

Explain Buddha's Four Noble Truths. (Q-1)

Buddha's enlightenment which he is eager to share with all fellow-beings. These have come to be known as the four noble truths. They are:

1. Life in the world is full of suffering.

2. There is a cause of this suffering.

3. It is possible to stop suffering.

4. There is a path which leads to the cessation of suffering (dukkha, dukkha-samudaya, dukkha-nirodha, dukkha-nirodha-marga.)

The First Noble Truth about Suffering — The sights

of suffering which upset the mind of young Siddhārtha were of disease, old age and death. But to the enlightened mind of Buddha not simply these, but the very of essential conditions of life, human and sub-human appeared, without exception, to be fraught with misery. Birth, old age, disease, death, sorrow, grief, wish, despair, in short, all that is born of attachment, is misery. In emphasizing the first noble truth Buddha had the support of all important Indian thinkers. The Carvaka materialist would, of course, take exception to Buddha's wholesale condemnation of life in the world, and point out the different sources of pleasure that exist in life along with those of pain. But Buddha and many other Indian thinkers would reply that worldly pleasures appear at such only to short-sighted people. Their transiency, the pains felt on their loss and the fears felt lest they should be lost, and other evil consequences, make pleasures lose their charm and turn into positive sources of fear and

2) The Second

suffering: The chain of Twelve

the fact of suffering is recognized by all Indian thinkers, the diagnosis of this malady is not always unanimous. The origin of life's evil is explained by Buddha in the light of his special conception of natural causation. According to it, nothing is unconditional; the existence of everything depends on some conditions. As the very existence of every event depends on some conditions, there must be something which being there all misery comes into existence.

Life's own suffering is there, says Buddha, because there is birth. If a man were not born, he would not have been subject to these miserable states. Birth again has its condition, it is the will to become, the force of the blind tendency or predisposition to be born, which causes our birth.

But what is the cause of this tendency? Our mental clinging to grasping the objects of the world is the condition responsible for our desire to be born. This clinging again is due to our thirst or craving to enjoy objects — sights, sounds etc.

But wherefrom does this desire originate? We would not have any desire for objects had we not tasted or experienced them before. Previous sense-experience, tinged with some pleasant feelings, is therefore the cause of our thirst or craving. But sense-experience could not arise but for contact i.e. of contact of sense-organs with

objects. This contact again would not have had
there not been the six organs of cognition,
the five senses and mind. These six
again depend for their existence on the
mind-body organism which constitutes the
perceptible being of man. But this organism
could not develop in the mother's womb and
come into existence, if it were dead or
devoid of consciousness. But the consciousness
that descends into the embryo in the mother's
womb is only the effect of the impressions of
our past existence. The impressions which
make for rebirth are due to ignorance
about truth. Ignorance, therefore, is the
root cause of impressions or tendencies
that cause rebirth.

The Third Noble Truth about Cessation of

Suffering — The third noble truth that there
is cessation of suffering follows from the
second truth that misery depends on some
conditions. If these conditions are removed,
misery would cease. But we should try
to understand clearly the exact nature of
the state called cessation of misery.

Liberation from misery is a
state attainable here in this very life,
if certain conditions are fulfilled. When
the perfect control of passion and constant
contemplation of truth lead a person through
the four stages of concentration to perfect
wisdom, he is no longer under the
sway of worldly attachment. He has
broken the fetters that bound him to the

world. He is, therefore, free, liberated.
He is said then to have become as Asha-
a venerable person. The state is more
popularly known now as nirvana - the
extinction of passions, and therefore, also
of misery.
It is true that for the attainment
of perfect, clear and steady knowledge of
the fourfold truth one has to withdraw
all his attention from outside and even
from other ideas within, and concentrate
it wholly on repeated reasoning and
contemplation of the truth in all these
aspects. But once wisdom has been permanently
obtained, through concentrated thought, the
liberated person should never again
withdraw from active life. Liberation then
was not incompatible with activity in the
life of the founder himself.

There are two kinds of action,
one that is done under the influence of
attachment, hatred, infatuation, another
that is done without these. It is only
the first that strengthens our desire to
cling to the world and generates the
seeds of karma causing rebirth. The
second kind of action, done with perfect
insight into the real nature of the universe
and without attachment, does not create a
karma, introducing rebirth. The difference
between the two kinds of karma Buddha
points out, is like that between the
sowing of ordinary productive seeds and the

sowing of seeds which have been fried and made barren.

The etymological meaning of 'nirvana' is 'blown out'. The metaphor of a 'blown out light' is there, and the liberated one is sometimes compared to it depending on such etymological meaning and the negative description of nirvana as the absence of all physical and mental states known to us, some interpreters of Buddhism — Buddhist and non-Buddhist have explained nirvana as complete cessation of existence. But against this view, we have to remember, first, that if nirvana or liberation be extinction of all existence, then Buddha cannot be said to have been liberated till he died; his attainment of perfect wisdom and freedom for which we have his own words, turns then into a myth. It is difficult to hold, therefore, that nirvana as taught ~~to~~ by Buddha meant cessation of all existence. Secondly, we are to remember that though nirvana, according to Buddha stops rebirth and therefore, means the extinction of all misery and of the conditions that cause future existence in this world after death, it does not mean necessarily that after death the liberated saint does not continue in any form. This last point, as we ~~we~~ mentioned previously, is one of the ten points on which Buddha repeatedly refused to express any opinion.

The important question that arises here then is: If Buddha is not explicit about the fate of a liberated being after

and positive. Nirvana is a state
that rebirth whose conditions have been
destroyed, will not occur. Nirvana also
positively means that one who has attained
it enjoys perfect peace even in this life
so long as he lives after enlightenment.
It is therefore said to be beyond worldly
pleasures and pains. We can understand
this because all of us have experienced
at least of temporary feelings of relief from
some pain or other, such as freedom from
disease, debt, slavery, imprisonment. Besides
the advantages of nirvana can be enjoyed
in part, even before it has been obtained,
by the partial fulfilment of its conditions.

The fourth Noble Truth about the Path to Liberation — The fourth noble truth lays
down that there is a path which Buddha
followed and others can similarly follow —
to reach a state free from misery. The
path recommended by Buddha consists of
eight steps or rules and is, therefore, called
the eight-fold noble path. This ~~path~~ gives
in a nutshell the essentials of Buddha
Dharma. This path is open to all, monks
as well as laymen. The noble path consists
in the acquisition of the following eight
good things: — Right views, Right resolve,
Right speech, Right conduct, Right direction,
Right effort, Right mindfulness, Right
concentration.