

Buddhism – The Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths:

- Types & causes of suffering
- Three Poisons
- Interpretations of nirvana, samsara & enlightenment
- The Eightfold Path (Three-Fold Way – ethics, meditation, wisdom)

Key Quotes:

- ‘Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts suffering follows him like the wheel that follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox.’ Dhammapada 1
- ‘Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is a law eternal.’ Dhammapada 5

Key Concepts:

Anicca	the impermanent nature of all things	Anatta	no independent or permanent self
Dukkha	suffering/unsatisfactoriness	(S)kandhas	the 5 elements that make up a human being
Samatha	calmness or breathing meditation	Pratitya	everything ‘exists’ because of other things
Mettabhavana	the development of loving kindness, usually through meditation	Vipassana	‘insight’ meditation to see the true nature of things

Key Beliefs and Teachings:

Suffering	Buddha taught that life involves suffering (dukkha) and that suffering is caused by craving (tanha). He also taught that it is possible to stop suffering by stopping craving or attachment (nirodha) and that the way to do this is by following the Middle Way (magga). For Buddhists, the best way to live the Middle Way is by following the Noble Eightfold Path . There are 3 main types of dukkha (1) the suffering of physical and emotional pain, (2) the suffering caused by life constantly changing (anicca), (3) the suffering that is unavoidable (e.g. growing old or dying) and is the result of people’s actions (e.g. anger or selfishness).
Three Poisons	Greed, hatred and ignorance lead to more suffering (dukkha) because everything is connected (pratitya samutpada). Buddha taught that overcoming greed, hatred and ignorance will stop suffering.
Nirvana	This is the state of peace and joy achieved when craving and desire have been extinguished. The Theravadin goal is to become an arhat (enlightened being) and reach their own nirvana. A Mahayanist would aim to become a bodhisattva and help other people to attain nirvana.
Samsara	The cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth . Buddhists believe that this cycle continues when people have unresolved issues or too much negative karma . An enlightened being can escape the cycle of samsara when they die (known as parinirvana – final/complete nirvana). Buddha attained parinirvana when he died.
Enlightenment	This is a state of inner freedom and happiness which comes from within a person. Theravada Buddhists think that an enlightened person (arhat) knows how to end all dukkha and escape samsara . Mahayana Buddhists think that a bodhisattva seeks enlightenment for the sake of all beings.
The Eightfold Path (magga)	Made up of three parts: wisdom, ethics, and meditation , (sometimes known as The Three-Fold Way). Buddhists aim to attain nirvana by perfecting these qualities. Wisdom (prajna) is studying the Dharma to achieve right understanding and having the right intention to follow the Path. Ethics (sila) points out the positive moral qualities needed: right speech, right action and right livelihood . Meditation (samadhi) encourages Buddhists to have the right effort in order to develop right mindfulness and right concentration .

Exam Practice:

- Describe the Three-Fold Way in Buddhism. (5)
- Explain Buddhist teachings about nirvana. (8)
- “The main purpose of Buddhism is to stop human suffering.” To what extent do you agree with this statement? (15)
- “All Buddhists have the same understanding of Enlightenment.” To what extent do you agree with this statement? (15)

Key Connections:

How do teachings about the Four Noble Truths relate to other areas of your study?

Three Marks of Existence, karma, rebirth, arhat, bodhisattva, relationships, Precepts, value of human life, beliefs about death and afterlife, crime and punishment, good, evil and suffering, issues of wealth & poverty