasodharā* from the *Koliya* kingdom.⁸ At the age of 29, soon after the birth of his only child, *Rahula*, *Siddhartha* left his kingdom and became an ascetic in search of his solution to the suffering in life. After six years of research to explore the truth of life, at the age of 35, the ascetic *Gotama* attained enlightenment with his remarkable research findings, and he was later known as the *Buddha*, 'the enlightened one'.⁹ After his Enlightenment, *Gotama* the *Buddha* disseminated his *dhamma* (knowledge on the truth) for 45 years, he taught all classes of men and women kings to peasants, Brahmins to outcasts without making the slightest distinction between them. He recognized no differences of caste or social groupings, and the Way he preached was open to all men and women who were ready to understand and to follow it.¹⁰ During these 45 years, *Gotama* the *Buddha* opened his tradition to everyone and built a large community of followers of the *Dhamma*, known as the *Sangha*.

3. Theravada Buddhism: The Tradition of Thera's

After the Buddha's *Parinirvana*, followers developed several *Sangha* traditions based on the original Buddhist teachings. *Theravada* is one of the major Buddhist traditions. *Theravada* Buddhism is widely recognised as the classic introduction to the branch of Buddhism found in Sri Lanka and parts of Southeast Asia.¹¹

According to historical sources, one hundred years after the *Maha-Parinibbana* (*Parinirvana*) of the *Buddha*,¹² the second Buddhist Council with seven hundred monks was held at *Vesali* in order to examine and to suppress the practices of ten un-*Vinayic* (unethical) acts of a group of the *Vajjian* or

Vesalian monks.¹³ After discussion, the council concluded that the ten rules followed by the *Vajjian* monks were unlawful to the *vinaya* and were not permissible. However, *Vajjian* monks did not agree with the decision of the council. Another council was held by them. They discussed the matter and gave a decision about what they wanted in their favour. This council was known as the *Mahiisangha* or *Mahasanghika*.¹⁴ Hence, after the Second Buddhist Council *Vajjian* monks did not want to remain in the *Sangha* of the *Theravadins* or *Sthaviraviidins* tradition and they formed a new *Sangha* tradition known as the *Mahasangha* or *Mahayana*. Accordingly, the Second Buddhist Council marked the first division in the *Sangha*. This was due to differences of opinion relating to the practice of ten rules of discipline by monk. Thus, there arose in the *Sangha* at that time two sects: orthodox and unorthodox.¹⁵

Accordingly, the *Theravada* tradition should be recognized as not only the most ancient but also the most conservative school of Buddhism and its doctrines were in *Pali*. This sect had a *Tipitaka* which consisted of *Sutta*, *Vinaya* and *Abhidhamma* in *Pali*.¹⁶ The *Theravadins* believe that all worldly things are subject to decay and are *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*. According to them, the *Ariyathailgikamagga* (the noble way) is the real path to get rid of suffering and attain supreme bliss, *nibbana*.¹⁷

4. Reducing Suffering: Fundamental Teachings of Theravada Buddhism

Theravada Buddhism places the cessation of suffering (*dukkha*) at the very centre of its teachings, viewing this as the ultimate spiritual goal, which is known as attaining *Nirvana*. The *Theravada* tradition emphasizes that suffering is an

⁷ Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (Grove Press, New York, 1974), XV.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Richard F. Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A social history from ancient Benares to modern Colombo*, (Routledge, 2006).

¹² *Maha-Parinibbana* refers to the Buddha's passing away and his final liberation from the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*), marking his attainment of *Nirvana* or *Parinirvana*.

¹³ Kanai Lal Hazra, *History of Theravada Buddhism in South-East Asia: with special reference to India and Ceylon*, (Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1981), 27.

These ten un-*vinayic* acts were proposed by *Vajjian Bikkus*: (i) *The practice of carrying salt in a horn. For use when needed.* (ii) *The practice of taking food after mid-day.* (iii) *The practice of going to a neighboring village and taking a second meal there the same day.* (iv) *The observance of uposathas in different places within the same sima.* (v) *The practice of doing an ecclesiastical act and obtaining its sanction afterwards.* (vi) *The practice of using precedents as authority.* (vii) *The practice of drinking milk-whey after meal.* (viii) *The drinking of fermenting palm-juice which is not yet toddy.* (ix) *The use of a borderless sheet to sit.* (x) *The acceptance of gold and silver.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 28.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 29.

¹⁷ Walpola Rahula (n.7), Kanai Lal Hazra (n.13).

inherent characteristic of existence, arising from our own attachment (*upādāna*) based on passion (*lobha*), hatred (*dōsa*) and ignorance (*mōha*) of the true nature of reality. Through understanding the 'Four Noble Truth' (*chathurāryasatya*) and following the 'Noble Eightfold Path' (*āryāṣṭāṅgamārga*), *Theravada* Buddhism proposes to eliminate the root causes of suffering rather than merely addressing its symptoms.¹⁸

The *Theravada* approach is fundamentally pragmatic, focusing on individual liberation through disciplined moral conduct (*sila*), meditation practice (*samādhi*), and the development of wisdom (*prajñā*) that sees through the reality of the life. This path leads to *nirvana*, the complete extinguishing of suffering through the elimination of all forms of craving and attachment of the long way of *samsara* (the vicious circle of reincarnation of the creatures, which causes suffering).

4.1 The Four Noble Truths

According to Ven. Walpola Rahula Thero, the heart of Buddha's teaching lies in the Four Noble Truths (*Cattari-Ariyasaccani*)¹⁹ The Buddha's teaching on the Four Noble Truths defines in *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*,²⁰ namely the discourse on 'Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion'. The *Theravada* school of Buddhism regards this sutta as the essence of the teaching of the Buddha. This one sutta contains all that is necessary for understanding Dhamma and for enlightenment.²¹

In the *Maha-parinibbana Sutta* (The discourse on the great extinguish) the Buddha stated that,

*“catunnaṃ ariyasaccānaṃ yathābhūtaṃ adassanā
Saṃsitaṃ dīghamaddhānaṃ tāsū tāsveva jātisū
Tāni etāni diṭṭhāni bhavanetti samūhatā,
Ucchinnaṃ mūlaṃ dukkhassa natthidāni punabbhavo'ti.”*²²

‘Through not seeing the Four Noble Truths,
Long was the weary path from birth to birth.
When these are known, removed is rebirth's cause,

The root of sorrow plucked; then ends rebirth.’²³

Accordingly, all of us have had to travel through this long round of *samsara* since unable to discover the four noble truths.²⁴ By studying the Four Noble Truths through these references and explanations, we can gain a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the Buddha's essential teachings as preserved in the earliest Buddhist texts. These noble truths are: (1) *Dukkha* (Suffering): The reality of pervasive unsatisfactoriness in existence. (2) *Samudaya* (Origin): The cause of *dukkha*, rooted in craving (*tanhā*). (3) *Nirodha* (Cessation): The possibility of ending *dukkha* by eliminating its causes. (4) *Magga* (Path): The Noble Eightfold Path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*.²⁵

4.1.1 First Noble Truth: *Dukkha* (Suffering)

The First Noble Truth (*Dukkha-Ariya-Sacca*) is generally translated by almost all scholars as 'The Noble Truth of Suffering'.²⁶ The First Noble Truth contains three aspects is: “There is suffering, *dukkha*. *Dukkha* should be understood. *Dukkha* has been understood.” This is very skillful teaching because it is expressed in a simple formula which is easy to remember, and it also applies to everything that you can possibly experience or do or think concerning the past, the present or the future.²⁷ Suffering or *dukkha* is the common bond we all share. Suffering is something we usually do not want to experience; we just want to get rid of it. The *Pāli* word *dukkha* means not only ‘suffering’ but “incapable of satisfying” or “not able to bear or withstand anything”: always changing, incapable of truly fulfilling us or making us happy.²⁸

As stated by Ven. Walpola Rahula Thero, the term *dukkha* as the First Noble Truth, which represents the Buddha's view of life and the world, has a deeper philosophical meaning and connotes enormously wider senses.²⁹ Hence, it simply does

¹⁸Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path: The Way to the End of Suffering*, (Buddhist Publication Society, 1994).

¹⁹ Walpola Rahula (n.7), 16.

²⁰ *Tipitaka: The Pali Canon, Sutta Pitaka, Samyutta Nikāya Sacca-samyutta*, 11th sutta.

²¹ Ajahn Sumedho, *The Four Noble Truths*, 5.

²² *Tipitaka: The Pali Canon, Sutta Pitaka, Digha Nikaya, Maha-wagga*, 16th sutta.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Ajahn Sumedho, (n.21).

²⁵ Walpola Rahula (n.7), 16.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Ajahn Sumedho, (n.21), 9.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 10.

²⁹ Walpola Rahula (n.7), 17.

not mean mere suffering, but in addition it also includes deeper ideas such as 'imperfection', 'insubstantiality' & 'impermanence'.³⁰

According to *Dukkha Sutta* (the discourse of Suffering) the conception of *dukkha* may be discussed from three aspects: (1) *dukkha* as ordinary suffering (*dukkha-dukkha*), (2) *dukkha* as produced by change (*viparinama-dukkha*) and (3) *dukkha* as conditioned states (*samkhara-dukkha*).³¹ *Dukkha-dukkha* means, ordinary physical and mental suffering that is universally accepted as suffering. These are common to all human beings and are experienced from birth to death by all with no exception. These suffering include all types of suffering such as birth (*jāthi*), ageing (*jarā*), sickness (*vyādhi*), death (*marana*), association with the unpleasant (*appiya-sampayogo*), and dissociation from the pleasant (*piyehi-vippayogo*).³² *Viparinama-dukkha* defines suffering caused by the transitory and the constantly changing nature of physical and mental phenomena. This means that the joys and pleasures enjoyed in life are temporary and will soon end, causing inevitable suffering.³³

Intra alia the third form of *dukkha* as conditioned states (*samkhara dukkha*) is the most important philosophical aspect of the First Noble Truth.³⁴ According to *Theravāda* Buddhist philosophy, a 'being' is constituted through the coming together of the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*). These five Aggregates are: form/matter (*Rupa*), feeling/sensation (*Vedana*), perception (*Sanna*), mental formations (*Sankhara*), and consciousness (*Vinnana*). These five aggregates together constitute the Psycho-physical complex or mind and matter (*nama-rupa*).³⁵ According to the Buddha, all these conditioned phenomena (*pañcakkhandha*) are *dukkha*. As stated in the *Dhammapada* (The Path of Dhamma):

"Sabbe sankhara dukkhati - yada pannaya passati
atha nibbindati dukkha - esa maggo visuddhiya"³⁶

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka, Samyutta Nikāya, Salayatana Vagga, Jambukhadaka-samyutta, Dukkha Sutta*, 14th sutta.

³² Walpola Rahula (n.7), 19.

³³ *ibid.*, 20.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*, 26.

³⁶ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka, Khuddaka Nikaya, Dhammapada, Magga-wagga*, Verse 278.

The meaning of this verse is, "All conditioned phenomena (*samkhara*) are unsatisfactory (*dukkha*); and not-self. When one sees this with insight-wisdom, one becomes weary of *dukkha* (i.e., the *pañcakkhandha*). This is the Path to Purity."³⁷

4.1.2 Second Noble Truth: *Dukkha-Samudaya* (The cause for Suffering)

The Second Noble Truth is that of the arising or origin of *dukkha* (*Dukkha-Samudaya Ariya-Sacca*). According to the second noble truth, it is this 'thirst', 'desire', 'greed', 'craving', manifesting itself in various ways, that gives rise to all forms of suffering and the continuity of beings.³⁸ Thirst or craving is denoted in the Pali language³⁹ as *tanhā*.⁴⁰ As stated by Ven. Walpola Rahula Thero, here the term 'thirst' includes not only desire for, and attachment to, sense-pleasures, wealth and power, but also desire for, and attachment to, ideas and ideals, views, opinions, theories, conceptions and beliefs.⁴¹

According to the Buddha's analysis, all the troubles, conflicts and crises in the world, including wrongdoings (i.e.-theft), arise out of this selfish 'thirst'.⁴² In *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (The discourse on Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion)⁴³ Lord Buddha discussed that,

"*Idam kho pana bhikkhave, dukkhasamudayo ariyasaccaṃ:
"yāyaṃ taṇhā ponobhavikā nandirāgasahagatā tatra
tatrābhinandinī, seyyathīdam: kāmataṇhā bhavataṇhā
vibhavataṇhā"*.⁴⁴

The meaning of this verse is, "The noble truth of the origination of suffering: the craving that makes for further becoming accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there i.e., craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming."⁴⁵

In essence, the Second Noble Truth, *Dukkhasamudaya-ariyasacca*, provides the Buddha's profound diagnosis for the

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Walpola Rahula (n.7), 29.

³⁹ Pali is a Middle Indo-Aryan language, historically significant as the language of the Theravada Buddhist Canon (*Tipitaka*).

⁴⁰ Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation – Excursions into the Thought-world of the Pāli Discourses*, (The Buddhist Association of the United States, 2009), 5.

⁴¹ Walpola Rahula (n.7), 30.

⁴² *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka, Digha Nikaya, Aggañña Sutta*, 27th sutta.

⁴³ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, (n.20).

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

origin of suffering (*dukkha*). It unequivocally identifies craving (*tanhā*) as the fundamental cause. This *tanhā* manifests as an insatiable thirst not merely for sense pleasures, wealth, or power, but also for existence itself (*bhava-tanhā*), non-existence (*vibhava-tanhā*), and even for ideas, beliefs, and views.

The terms *tanha*, denote the desire, the will to be, to exist, to re-exist, to become more and more, to grow more and more, to accumulate more and more. This is the cause of the arising of *dukkha*.⁴⁶ *Theravada* Buddhist philosophy identifies the causes of suffering as mental processes and actions that are based in greed (*loba*), hatred (*dosa*) or delusion (*moha*). These root defilements underlie all other negative or unskillful thoughts and deeds (*akusala*).⁴⁷

As Ven. Walpola Rahula emphasizes, this pervasive craving, fueled by relentless passion and delight, is the driving force behind both personal suffering and the vast array of conflicts, wrongdoings, and crises plaguing the world. The *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*'s teaching on the threefold craving (*kāmatanhā*, *bhavatanhā*, *vibhavatanhā*) underscores its role in perpetuating the cycle of becoming (*ponobhavikā*). Therefore, understanding this Truth means recognizing that the root of all suffering lies in this self-centered, clinging desire inherent in the unenlightened mind.

4.1.3 Third Noble Truth: *Dukkha-Nirodha* (The Cessation of Suffering)

The Third Noble Truth is the cessation of suffering or the cessation of the continuation of suffering. This is called the Noble Truth for the Cessation of Suffering (*Dukkha-Nirodha Ariya-Sacca*).⁴⁸ To eliminate *dukkha* completely, it is essential to eliminate the main root of it, which is called 'thirst' (*tanha*) (the cause of *dukkha*). Therefore, cessation of *dukkha* is also known by the term *Tanhakkhaya* 'Extinction of Thirst'.⁴⁹

In *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (The discourse on Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion)⁵⁰ Lord Buddha explained that,

“*Idaṃ kho pana bhikkhave, dukkhanirodho ariyasaccaṃ: yo tassāyeva tanhāya asesavirāgaṇirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo*”⁵¹

Which means, "And this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of stress: the remainder-less fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that very craving."⁵²

The cessation of suffering is called *nibbana* or *nirvana*. The *nibbana* is defined in the *Jambukhādaka Sutta* in the *Sutta Pitaka*, which was a discourse between an intellect named *Jambukhādaka* and the venerable *Sāriputta*. In this discussion *Jambukhādaka* asked that “What is *nibbana* (extinguishment)?” then *Sāriputta* Thero answered, “the ending of greed, hate, and delusion is called extinguishment.”⁵³

Accordingly, the Third Noble Truth, called *Nirodha*, reveals that suffering doesn't have to last forever, it can truly come to an end. This is one of Buddhism's most hopeful messages: the end of *dukkha* isn't just an idea, but something we can actually achieve through our own effort and understanding. *Nirodha* means extinguish of craving (*tanha*) and attachment (*upadana*), the very things that keep our suffering alive much like a fire that goes out when there's no more fuel. When we stop constantly chasing after pleasure, fighting against pain, and clinging to our ignorance of reality, we can experience a deep peace and genuine freedom.

This extinguishment (*nirvana*) is not extinction or emptiness in a negativistic sense, but rather the end of the mental formations that create our experience of dissatisfaction and unrest. The Third Noble Truth thus serves as Buddhism's central promise: that through wisdom and practice, every

⁵⁰ *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, (n.20).

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ *Tipitaka: The Pali Canon, Sutta Pitaka, Samyutta Nikaya, Saḷāyatana-vagga, Jambukhādaka-samyutta, Jambukhādakavagga. 1st sutta.*

“*Nibbānaṃ, nibbānaṃ 'ti, āvuso sāriputta, vuccati. Katamaṃ nu kho, āvuso, nibbānanti?*”

“*Yo kho, āvuso, rāgakkhayo dosakkhayo mohakkhayo idaṃ vuccati nibbānati.*”

⁴⁶ Walpola Rahula (n.7), 31.

⁴⁷ Andrew Bartles-Smith and others, *Reducing Suffering During Conflict: The Interface Between Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law*, 22:1-2, 8-51 (2021) & ICRC. 2022. 17.

⁴⁸ Walpola Rahula (n.7), 35.

⁴⁹ *Tipitaka: The Pali Canon, Sutta Pitaka, Samyutta Nikaya, Mahā-vagga, Bojjhanga-samyutta, Khaya Sutta. 26th sutta.*

being possesses the potential to transcend suffering and achieve the ultimate goal of *Nirvana*, the unconditioned state beyond birth, death, and rebirth.

4.1.4 Fourth Noble Truth: *Magga* (The Path for Cessation of Suffering)

The Fourth Noble Truth, known as *Maga* (the path), offers a practical way of revealing the true meaning of suffering. While the Third Noble Truth assures that suffering can end, the Fourth Noble Truth answers the question that, "if the suffering can be ended, how can it be done?" Accordingly, the Fourth Noble Truth presents the systematic method for achieving this cessation through the Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya Atthangika Magga*).⁵⁴ the Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya-Atthangika-Magga*), categories or divisions: namely,⁵⁵

- i. Right Understanding (*Samma ditthi*),
- ii. Right Thought (*Samma sankappa*),
- iii. Right Speech (*Samma vaca*),
- iv. Right Action (*Samma kammanta*),
- v. Right Livelihood (*Samma ajiva*),
- vi. Right Effort (*Samma vayama*),
- vii. Right Mindfulness (*Samma sati*),
- viii. Right Concentration (*Samma samadhi*).

These eight factors aim at promoting and perfecting the three essentials of Buddhist training and discipline: namely: (a) Ethical Conduct (*Sila*), (b) Mental Discipline (*Samadhi*) and (c) Wisdom (*Panna*).⁵⁶ Accordingly, the Eightfold Path touches every corner of our lives how we understand the world, what we intend, how we speak to others, our daily actions, even how we earn our living. It demands that we pay attention to our minds through meditation while also living ethically in our communities. In this way, *Magga* reveals that awakening isn't an escape from ordinary life but a complete transformation of how we engage with it. The Fourth Noble Truth promises that liberation isn't reserved for a select few but represents a genuine possibility for anyone willing to walk this carefully laid-out path.

The Eightfold Path suggests avoiding two extremes: One is the pursuit of happiness through sensual pleasures. The other is the pursuit of happiness through self-mortification, practiced in various forms of asceticism. Hence this pathway is called and the middle path (*Madhyamā pratipada*)⁵⁷ As Ven. Walpole Rahula Thero Stated, "Practically the whole teaching of the Buddha, to which he devoted himself for 45 years, deals in some way or other with this Path."⁵⁸

4.2 The Eightfold Path: The Noble Middle Way

The Eightfold Path (*Ariya Atthangika Magga*), also known as the Noble Middle Way (*majjhima patipada*), is a core concept in Buddhism that outlines a path to end suffering and achieve enlightenment.⁵⁹ It consists of eight interconnected practices, categorized under wisdom (*Paññā*), ethical conduct (*Sīla*), and mental discipline (*Samādhi*), all aimed at achieving a balanced and mindful way of living.

Accordingly, the eightfold path can be categorised as follows.

Wisdom (*Paññā*)

- i. Right Understanding (*Samma ditthi*),
- ii. Right Thought (*Samma sankappa*),

Ethical Conduct (*Sīla*)

- iii. Right Speech (*Samma vaca*),
- iv. Right Action (*Samma kammanta*),
- v. Right Livelihood (*Samma ajiva*),

Mental Discipline (*Samādhi*)

- vi. Right Effort (*Samma vayama*),
- vii. Right Mindfulness (*Samma sati*),
- viii. Right Concentration (*Samma samadhi*).

Thus, the Noble Eightfold Path offers a holistic framework for spiritual development, integrating wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline into every aspect of life. By cultivating these eight factors in harmony, one progresses toward the cessation of suffering and the realization of *Nibbāna*, the ultimate goal in Buddhism.

⁵⁴ Walpole Rahula (n.7), 45.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁷ Ajahn Amar (n.6), 5-6.

⁵⁸ Walpole Rahula (n.7), 46.

⁵⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi (n.18).

4.2.1 Right Understanding: *Samma Ditthi*

Right view or understanding is the first step of the eightfold path, which guides all other steps. It enables us to understand where we should start our journey and what our destination is in the journey or cessation of suffering.⁶⁰ In the *Majjhima Nikaya* the *Sammaditti sutta* (The discourse on the rightful view) discusses the discourse of the right view.⁶¹ This *sutta* focuses on how the four noble truths, dependent co-arising, and the knowledge that ends mental fermentation all build upon the basic dichotomy between skillful and unskillful action.⁶² In the *Sutta*, *Sāriputta* Thero explains that when a noble person comprehends the nature of suffering, understands its origin, realizes the possibility of its cessation, and follows the path leading to that cessation, such a person possesses right view and has truly entered and established themselves in the genuine *Dhamma*.⁶³

In *Maha-satipatthana Sutta* (The great discourse on Mindfulness)⁶⁴ Lord Buddha explained that,

“*yam kho bhikkhave dukkhe nāṇaṃ dukkhasamudaye nāṇaṃ dukkhanirodhe nāṇaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminiyā paṭipadāya nāṇaṃ, ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave sammāditthi.*”⁶⁵

Which means, “[what is right view?] Knowledge with regard to suffering, knowledge with regard to the origination of suffering, knowledge with regard to the cessation of suffering, knowledge with regard to the way of practice leading to the cessation of suffering: This is called right view.”⁶⁶

Also, as explained in the *Bija Sutta* (The discourse on Seeds) in *Anguttara Nikaya*⁶⁷, when a person has right view, whatever bodily deeds he undertakes in line with that view, whatever verbal deeds and mental deeds he undertakes in line with that view, whatever intentions, whatever vows, whatever determinations, whatever fabrications, all lead to what is

agreeable, pleasing, charming, profitable, & easeful. Why is that? Because the view is auspicious.⁶⁸

Accordingly, right view serves as the foundation of the Noble Eightfold Path, shaping one’s mindset, conduct, and mental discipline in alignment with the *Dhamma*. It is not merely an intellectual understanding but a transformative insight into the nature of suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path leading to that cessation.

4.2.2 Right Thought: *Samma sankappa*

According to *Theravada* Buddhist philosophy, “right thought” or *samma sankappa* is the second element of the Noble Eightfold Path which emphasizes the importance of developing right intentions in one’s mind. *samma sankappa* is not just about thinking correctly, but about having the right intention or aspiration in order to understand the *Dhamma*.

In the *Magga-vibhanga Sutta* (the Discourse of the Analysis of the Path)⁶⁹ of the *Samyutta Nikaya*, Lord Buddha explained that,

“*Katamo ca bhikkhave, sammāsankappo: yo kho bhikkhave, nekkhammasankappo avyāpādasankappo, avihimsāsankappo, ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave, sammāsankappo.*”⁷⁰

Meaning that, “[what is right thought?] Being resolved on renunciation, on freedom from ill will, on harmlessness: This is called right thought.”⁷¹

In the *Chunda Kammaraputta Sutta*, Lord Buddha explained that “who he bears no ill will and is not corrupt in the resolves of his heart. [He thinks,] ‘May these beings be free from animosity, free from oppression, free from trouble, and may they look after themselves with ease!’ He has right view and is not warped in the way he sees things.”⁷²

Accordingly, in *Theravāda* Buddhist philosophy, *sammā sankappa* (right thought) is not merely about correct reasoning, but about cultivating wholesome mental intentions

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka*, *Majjhima Nikaya*, *Sammaditthi Sutta*, 9th sutta.

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka*, *Digha Nikaya*, *Maha-satipatthana Sutta*, 22nd sutta.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka*, *Anguttara Nikaya*, *Dasaka Nipāta*, 104th sutta.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka*, *Samyutta Nikaya*, *Magga-samyutta*, 8th sutta.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka*, *Anguttara Nikaya*, *Dasaka Nipāta*, 176th sutta.

that guide ethical conduct and spiritual progress. Hence, *sammā saṅkappa* proposes reducing ill will, and promoting harmlessness principles that foster compassion, non-violence, and inner clarity. Thus, *sammā saṅkappa* is not just about inner clarity and thoughtfulness, but cultivating loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*) and non-harming (*ahinsā*) towards the entire world.

Right thought is inseparable from right view, forming a mental foundation through which one perceives reality without distortion and acts for the welfare of all beings. In essence, it transforms thought into a conscious aspiration for liberation, peace, and universal goodwill.

4.2.3 Right Speech: *Samma Vaca*

In Buddhism, Right Speech (*Samma Vaca*) is the third aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path, emphasizing the importance of ethical and mindful communication. It involves abstaining from harmful or unskillful speech, such as lying, slander, harsh words, and idle chatter.

In the *Magga-vibhanga Sutta* (the Discourse of the Analysis of the Path)⁷³ of the *Samyutta Nikaya*, Lord Buddha defined that, abstaining from lying, abstaining from divisive speech, abstaining from abusive speech and abstaining from idle chatter as right speech. Also, the *Vacha Sutta* (the Discourse of the Speech)⁷⁴ of the *Anguttara Nikaya* discusses five factors of rightful speech as follows,

“Kālena ca bhāsītā hoti. Saccā ca bhāsītā hoti, saṅhā ca bhāsītā hoti, atthasaṃhitā ca bhāsītā hoti, mettacittena ca bhāsītā hoti.

*Imehi kho bhikkhave pañcahi aṅgehi samannāgatā vācā subhāsītā hoti no dubbhāsītā, anavajjā ca ananuvajjā ca viññūnanti.”*⁷⁵

Meaning that, "It is spoken at the right time. It is spoken in truth. It is spoken affectionately. It is spoken beneficially. It is spoken with a mind of goodwill. A statement endowed with

these five factors is rightfully spoken, not ill-spoken. It is blameless & un-faulted by knowledgeable people."⁷⁶

Once, Lord Buddha advised Ven. *Rahula*, (the son of *Siddhartha Gautama* before his Enlightenment)

“While you are doing a verbal action, you should reflect on it: 'This verbal action I am doing is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it unskillful verbal action, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both... you should give it up. But if on reflection you know that it is not... you may continue with it.”⁷⁷

Accordingly, Right Speech (*Samma Vaca*), the third step of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism, focuses on ethical and mindful communication by avoiding lying, divisive speech, abusive language, and idle chatter. Lord Buddha also advised reflecting on one's words to ensure they do not cause harm to oneself or others, and to abandon speech that leads to suffering.

4.2.4 Right Action: *Samma kammanta*

In the *Theravada* Buddhist philosophy, Right Action (*Samma Kammanta*) is the fourth step of the Noble Eightfold Path and refers to ethical and skillful (*kusala*) conducts (physical actions). It emphasizes abstaining from harmful actions and engaging in those that promote well-being and compassion.

In the *Magga-vibhanga Sutta* (the Discourse of the Analysis of the Path)⁷⁸ of the *Samyutta Nikaya*, Lord Buddha defined that,

*“yā kho bhikkhave, pāṇātipātā veramaṇī adinnādānā veramaṇī abrahmacariyā veramaṇī, ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave, sammākammanto.”*⁷⁹

⁷³ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, (n.69).

⁷⁴ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka, Anguttara Nikaya, Paicaka Nipata*, 198th sutta.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka, Majjhima Nikaya, Ambalathika-Rahulovada Sutta*, 61st Sutta.

⁷⁸ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, (n.69).

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

Meaning that, ‘abstaining from taking life, abstaining from stealing, abstaining from unchastity: This, monks, is called right action.’⁸⁰

In the *Chunda Kammaraputta Sutta*, Lord Buddha explained that there are three skillful bodily actions. These actions are, abstaining from taking life (refraining from killing or harming living beings), abstaining from taking what is not given (refraining from stealing) and abstaining from sensual misconduct (refraining from sexual misconduct).⁸¹ Also, in the *Sigālovāda Sutta* (The Discourse to *Sigala*),⁸² the Buddha described a profound redefinition of social and moral responsibilities for laypeople. He explains that true worship of the “six directions” means fulfilling one’s duties and liabilities within social relationships, thereby cultivating skillful conduct (*kusala-kamma*). Furthermore, in the *Khuddakapatha* (The Short Passages) of the *Khuddaka Nikaya* proposes ten skillful conducts (*Dasa Sikkhapada*).⁸³ The first five correspond to the layperson’s ‘Five Precepts’ (*Pañca Sila*): abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants. These five precepts were also described as the five causes for noble rewards in the *Abhisanda Sutta* (The Discourse of Rewards).⁸⁴ These precepts help practitioners simplify their lives, restrain desire, and focus on spiritual development.

Accordingly, right action (*samma kammanta*) does not refer to a set of prohibitions, but rather a framework for developing moral discipline, compassion, and responsibility in everyday life. *Samma kammatha* advocates abstaining from unskillful conduct (*akusala*) and aligning conduct with the principles of non-harming and respect for others. The teachings across the *Theravada* Buddhist philosophy emphasize that moral conduct forms the foundation for both individual spiritual progress and harmonious social relationships. Thus, Right Action serves as a bridge between personal virtue and collective well-being, guiding practitioners toward a life of mindfulness, moral integrity, and liberation.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, (n.72).

⁸² *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka, Diga Nikaya*, 31st Sutta.

⁸³ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka, Khuddaka Nikaya, Khuddakapatha, Dasa Sikkhapada*.

⁸⁴ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka, Anguttara Nikaya, Aṭṭhaka Nipāta, Abhisanda Sutta*, 39th Sutta.

4.2.5 Right Livelihood: *Samma ajiva*

In Buddhism, Right Livelihood (*Samma Ajiva*) is the fifth factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is emphasizing the importance of ethical and honest means of earning a living. *Samma Ajiva* means choosing an occupation or profession that does not cause harm to oneself or others, and that aligns with moral principles.

In the *Magga-vibhanga Sutta* (the Discourse of the Analysis of the Path)⁸⁵ of the *Samyutta Nikaya*, Lord Buddha explained that “there is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, having abandoned dishonest livelihood, keeps his life going with right livelihood: This is called right livelihood”⁸⁶ In addition to explaining *Sammā Ājīva*, Buddhist teachings also emphasize abstaining from *Michchā Ājīva* (wrong livelihood), which includes trading in weapons, human beings, meat, intoxicants, and poison.⁸⁷ Also, Lord Buddha emphasized the interconnection of the ‘Right Livelihood’ with ‘Right view’ ‘Right effort’ and ‘Right mindfulness.’ Accordingly, “One discerns wrong livelihood as wrong livelihood, and right livelihood as right livelihood: This is one’s right view. One tries to abandon wrong livelihood & to enter into right livelihood: This is one’s right effort. One is mindful to abandon wrong livelihood & to enter & remain in right livelihood: This is one’s right mindfulness. Thus, these three qualities right view, right effort, & right mindfulness circle around right livelihood”⁸⁸

Hence, Right Livelihood serves as a vital foundation for living a wholesome and compassionate life, as it directly connects one’s work with the broader ethical vision of the Noble Eightfold Path. By abstaining from harmful and dishonest occupations and engaging in livelihoods that promote well-being, one cultivates harmony, integrity, and respect for all forms of life. Thus, *Sammā Ājīva* is not merely about survival or material gain, but about living responsibly and

⁸⁵ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, (n.69).

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka, Anguttara Nikaya, Pañcaka Nipāta, Vanija Sutta*, 177th Sutta.

⁸⁸ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka, Majjhima Nikaya, Mahacattarisaka Sutta*, 117th Sutta

meaningfully, ensuring that one's livelihood becomes a source of peace rather than suffering.

4.2.6 Right Effort: *Samma vayama*

Right Effort, known as '*Samma Vāyāma*' in Pali, is the sixth factor of the Noble Eightfold Path in *Theravada* Buddhist philosophy. It emphasizes the determination to make effort for achieving positive mental qualities and the abandonment of negative ones. This effort is essential for spiritual progress, supporting mindfulness, and ultimately, for attaining the noble *nirvana* (enlightenment).

According to the *Magga-vibhanga Sutta* (the Discourse of the Analysis of the Path)⁸⁹ Lord Buddha explained, *Samma Vayama* includes four dimensions of mental training and purification that a wise person must undertake. First, the wise person must generate determination to prevent the arising of unwholesome (*akusala*) states that have not yet appeared, safeguarding the mind from potential impurities. Second, the wise person should strive to abandon unwholesome (*akusala*) states that have already arisen, cutting off their influence before they can take deeper root. Third, the wise person should actively develop wholesome (*kusala*) states that have not yet arisen, encouraging the growth of virtues such as loving-kindness, compassion, wisdom, and mindfulness. Finally, the wise person should dedicate himself to maintaining, strengthening, and perfecting wholesome (*kusala*) states that have already been cultivated, ensuring their stability and growth.⁹⁰ Thus, when one strives to abandon wrong view, wrong thought, wrong speech, wrong action, and wrong livelihood, and instead cultivates right view, right thought, right speech, right action, and right livelihood, this is described as Right Effort (*Sammā Vāyāma*).⁹¹

Accordingly, Right Effort (*Sammā Vāyāma*) can be identified as the driving force that sustains the entire Noble Eightfold Path. Constant and mindful effort to purify the mind, protect against harmful tendencies, and foster the conditions for the

development of wisdom and kindness directs toward realization of *Nibbāna*.

4.2.7 Right Mindfulness: *Samma sati*

Right Mindfulness, or *Samma Sati*, is a vital aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism, advocating the cultivation of present moment awareness. It involves paying attention to the body, feelings, mind, and mental objects, fostering a deeper understanding of impermanence, suffering, and the path to liberation.

According to *Maha-satipatthana Sutta* (The Great discourse on Mindfulness) of the *Digha Nikaya*,⁹² one who focuses on the world, setting aside craving and suffering, is in right mindfulness.⁹³ According to the *Theravada* Buddhist perspective, Right mindfulness developed through the four foundations of mindfulness namely, (1) Contemplation or mindfulness of body (*kāyānupassanā*), (2) Contemplation or mindfulness of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*) (3) Contemplation or mindfulness of mind (*cittānupassanā*) and (4) Contemplation or mindfulness of mind objects (*dhammānupassanā*).⁹⁴

In *Theravāda* Buddhist philosophy, Right Mindfulness (*Sammā Sati*) can be understood not merely as a practice of awareness but as a transformative initial that anchors the entire Noble Eightfold Path. By preparing the mind to observe the body, feelings, states of consciousness, and mental phenomena with clarity, a person can gradually overcome ignorance and cultivate wisdom. As emphasized in the *Mahā-satipatthāna Sutta*, mindfulness is the direct path to alleviation of suffering because it uproots craving and hatred while fostering insight into the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and non-self-nature of existence. Through the systematic cultivation of the four foundations of mindfulness (*kāyānupassanā*, *vedanānupassanā*, *cittānupassanā*, and *dhammānupassanā*) the person who is practicing the mind develops inner balance, compassion, and wisdom. Finally, Right Mindfulness serves

⁸⁹ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, (n.69).

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon (n.88).

⁹² *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, (n.64).

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ Phra Debvedi, *Smmasathi*: An exposition of right mindfulness, (Buddhadharma Foundation, 1988)

as the guiding light that sustains meditative practice, harmonizes ethical living, and leads toward the realization of *Nibbāna*, the liberation from suffering.

4.2.8 Right Concentration: *Samma samadhi*

Right concentration, or *Samma Samadhi*, is the eighth and final factor of the Noble Eightfold Path. It signifies a state of unified and focused awareness, achieved through calming the mind and deepening one-pointedness on a chosen object of attention, ultimately leading to insight and liberation.

Samādhi means that the mind is established in equanimity. A mind that is focused upon an external object cannot attain equanimity; it will only disturb the balance of the mind. That is why only the concentration of a wholesome mind should be regarded as *Sammā Samādhi*.⁹⁵

In the *Jhana (Dhyāna) Sutta* (The Discourse on Mental Absorption)⁹⁶ Lord Buddha emphasized that Purification of the mind depends on concentration. According to *Mahacattarisaka Sutta* (The Discourse on Great Forty)⁹⁷, Lord Buddha explained that ‘any singleness of mind equipped with right view/understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, & right mindfulness is called noble right concentration with its supports & requisite conditions.’⁹⁸ Accordingly, *Sammā Samādhi* is not a standalone, but is a continuation process from the previous seven factors of the Noble Eightfold Path.

4.3 *Ahiṃsā*: The principle of non-violence

Ahiṃsā is not a concept limited only to Buddhist philosophy. The literal meaning of the Sanskrit word *ahiṃsā* is “non-harm,” or “non-violence.” *Ahiṃsā* was probably first clearly articulated as a religious ideal by *Jina Mahāvīra*, well known

⁹⁵ S. N. Goenka, *Samma Samadhi*, (Vipassana Newsletter, Vol. 21, No. 9: 12 September 2011).

⁹⁶ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka, Anguttara Nikaya, Navaka Nipāta, Jhana Sutta*, 36th Sutta.

⁹⁷ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, (n.88).

⁹⁸ *ibid*.

as the *Niganta Nātha Puththa*, the great Jain teacher and older contemporary of the *Siddhārtha Gautham* (Buddha).⁹⁹

According to the Buddhist philosophy non-harms or *ahiṃsā* should be towards all the living being.¹⁰⁰ The basis of the practice of *ahiṃsā* is compassion (*dayā*), mercy (*hitānukampā*), and a feeling of shame (*lajjā*) of the cruelty of killing and injuring life.¹⁰¹ *Ahiṃsā* (non-injury) has also its positive counterpart, which demands not only abstention from injury but also the practice of *metta* (loving-kindness), and *karuna* (compassion) to other living beings.¹⁰²

Out of the five principles of *pañcasīla* (the five precepts) of the Buddhism, the first is the principle of non-violence or *ahiṃsā*.¹⁰³ Accordingly, all living beings should be non-harmed. All lives should be saved.¹⁰⁴

The following *Pali* Verse in the *Dhammapada* reflects the Buddhist philosophical attitude on *ahiṃsā*.

“*Sabbe tasanti dandassa - sabbe bhayanti maccuno
Attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā - na haneyya na ghātaye*”¹⁰⁵

The meaning of this verse is, “All are afraid of the punishment, all fear death. Putting oneself in another's place, one should not beat or kill others.”

Further, following *Pali* Verse concludes that the Buddhist ideology on *ahiṃsā*.

“*Yathā ahaṃ tathā ete - yathā ete tathā ahaṃ.
Attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā - na haneyya na ghātaye*”¹⁰⁶

The meaning of this verse is, "As I am, so are others; as others are, so am I." Having thus identified self and others, harm no one nor have them harmed.¹⁰⁷

Hence, Buddhist philosophy recognizes the principle of non-violence or non-harm (*Ahiṃsā* or *Avihimsā*) as one of the fundamental rules of its philosophical practice. Thus,

⁹⁹ Martin T. Adam, *Nonviolence and Emptiness: Buddha, Gandhi, and the "Essence of Religion"*, (ARC, The Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University Volume 34, 2006), 2.

¹⁰⁰ *sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittatā* - May all beings be happy and secure.

¹⁰¹ K. T. S. Sarao, *Ahiṃsā (Buddhism)*, (Buddhism and Jainism, Department of Buddhist Studies, University of Delhi, 2013), 3.

¹⁰² Archphurich Nomnian, *A Comparative Study of Ahimsa (non-violence) in Jainism and Metta-Karuna (loving-kindness and compassion) in Theravada Buddhism*, (Journal of Religion and Culture, 2nd year, no. 2, 2008) 112.

¹⁰³ Prabath Misra, *Reflection of Ahimsa: A Practical Approach*, (Indian Philosophical Quarterly Publication, Vol. XXV No. 2, April 1998) 192.

¹⁰⁴ *Panātipata veramani sikkhapadam samādiyami* – “I undertake the precept to refrain from destroying living creatures.”

¹⁰⁵ *Dhammapada, Dandawagga, Chabbaggiya Bhikkhu Vatthu*, Verse 129.

¹⁰⁶ Ven. S. Dhammika, *Gemstones of the Good Dhamma (Saddhamma-maniratana)*, Part 17 - Mettavagga II, 158.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*.

Buddhism stands against all kinds of violence and destruction. The Buddhist philosophical approach to *ahimsā* is not merely based on sentimentality, but on the true understanding of the dynamics of violence, hatred, and their causations.¹⁰⁸ According to the Buddhist philosophy, *Ahimsā* is not a passive avoidance of harm, but an active and transformative principle rooted in compassion, wisdom, and moral discipline. It extends beyond the mere abstention from killing to the cultivation of *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion) toward all living beings, recognizing the shared vulnerability and fear of suffering inherent in all forms of life. The Buddhist perspective emphasizes empathy by urging individuals to see themselves in others and to refrain from causing harm in thought, word, or deed. The centrality of *ahimsā* in the *pañcasīla* demonstrates its foundational role in guiding ethical conduct, spiritual development, and social harmony. Ultimately, the Buddhist doctrine of non-violence is not limited to personal morality but serves as a universal philosophy for overcoming hatred and conflict, fostering peace, and nurturing the conditions for liberation.

4.4 Concepts of *Mettā* (Loving-Kindness) and *Karuṇā* (Compassion)

The concepts of *mettā* and *karuṇā* are two of the four noble concepts in *Theravada* Buddhism, including *muditā* (sympathetic joy) and *upekkhā* (serenity) of *brahma-viharanas* which values qualities of unselfish human beings.¹⁰⁹

4.4.1 *Mettā* or *Maitrī*: Loving-Kindness

Mettā or *Maitrī* is generally translated into English as pure loving-kindness towards all beings.¹¹⁰ In Buddhism, *mettā* is recognized as a form of individual mentality. There are many sources of *Theravada* Buddhism that discuss the practice of *Mettā* or *Maitrī*. Among other sources, the *Karaniya Mettā*

Sutta (The Discourse on Loving-kindness)¹¹¹ is prominent which discusses the concept of *Mettā* and its effects. The following verse of the *Karaniya Mettā Sutta* suggests the significance of the practicing of the *mettā* towards all.

“*Mettañca sabba-lokasmi, - manasam bhāvaye aparimānam
Uddham adhoca tiriyañca, - Asaóabāddham, averajā
asapattam*”¹¹²

The meaning of this verse is, “Cultivate a mind of boundless love, towards all, throughout the universe. Love that is unobstructed and free from hatred or enmity.”¹¹³ Accordingly, *Theravada* Buddhist philosophy accepts that the *mettā* as a universal concept. Also, it suggests that ‘may all living beings be joyful and secure.’¹¹⁴ The concept of *mettā* implies not harming anyone as well as spreading love and kindness to everyone in the world.

According to Ven. Dr. Buddharakkhita, one of the prominent *Theravada* Buddhist scholars in contemporary academia,

“The ability to remain non-harassing, inoffensive, non-torturing, non-destructive and non-vexing means a very refined, beautiful and loving mode of behaviour in a world where interaction between human beings creates so much tension and misery.”¹¹⁵

Hence, the *Mettā* or *Maitrī* is a practical solution to heal the tense world. Accordingly, Buddhist philosophy suggests that spreading love and kindness can heal the violent world.

Metta has been identified as that specific factor which “ripens” the accumulated merit (*punna*) acquired by the ten ways for the acquisition of merit (*dasapunna-kiriyavatthu*), such as the practice of generosity, virtue, etc. Again, it is *metta* which brings to maturity the ten exalted spiritual qualities known as “perfections” (*paramita*).¹¹⁶ *Metta* makes one a pure font of well-being and safety for others. According to *Karaniya Mettā*

¹¹¹ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, *Sutta Pitaka, Khuddaka Nikaya, Sutta Nipata*, 8th sutta.

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ Ven. Dr. Acharya Buddharakkhita, *Mettā: The Philosophy & Practice of Universal Love*, (Buddha Vachana Trust Maha Bodhi Society, 2014), 4.

¹¹⁴ *Sabbe Satta Bhavantu Sukhita*.

¹¹⁵ Ven. Dr. Acharya Buddharakkhita, (n.113).

¹¹⁶ Ven. Dr. Acharya Buddharakkhita (n.113).

¹⁰⁸ James A. Stroble, *Buddhism and War: A Study of the Status of Violence in Early Buddhism*, (University of Hawai'i at Manoa, December 17, 1991).

¹⁰⁹ Archphurich Nomnian, (n.102), 113.

¹¹⁰ Yu Yu Swe, *The Concept of Mettā in Buddhist Ethics*, (Yadanabon University Research Journal 2019, Vol-10, No.1), 1.

Sutta, just as a mother gives her own life to protect her child, so *metta* only gives and never wants anything in return.¹¹⁷

Accordingly, *mettā* (loving-kindness) in *Theravāda* Buddhism is a profound ethical and spiritual principle. Rooted in the *Karaniya Mettā Sutta*, it emphasizes cultivating a boundless, unconditional love that is free from hatred, enmity, and discrimination, extending equally to all beings. *Mettā* is not only a moral guideline but also a practical remedy for the tensions and conflicts that pervade human society. It cultivates compassion, patience, and non-violence, while also serving as a catalyst for the perfection of virtues and the maturation of merit. Hence, *mettā* calls for a selfless, giving attitude that expects nothing in return. Thus, in both personal transformation and collective harmony, *mettā* offers a timeless path for healing, peace, and the creation of a compassionate world.

4.4.2 *Karunā*: Compassion

Karunā means compassion. Compassion or *karunā* is one of the most important virtues, in *Theravada* and *Mahayana* Buddhism as well.¹¹⁸ The importance of the concept of compassion in Buddhist literature is further reflected in the identification of *Siddhartha Gautama* (Buddha) by the term of *Mahā Kārunika* (Great Compassionate One). *Karunā* is a proper mental attitude toward those who are in distress. Also, *Karunā* is one of the four noble concepts of Buddhism known as *Brahma-vihāranas*. According to Buddhist teaching, The *Brahma-vihāranas* are incompatible with a hating state of mind. *Karunā* always complies with empathy. Theravada Buddhist teachings emphasize the cultivation of *karunā* through ethical behaviour. Also, *karunā* is considered to be an essential aspect of the path to liberation in *Theravada* Buddhism. Further, *Theravada* Buddhism recognizes that *karunā* is a concept that should be towards others. Accordingly, *Theravada* Buddhist philosophy discusses the concept of *karunā* as an instrument to heal the world of

suffering. Hence, *karunā* means to get rid of suffering and pain.¹¹⁹

4.5 *Sīla*: The Ethical Conduct

Sīla (ethical conduct) is the foundation for *Samadhi* (concentration), and *Panna* (wisdom) to build upon which hold the *Nabbanic* Peace (liberation from *Dukkha*, or total Enlightenment).¹²⁰ Since unskillfulness (*Akusala*) obstructs the path to achieve *nirvana*, Buddhist philosophy proposes ethical codes to subdue and tame our physical, verbal, and mental conducts in order to suppress *akusala*. Hence, *sīla* (ethical conduct) means to restrain yourself from doing harm and apply to both monastic and lay followers.

During the time of the Buddha, *sīla* happened to be in common usage for a kind of regular commitment of a person in a behavior-transforming kind of practice.¹²¹ Accordingly, *Sīla* suggests a way of good physical, verbal and mental conducts towards achieving spiritual objectives. From the basic *pnacha sīla* to great *upasampada sīla*, *Theravada* Buddhism instructs both monastic and lay followers on how to manner their conducts and practices. These instructions guide the individual on how to minimize suffering and live in less conflict with society. Hence, *sīla* is a significant basis and a starting point in the ethical transformation of a person.¹²² Accordingly, *sīla* is a code of discipline that regulates the conduct of the person in order to make sure that non-harm to the external society while achieving peace in persona. As Prof. P.D Premasiri explains, when used in the context of the Buddha's ethical teachings in a positive sense *sīla* indicates a kind of nurturing of the person in wholesome ways as a foundation for the achievement of the highest goal of the teaching.¹²³

4.5.1 *Pañca Sīla*, Five Precepts of Buddhist Morality

¹¹⁹ Archphurich Nomnian, (n.102), 115.

¹²⁰ Sa-yar Myat, *Three Pillars of Buddhism - Morality, Mental Concentration and Intuitive Wisdom*, (Satipatthana Meditation Society of Canada, 2008).

¹²¹ Prof. P.D. Premasiri, *The Concept of Sīla in Theravada Buddhist Ethics*, (Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 3 (1), 2020), 1.

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon (n.111).

¹¹⁸ Veniz Maja V. Guzman, *Achieving Karunā: Interconnectedness and Compassion through Awe*, (Conference: DLSU Arts CongressAt: Manila, Philippines, Volume: 2, 2018), 4.

Pañca Sīla, or the Five Precepts, is the fundamental ethical code for Buddhist lay followers, a commitment to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicating substances. These five precepts are a core part of Buddhist morality, helping to strengthen moral volitions and foster habitual ethical conduct for a more meaningful life.

In the *Abhisanda Sutta* (The discourse on Rewards)¹²⁴ Lord Buddha explained that, *Pañca Sīla*, is a practice which is 'original, long-standing, traditional, ancient, unadulterated, not open to suspicion, will never be open to suspicion, and are unfaulted by knowledgeable contemplatives & brahmins.'¹²⁵ This characterization suggests that the *Pañca Sīla* was not only regarded as an enduring ethical code but also as a normative standard recognized across traditions. Accordingly, the *Pañca Sīla* should be understood as a historically embedded ethical practice that reflected both the moral consciousness of the time and the universality of its application.

Lord Buddha explained the Five Precepts in the *Abhisanda Sutta* (The discourse on Rewards) as follows,

The first precept: abstains from taking of life,

*"ariyasāvako aparimāṇānaṃ sattānaṃ abhayaṃ deti. Averaṃ deti. Abyāpajjhaṃ deti. Aparimāṇānaṃ sattānaṃ abhayaṃ datvā averaṃ datvā abyāpajjhaṃ datvā aparimāṇassa abhayassa averassa abyāpajjhassa bhāgī hoti."*¹²⁶

Meaning that, 'there is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, abandoning the taking of life, abstains from taking life. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings.'¹²⁷

The second precept: abstains from stealing,

*"ariyasāvako adinnādānaṃ pahāya adinnādānā paṭivirato hoti. Adinnādānā paṭivirato bhikkhave, ariyasāvako aparimāṇānaṃ sattānaṃ abhayaṃ deti. Averaṃ deti. Abyāpajjhaṃ deti. Aparimāṇānaṃ sattānaṃ abhayaṃ datvā averaṃ datvā abyāpajjhaṃ datvā aparimāṇassa abhayassa averassa abyāpajjhassa bhāgī hoti."*¹²⁸

¹²⁴ *Tipitaka*: The Pali Canon, (n.84).

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

Which means, 'abandoning taking what is not given (stealing), the disciple of the noble ones abstains from taking what is not given. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings.'¹²⁹

The third precept: abstains from sexual misconduct,

*"ariyasāvako kāmesu micchācāraṃ pahāya kāmesu micchācārā paṭivirato hoti. Kāmesu micchācārā paṭivirato bhikkhave, ariyasāvako aparimāṇānaṃ sattānaṃ abhayaṃ deti. Averaṃ deti. Abyāpajjhaṃ deti. Aparimāṇānaṃ sattānaṃ abhayaṃ datvā averaṃ datvā abyāpajjhaṃ datvā aparimāṇassa abhayassa averassa abyāpajjhassa bhāgī hoti."*¹³⁰

Meaning that, 'abandoning sexual misconduct, the disciple of the noble ones abstains from sexual misconduct. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings.'¹³¹

The fourth precept: abstains from false speech,

*"ariyasāvako musāvādaṃ pahāya musāvādā paṭivirato hoti. Musāvādā paṭivirato bhikkhave, ariyasāvako aparimāṇānaṃ sattānaṃ abhayaṃ deti. Averaṃ deti. Abyāpajjhaṃ deti. Aparimāṇānaṃ sattānaṃ abhayaṃ datvā averaṃ datvā abyāpajjhaṃ datvā aparimāṇassa abhayassa averassa abyāpajjhassa bhāgī hoti."*¹³²

Which means, 'abandoning lying, the disciple of the noble ones abstains from lying. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings.'¹³³

The fifth precept: abstains from intoxicating substances,

*"ariyasāvako surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānaṃ pahāya surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā paṭivirato hoti. Surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā paṭivirato bhikkhave, ariyasāvako aparimāṇānaṃ sattānaṃ abhayaṃ deti. Averaṃ deti. Abyāpajjhaṃ deti. Aparimāṇānaṃ sattānaṃ abhayaṃ datvā averaṃ datvā abyāpajjhaṃ datvā aparimāṇassa abhayassa averassa abyāpajjhassa bhāgī hoti."*¹³⁴

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

¹³¹ *ibid.*

¹³² *ibid.*

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

Meaning that, 'abandoning the use of intoxicants, the disciple of the noble ones abstains from taking intoxicants. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings.'¹³⁵

Accordingly, the *Pañca Sīla*, or the Five Precepts, constitute the foundational framework of Buddhist ethical discipline, emphasizing personal responsibility in sustaining moral order within society. These precepts function as guiding principles that not only encourage virtuous conduct but also actively discourage immoral and socially disruptive behavior. By promoting self-restraint and mindfulness in everyday life, the *Pañca Sīla* serves both an individual and collective function: it nurtures personal moral integrity while simultaneously fostering social harmony and reducing harm within the broader community.

5. Conclusion

Buddhist philosophy, one of the leading schools of thought in Eastern philosophical spectrum, focuses primarily on the spiritual liberation of an individual. Hence, in general Buddhist philosophy seeks to find a way to eliminate of all forms of suffering that mankind suffers (*dukkha*). This paper presents *Theravada* Buddhism as the most conservative and authentic school of Buddhist philosophy, positioning it as the tradition that best preserves the original teachings of the *Buddha*. The analysis traces the historical development from the Buddha's life in 6th century BCE Northern India through the establishment of *Theravada* as a distinct school following the Second Buddhist Council, where doctrinal disagreements led to the first major division in Buddhism. The paper's central argument rests on *Theravada's* claim to orthodoxy based on its strict adherence to the *Pali* canon (the *Tripitaka*) and its resistance to doctrinal innovations that characterized other Buddhist schools.

The biography of *Siddhartha Gotama* establishes both historical context and spiritual paradigm. The narrative progression from privileged prince to renunciant ascetic to enlightened teacher serves to illustrate the universal human struggle with suffering while demonstrating the possibility of

liberation. The emphasis on the Buddha's egalitarian teaching approach, transcending caste and social divisions, positions Buddhism as inherently democratic in its accessibility to all seekers regardless of social status.

The substantive contribution of this paper lies in its systematic exposition of the Four Noble Truths as Buddhism's fundamental diagnostic and therapeutic framework. The First Noble Truth's analysis of *dukkha* extends beyond conventional understanding of suffering to encompass philosophical concepts of impermanence, imperfection, and the inherent unsatisfactoriness of conditioned existence. This three-fold categorization of ordinary suffering (*dukkha-dukkha*), suffering from change (*viparinama-dukkha*), and suffering inherent in conditioned states (*samkhara-dukkha*) reveals sophisticated psychological insight into the human condition. The Second Noble Truth's identification of *thanha* (craving) as the root cause demonstrates Buddhism's emphasis on psychological rather than metaphysical explanations for human distress. The threefold analysis of craving as, sensual pleasure (*kāmatanḥā*), pleasure for existence (*bhavatanḥā*), and pleasure for non-existence (*vibhavatanḥā*) shows the human motivation that encompasses to material and existential attachments.

The Third Noble Truth's presentation of *Nirvana* as the cessation of suffering through the elimination of craving challenges common misconceptions about Buddhist soteriology as nihilistic. The paper effectively presents liberation not as annihilation but as a positive state characterized by the absence of mental formations that generate suffering. The Fourth Noble Truth's exposition of the Noble Eightfold Path provides the practical methodology for achieving this liberation, demonstrating Buddhism's balance between theoretical understanding and applicable guidance.

The detailed analysis of the Eightfold Path reveals the paper's understanding of spiritual development as requiring integrated cultivation of wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline. The treatment of Right Understanding and Right Thought establishes the cognitive foundation necessary for genuine spiritual progress, while the discussion of ethical conduct through Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

demonstrates Buddhism's integration of individual spiritual development with social responsibility. The mental discipline components of Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration provide practical guidance for meditative practice while maintaining connection to the path's ethical and wisdom dimensions.

This paper further examines the principles of *ahimsa* (non-violence), *metta* (loving-kindness), and *karuna* (compassion), alongside the ethical framework embodied in the Five Precepts, to illustrate the relationship between personal moral cultivation and collective social well-being. By highlighting the social dimensions of Buddhist ethics, the study challenges portrayals of Buddhism as an exclusively individualistic tradition. Furthermore, it demonstrates the enduring relevance of Buddhist ethical principles in addressing contemporary challenges associated with violence, conflict, and social fragmentation, thereby underscoring their potential contribution to fostering peace and social harmony in the modern world.

From a methodological perspective, the paper employs extensive textual support through *Pali* sources, lending scholarly credibility while making primary Buddhist literature accessible to general readers. The systematic organization progresses logically from historical foundations through doctrinal analysis to practical application, creating a coherent narrative that serves both academic and devotional purposes. The philosophical rigor evident in examining logical relationships between concepts and their practical implications elevates the discussion beyond mere descriptive presentation.

The paper makes significant scholarly contributions through its comprehensive synthesis of historical, doctrinal, and practical elements, providing a holistic understanding that serves multiple audiences. The integration of primary textual sources with systematic philosophical analysis demonstrates both scholarly rigor and accessibility. The sustained attention to ethical principles and social responsibility effectively demonstrates Buddhism's relevance to contemporary moral discourse and practical guidance for ethical living.

The paper succeeds in presenting *Theravada* Buddhism as a sophisticated philosophical and practical system that addresses

fundamental questions about human suffering and the possibility of liberation. The systematic analysis of core doctrines, combined with historical contextualization and contemporary application, creates a comprehensive resource for understanding this important religious tradition. While maintaining scholarly objectivity, the text effectively communicates the transformative potential of Buddhist practice and its relevance to contemporary seekers of wisdom and ethical guidance. The integration of theory and practice, supported by extensive textual documentation, establishes this as a valuable contribution to both academic Buddhist studies and practical spiritual literature.

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