THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The Four Noble Truths explain the foundation, path and goal. They show why it makes sense to strive for liberation and enlightenment.

With his enlightenment, Buddha realized insight into the nature of mind. Enlightenment is a permanent state of unshakable fearlessness, supreme joy, and active compassion for all living beings. Seven weeks after his enlightenment, Buddha first taught the "Four Noble Truths."

Buddha saw how, on a relative level, happiness and suffering alternate in the lives of beings. Although everyone seeks lasting fulfillment, no one succeeds in attaining it. At the same time, from an absolute point of view, he saw that all are already potential Buddhas. "They are all Buddhas, yet they do not know it." Out of ignorance, beings experience suffering, even though the nature of their mind is timeless supreme joy.

In the explanations that followed, he bridged the gap from showing the limitations of general experience to liberation and enlightenment. Buddha's core statements are:

1. THERE IS SUFFERING
Buddha describes three types of suffering, which are experienced to a greater or lesser degree depending on consciousness:
a. **Suffering of suffering**: old age, sickness, and death: if we identify with the body, we also consider old age, sickness, and death to be real, and thus suffering arises.
b. **Suffering of impermanence**: It is the cause of sorrowful experiences when one is attached to conditional happiness.
c. **Suffering of conditionality**: As the most subtle form of suffering, it expresses itself, among other things, in the experience that our mind is veiled and we do not perceive things as they really are. We have no control over our lives and are thus trapped in the cycle of conditional existence.

In absolute terms, steadfastness, joy and love are the spontaneous expression of the mind when it is free from limitations. Compared to this, even the greatest conditional happiness is limited and imbued with a seed of sorrow, since conditional things change and are impermanent.

2. THERE IS A CAUSE OF SUFFERING
As the cause of suffering, Buddha identifies basic ignorance. It is the inability of the unenlightened mind to recognize itself. This is because it works like an eye: it perceives everything "outside" without seeing itself. Thus, every experience is accompanied by a fundamental sense of separation (duality).
The experiencing consciousness experiences itself as "I" (subject), the experienced becomes "you" or something else (object). Although one finds only a stream of thoughts, feelings and impressions that is constantly changing, this idea of an "I" becomes the basis of all experience (ego illusion).

From this dualistic view arises attachment to pleasant things, aversion to unpleasant things, and confusion. From attachment in turn arises avarice, from aversion jealousy and from stupidity pride. These are the so-called six disturbing emotions. If you take them seriously, they lead to sorrowful actions and to further disturbances and suffering for others and yourself. If these causes come back to you as unpleasant effects, you usually think it is the fault of others, and you set negative things in motion again. (> see Karma - Cause & Effect)

3. THERE IS AN END TO SUFFERING
As a goal Buddha shows liberation and enlightenment. In liberation (small nirvana), the idea of a truly existing "I" is recognized as deceptive. Conflicting feelings come to rest, insight and clarity and a state of being free from all limitations and constraints arise.

Enlightenment (great nirvana) is the full experience of the nature of mind: the veils of ignorance are removed and all the inherent qualities of mind are fully developed. For by its absolute nature, consciousness is omniscient fearless space, and its experience supreme joy. From each of its actions "non-separating compassion" expresses itself, loving like the sun, which shines impartially on everything.

4. THERE IS A WAY TO END SUFFERING
This way consists in the application of the timeless

methods that Buddha gave. An appropriate view, meditation and behavior are mutually dependent and develop all the qualities of body, speech and mind.

In the 45 years of his teaching, Buddha gave 84,000 teachings that allowed his friends and disciples, according to their ability, to make every moment of life a step on the path to liberation and enlightenment.
In Theravada, he taught about cause and effect (karma), that we ourselves create our lives, and how, through developing mindfulness, we can use the body, speech, and mind to bring happiness to others and ourselves (see The Noble Eightfold Path).
In the Great Way, he taught the importance of compassion and wisdom as a liberating attitude and view (see Lojong Mind Training).
In the Diamond Way, he showed them meditations through which they could powerfully identify with the non-conditioned qualities of their own minds.