

# Four Noble Truths of Buddhism: Cattari Ariyasaccani

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*Abstract: Definitions of Four Noble Truths in Oxford Dictionaries, Encyclopedia Britannica and Wikipedia were compared in my draft paper: Four Noble Truths: The four central beliefs containing the essence of Buddhist teaching. The comparison pointed out that the definitions differ. They were downloaded in June 2016. Oxford Dictionaries and Wikipedia have since revised its definitions. This paper examines the new definitions in OD and Wikipedia.*

The definitions of Four Noble Truths (four noble truths) quoted in my earlier paper are as follows:

### **Oxford Dictionaries**

Definition of four noble truths in English:

plural noun

The four central beliefs containing the essence of Buddhist teaching. See Buddhism.

The definition quoted above refers to Buddhism;  
The definition of Buddhism was:

Definition of Buddhism in English:

A widespread Asian religion or philosophy, founded by Siddhartha Gautama in NE India in the 5th century bc.

Buddhism has no god, and gives a central role to the doctrine of karma. The 'four noble truths' of Buddhism state that all existence is suffering, that the cause of suffering is desire, that freedom from suffering is nirvana, and that this is attained through the 'eightfold path' of ethical conduct, wisdom, and mental discipline (including meditation). There are two major traditions, Theravada and Mahayana

**Encyclopedia Britannica**

The definition of Four Noble Truths in the Encyclopedia Britannica is quoted below:

Four Noble Truths

BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

WRITTEN BY:

Donald S. Lopez

Alternative Titles: Chattari-ariya-saccani, Chatvari-arya-satyani

Four Noble Truths, Pali Chattari-ariya-saccani, Sanskrit Chatvari-arya-satyani, one of the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism, said to have been set forth by the Buddha, the founder of the religion, in his first sermon, which he gave after his

enlightenment. Although the term Four Noble Truths is well known in English, it is a misleading translation of the Pali term Chattari-ariya-saccani (Sanskrit: Chatvari-arya-satyani), because noble (Pali: ariya; Sanskrit: arya) refers not to the truths themselves but to those who understand them. A more accurate rendering, therefore, might be “four truths for the [spiritually] noble”; they are four facts that ... (100 of 407 words)

## **Wikipedia**

In my paper, I quoted the following definition of Four Noble Truths from Wikipedia:

The Four Noble Truths (Sanskrit: catvāri āryasatyāni; Pali: cattāri ariyasaccāni) are "the truths of the Noble Ones," which express the basic orientation of Buddhism: this worldly existence is fundamentally unsatisfactory, but there is a path to liberation from repeated worldly existence.

According to this definitions Four Noble Truths is a reference to Sanskrit catvāri āryasatyāni and Pali cattāri ariyasaccāni (English: Cattari Ariyasaccani). Wikipedia seems to have adapted the definition from Encyclopedia Britannica; “four truths for the [spiritually] noble” has become "the truths of the Noble Ones,".

## New Definitions of Four Noble Truths

The OD and Wikipedia have recently introduced new definitions for 'four noble truths'.

### OD new definition

The OD definition is given below:

Definition of four noble truths in English:

four noble truths

PLURAL NOUN

The four central beliefs containing the essence of Buddhist teaching.

See Buddhism

The example sentences illustrating the meanings given to 'four noble truths' are given below:

‘The Buddha's discovery was elaborated in the four noble truths.’

‘Whilst seated beneath the Bodhi tree the Buddha experienced the four noble truths.’

‘It is critical to realize that none of the four noble truths departs from the truth of suffering and that all are, in a sense, contained in the first.’



‘Our enlightened nature is covered by obscurations that can gradually be removed, that is the essence of the teaching of the four noble truths.’

‘But looking at things in terms of the four noble truths allows you to solve the whole problem of suffering.’

‘The four noble truths thus represent an alternative and more realistic belief system than the one we typically carry around with us.’

‘Shakyamuni Buddha's first disciples became liberated when they heard him expound the four noble truths.’

‘These are what people on Earth call the four noble truths.’

‘The four noble truths and the teachings of loving-kindness and compassion always apply.’

‘While a few key concepts (like the four noble truths, with their simultaneously gloomy and hopeful view of human nature) have always held firm, methods, philosophies and interpretations have differed widely.’

It is clear from the above example sentences that 'four noble truths' mean different things to different people. The definition directs one to the entry on

Buddhism (see Buddhism). The definition of Buddhism is quoted below:

Definition of Buddhism in English:

Buddhism

NOUN

[MASS NOUN] A widespread Asian religion or philosophy, founded by Siddhartha Gautama in NE India in the 5th century bc.

→ four noble truths

The example sentences are quoted below:

‘This seems to be the point of convergence between Christianity and Buddhism.’

‘Ergo, Buddhism would have a western flavour in the west while keeping to the teachings of the Buddha.’

‘Falun Gong is a mixture of Buddhism, Taoism and meditation and breathing exercises.’

‘Much of Kendo's philosophy is drawn from Zen and from Buddhism and from Shintoism.’

‘Since its beginnings, the Hindu religion in Bali has been closely related to Buddhism.’

‘He sees this balance most clearly in the Eastern religions, particularly Buddhism and Hinduism.’

‘This awakening is the crucial watershed in the Buddha's life and the key reference point for Buddhism.’

‘The study of Buddhism over the past century or so has resembled the encounter of the blind men and the elephant in many ways.’

‘This all changed when Hsiao gained a spiritual interest in Buddhism a decade ago.’

‘She wrote about her adventures and what she learned about Buddhism and the mysteries of Tibet.’

‘The Qianlong Emperor surpassed his predecessors as a patron of Buddhism and Buddhist art.’

‘Depending on the sect of Buddhism, the word bodhisattva has essentially two meanings.’

‘Place this religious psychology alongside Buddhism, with its fleeing of the world.’

‘For about a millennium after the death of the Buddha, Buddhism flourished in India.’

‘The goal of Buddhism is nirvana, a transcendence of the confines of mind and body.’

‘The practice of Dharma refers to following Buddhism's Eightfold Path to Enlightenment.’

‘Although Buddhism originated in India it now flourishes predominantly in other parts of Asia.’

‘My own interest has been in the actual practice of Buddhism in Buddhist lands today.’

‘Zen is the common name for this branch of Buddhism in Japanese as well as in English.’

‘So we were very eager to practice Buddhism in such a way that we could bring it into society.’

Above examples show that Buddhism means different things to different people. OD has given the etic view of Buddhism and it has refrained from giving any interpretations of Buddhism.

## **Encyclopedia Britannica**

There is no change in the definition of Encyclopedia Britannica.

## Wikipedia

Wikipedia's definition, downloaded on 9/30/2016 is given below<sup>1</sup>:

The Four Noble Truths (Sanskrit: catvāri āryasatyāni; Pali: cattāri ariyasaccāni) are "the truths of the Noble Ones,"[1] the truths or realities which are understood by the "worthy ones"[web 1] who have attained Nirvana.[2][web 1]The truths are dukkha, the arising of dukkha, the cessation of dukkha, and the path leading to the cessation of dukkha.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four\\_Noble\\_Truths](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Noble_Truths). Downloaded on 9/30/2016



The four truths express the basic orientation of Buddhism: we crave and cling to impermanent states and things, which is dukkha,[3] "incapable of satisfying"[web 2] and painful.[4][5] This keeps us caught in samsara, the endless cycle of repeated rebirth, dukkha and dying again. [note 1] But there is a way to reach real happiness[11] [note 2] and to end this cycle, namely following the eightfold path. [note 3] The meaning of the truths is as follows:[23][16][web 3]

There are significant differences between the two definitions. The text "The Four Noble Truths (Sanskrit:

catvāri āryasatyāni; Pali: cattāri ariyasaccāni) are "the truths of the Noble Ones," has not changed.

However, the text "which express the basic orientation of Buddhism: this worldly existence is fundamentally unsatisfactory, but there is a path to liberation from repeated worldly existence" has been replaced by "the truths or realities which are understood by the "worthy ones who have attained Nirvana. The truths are dukkha, the arising of dukkha, the cessation of dukkha, and the path leading to the cessation of dukkha. This is Wikipedia's interpretation of Four Noble Truths of Buddhism.

Wikipedia gives four references for its definition: [1], [Web 1], [2]. The first is 'Williams 2002, p. 41'. The source is: Williams, Paul (2002), Buddhist Thought (Kindle ed.), Taylor & Francis.

According to Wikipedia, 'Williams was a Buddhist himself for many years but has since converted to Roman Catholicism, an experience he wrote about in his book The Unexpected Way[1][2] and in an article, "On converting from Buddhism to Catholicism – One convert's story." [3][4]'. This certainly is a biased view of Four Noble Truths by a catholic philosopher. It certainly is not the meaning of Cattari Ariyasaccani.

Reference 'Web 1' is

Arhat

BUDDHISM

WRITTEN BY:

The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica

Alternative Titles: arahant, rakan

Arhat, ( Sanskrit: “one who is worthy”) , Pali arahant, in Buddhism, a perfected person, one who has gained insight into the true nature of existence and has achieved nirvana (spiritual enlightenment). The arhat, having freed himself from the bonds of desire, will not be reborn.

The state of an arhat is considered in the Theravada tradition to be the proper goal of a Buddhist. Four stages of attainment are described in Pali texts: (1) the state of the “stream-enterer”—i.e., a convert (sotapanna)—achieved by overcoming false beliefs and doubts regarding the Buddha, the teaching (dhamma), and the order (sangha ... (100 of 309 words)

Wikipedia assumes that Arhat and Ariya are the same. It appears that Arhat and Ariya are not the same. We shall therefore refer to the dictionary interpretations of Cattari Ariysaccani.

## Dictionary Interpretations of Cattari Ariyasaccani.

Cattari Ariyasaccani consists of the two canonical words, *cattāri* and *ariyasaccāni*.

### PED

PED does not have entries for *cattāri* and *ariyasaccāni*. However, PED has an entry Catur. It is quoted below:

Catur, catu° in composition [Vedic catvārah (m.)

cat- vāri (nt.) fr. \*q<sub>u</sub>etuor, \*q<sub>u</sub>etur=Gr. te/ttares

(hom. pi/sures), Lat. quattuor, Goth. fidwōr, Ohg.

fior, Ags fēower, E. four; catasras (f.) fr. \*qu(e)tru, cp. tistras. Also as adv. catur fr. \*quetrus=Lat. quater & quadru°] base of numeral four; 1. As num. adj. nom. & acc. m. cattāro (Dh 109; J iii.51) and caturo (Sn 84, 188), f. catasso (Sn 1122), nt. cattāri (Sn. 227); gen. m. catunnaṇ (Sn p. 102), [f. catassannaṇ]; instr. catubbhi (Sn 229), catūhi (Sn 231) & catuhi; loc. catūsu (J i.262) & catusu. -- 2. As num. adv., catu° catur° in cpds. catuddasa (14), also through elision & reduction cuddasa PvA 55, 283, etc., cp. also cātuddasī. Catuvīsati (24) Sn 457; catusaṭṭhi (64) J i.50; ii.193; PvA 74; caturāsīti (84) usually with vassa -- sahaṣṣāni J i.137; ii.311;

Pv iv.77; DhA ii.58; PvA 9, 31, 254, etc. See also cattāriṣa (40).

The word Cattari (cattāri) is not even mentioned.

PED has a long article on Ariya. Portions relevant are quoted below:

Ariya

Ariya (adj. -- n.) [Vedic ārya, of uncertain etym.

The other Pāli forms are ayira & ayya] 1. (racial)

Aryan D ii.87. <-> 2. (social) noble, distinguished, of

high birth. -- 3. (ethical) in accord with the

customs and ideals of the Aryan clans, held in

esteem by Aryans, generally approved. Hence:



right, good, ideal. [The early Buddhists had no such ideas as we cover with the words Buddhist and Indian. Ariya does not exactly mean either. But it often comes very near to what they would have considered the best in each].

anariya (adj. & n.) not Ariyan, ignoble, undignified, low, common, uncultured

1. -- sacca, a standard truth, an established fact,

When the commentators, many centuries afterwards, began to write Pali in S. India & Ceylon, far from the ancient seat of the Aryan clans, the

racial sense of the word ariya was scarcely, if at all, present to their minds. Dhammapāla especially was probably a non -- Aryan, and certainly lived in a Dravidian environment. The then current similar popular etmologies of ariya and arahant(cp. next article) also assisted the confusion in their minds. They sometimes therefore erroneously identify the two words and explain Aryans as meaning Arahants (DhA i.230; SnA 537; PvA 60). In other ways also they misrepresented the old texts by ignoring the racial force of the word. Thus at J v.48 the text, speaking of a hunter belonging to one of the aboriginal

tribes, calls himanariya -- r $\bar{u}$ pa. The C. explains this as "shameless", but what the text has, is simply that he looked like a non -- Aryan. (cp 'frank' in English).

PED is not at all certain of the meaning of ariya. There is no relationship between the meanings given to Ariyasacca and Ariya. PED however, calls Ariyasacca, a standard truth, an established fact. Here Ariya has become Standard and Established. There are no 'standard truths' or 'established facts'. There are only truths and facts.

PED has an entry on Arahant:

Arahant (adj. -- n.) [Vedic arhant, ppr. of arhati (see arahati), meaning deserving, worthy]. Before Buddhism used as honorific title of high officials like the English ' His Worship ' ; at the rise of Buddhism applied popularly to all ascetics (Dial. iii.3 -- 6). Adopted by the Buddhists as t. t. for one who has attained the Summum Bonum of religious aspiration (Nibbāna).

Arahant and Ariya have two different meanings. The Wikipedia assumption as far as that a Noble one is an Arhat is not acceptable.

**Ariyasacca, a standard truth, an established fact,**

OD defines truth as follows:

Definition of truth in English:

truth

NOUN

1[MASS NOUN] The quality or state of being true.

There is no standard 'quality or state of being true'.

OD defines fact as follows:

Definition of fact in English:

NOUN

1A thing that is known or proved to be true.

This most probably is the reason why OD defines 'four noble truths' as the 'four central beliefs'. OD definition, as far as Buddhist philosophy is concerned is a valid meaning of 'four noble truths'.

## Childers

Childers has an entry 'Ariyasaccaṃ'.

ARIYASACCAṂ, Sublime truth. The cattāri ariyasaccāni, or "four great truths," are four theses upon which the whole doctrine of Buddha is based; they are, dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ, dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ, dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ,

dukkhanirodhagāmini paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ,

"suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, the path leading to the cessation of suffering." They are also sometimes briefly expressed thus, dukkhaṃ, samudayo, nirodho, maggo. Stated in full the four truths are as follows:- Firstly, that existence is suffering; secondly; secondly, that human passion (taṇhā, desire) is the cause of continued existence; thirdly, that by the destruction of human passion existence may be brought to an end; fourthly, that by a life of holiness the destruction of human passion may be attained. The Magga or Paṭipadā

of the last truth is the Ariyo Aṭṭhaṅgiko Maggo (see Aṭṭhaṅgiko).

ARIYAPUGGALO, Holy personage, i.e. one who is in one of the four Paths or four Fruitions, see Ariyo.

The eight Ariyapuggalas are, Sotapattimaggaṭṭho,  
Sotapattiphalaṭṭho, Sakadāgāminimaggaṭṭho,  
Sakadāgāmiphalaṭṭho, Anāgāmīmaggaṭṭho,  
Anāgāmiphalaṭṭho, Arahattamaggaṭṭho,  
Arahattaphalaṭṭho.

Above definition is confirmed in the Buddhist Dictionary of Nyantiloka



Ariya-puggala: or simply Ariya: Noble Ones, noble persons:

The 8, Ariya = Noble Ones are those who have realized one of the 8 stages of Nobility, i.e. the 4 supra-mundane paths magga and the 4 supra-mundane fruitions phala of these paths. There are thus these 4 pairs:

A1. The one realizing the path of Stream-winning sotāpatti-magga.

A2. The one realizing the fruition of Stream-winning sotāpatti-phala.

A3. The one realizing the path of Once-return  
sakad**ā**g**ā**mi-magga.

A4. The one realizing the fruition of Once-return  
sakad**ā**g**ā**mi-phala.

A5. The one realizing the path of Non-return  
an**ā**g**ā**mi-magga.

A6. The one realizing the fruition of Non-return  
an**ā**g**ā**mi-phala.

A7. The one realizing the path of Nobility arahatta-  
magga.

A8. The one realizing the fruition of Nobility  
arahatta-phala.

Summed up, there are 4 noble individuals ariya-  
puggala:

1: The Stream-winner Sotāpanna,

2: The Once-Returner Sakadāgāmi,

3: The Non-Returner Anāgāmi,

4: The Worthy One Arahāt.

It is clear that the definition of Wikipedia is not a  
translation of Pali Cattāri Ariyasaccāni. It is an  
interpretation.

Dayawansa Chandra Wijeratna