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To this day, in the Buddhist calendar we celebrate the Wheel Turning Day, which signifies the Buddha giving his first teaching on the Four Noble Truths.

Showing the significance of the Buddha asserting the truth of suffering as the first of the four noble truths is explained in two categories - 1) stating the doubts and 2) the response.

**Stating the Doubt:** The doubt is raised in relation to the sequence of the presentation of the Four Noble Truths. In the sutras, the Truth of Suffering is explained first, followed by the Truth of Origination. However, in terms of the actual cause and effect sequence, the Origination should be explained first because the Truth of Origination is the cause for the Truth of Suffering. So the doubt which is raised here is this: if the natural cause and effect sequence is in that order, why then did the Buddha teach the Truth of Suffering first, followed by the Truth of Origination?

What is being explained here in the text is the reason why the Buddha taught in the reverse sequence, rather than in the cause and effect sequence of the Four Noble Truths. As the Buddha said in the sutras, "Monks this is the Noble Truth of Suffering, this is the Noble Truth of Origin." In the first line, 'this' refers to the contaminated aggregates as the Truth of Suffering.

In the second line where the Buddha says 'this is the Noble Truth of Origin', 'this' refers to the delusions, and the actions which follow the delusions. The karma created under the influence of the delusions is the Truth of Origination.

The doubt has been presented, now the answer is presented as the second subdivision in the category. The answer itself is presented in two subdivisions, 1) a brief presentation and 2) an extensive explanation.

**The brief presentation** explains that the Buddha reversed the sequence of cause and effect because the reversal is vital for our practice, and has a great significance for the practice.

**The extensive explanation** follows. There is a reason why the Buddha first taught the Truth of Suffering followed by the Truth of Origination then the Truth of Cessation followed by the Truth of the Path. If the disciples fail to develop a proper determination to liberate themselves from cyclic existence first, then they will sever the very root of liberation. The disciples must first develop a determination to be free from cyclic existence, otherwise liberation will not occur.

If the disciples from their own side did not develop a strong determination to be free from cyclic existence, and if the Buddha were to teach about liberation and so forth, then the teachings would be of no use to the disciples, and could not really benefit them.

What can also be understood from this explanation is reflecting on how the Buddha is extremely skilful in presenting the teaching, and how the Buddha presented the teaching in accordance with the mental disposition or capacity of the listeners.

In the beginning, the darkness of ignorance engulfed disciples. They mistook the pleasures of cyclic existence - which are in fact suffering - for happiness.

Ignorance influences how we see things. Pleasures which are in reality suffering are seen as a state of happiness. Being attracted to the sensual pleasures leads us to continuously circle in cyclic existence (because we see it as a pleasurable state), and this prevents us from developing a strong determination to be free from cyclic existence. The text quotes from *The Four Hundred Stanzas*: 'Fool there is no end to this ocean of suffering, why are you who are caught up in it not afraid?'

The cycle of existence is analogous to a great ocean: as long as we see it as being a pleasurable state, there is no end to this ocean of suffering. So when we have a glimpse of what it is like when we are caught in that, how could we not be afraid? We should be afraid; we should have fear of being caught in such a cycle, which is like a great ocean of suffering.

By saying that cyclic existence is not happiness but suffering, the Buddha is implying that there are many sufferings in cyclic existence. The Buddha explained the many forms of suffering and led his disciples to become disenchanted with cyclic existence and to recognise it as suffering. Recognising suffering is a necessary precondition, so that is why the Buddha explained the Truth of Suffering first.

Once you recognise suffering, and see yourself submerged in an ocean of suffering, then you will develop the wish to be liberated from the suffering and to counteract it. Without counteracting its causes, suffering itself cannot cease. By investigating the cause of suffering, you will come to understand its true origin; and so consequently the Buddha spoke about the Truth of Origin next.

The explanation in the text is actually a means for us to contemplate the Four Noble Truths through analytical meditation. It is called analytical meditation because you go through a process of analysing the teaching as explained to see whether it accords with reality or not. Even though it is called an analytic meditation, we must remember that analytic meditation must be done with a single-pointed mind. The mind should not be distracted in every direction; we must keep the mind focused on the topic of what we are meditating and analysing. When we contemplate how we are caught in the oceans of suffering, we actually contemplate how we are caught in the nature of suffering. The more we contemplate about being in the nature of suffering from the different reasons that are presented in the teachings, the more we will come to a point where we strongly develop a wish to be free from the suffering.

To use an analogy of a patient and their illness, when someone realises they have encountered a particular illness, they will then develop the natural wish to be free from that illness. Likewise when we contemplate how we are in the nature of suffering, we will begin to develop the wish to be free from the suffering. This wish will lead us into investigating what the causes of the suffering are, and lead to the origin of suffering.

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In investigating the analytical process, when we come to understand the suffering of what we are experiencing, we come to the origination. When we contemplate the karma and the activities we engage in that lead us into the cycle of suffering, we look into what is causing us to act like that. What is influencing those actions is the delusions within our mind. When we investigate our actions further according to the teachings, we come to realise that the delusions within ourselves, such as attachment and anger, arise from ignorance. The fundamental ignorance is the misconception of grasping at an inherently existent self. We come to realise, that is the root cause of all our suffering. We then investigate further to see whether that can be overcome or not, and in our analytical process we come to realise that grasping to an inherently existent self is a misconception because the object of that perception does not exist in that way.

The object of grasping is an inherently existent self, and there is no inherently existent self in a person or any other phenomenon. We come to realise that because the object of that misconception does not exist it is possible to eliminate the misconception itself. There is no real solid foundation or basis for that mind to remain, because what it perceives does not exist at all. The object itself does not exist, thus the mind that sees the object is a misconception and has no solid foundation. We come to realise that because there is no solid foundation or basis for that mind it can be eliminated. Thus we come to understand that it is possible to overcome the misconceptions and cease the causes for suffering.

When we realise that overcoming that misconception means that it is possible for the causes for suffering to cease, that state of being completely free from suffering and its causes, is what we call cessation, the Third Noble Truth. That is followed by the Fourth Noble Truth which is the Truth of the Path.

To understand that sequence again in relation to the analogy of a sick person: when a person comes to experience an illness and experiences the symptoms of that sickness, that is analogous to the Truth of Suffering. When a patient comes to a point of not being able to bear the sickness any more and wants to find a cure for it, they will want to see a doctor, The doctor will diagnose what the cause of the sickness is by using a diagnostic process. When the investigations are done and the causes of the sickness are found, the doctor will then be able to prescribe the possible cure. The cause of the sickness is analogous to the Origination of Suffering, and that there is a cure to the sickness is analogous to the Cessation of Suffering, the third Noble Truth. The doctor prescribing the medication as a cure to the suffering is analogous to the Fourth Noble Truth, the Truth of the Path. A sick person wishing to find a cure and taking the medication is similar to the process of the Four Noble Truths.

Before we conclude the session for this evening, we can again engage in a few moments of meditation. This time as we bring our mind inwards from the distractions, we keep our mind focused on the recitation of the mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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