

How the Two Truths Relate to the Four Noble Truths

This article is in response to the question of how the Two Truths (relative and absolute) relate to the Four Noble Truths.

The Two Truths lead us to the wisdom of seeing the very truth or nature of items and ideas – they point out *the way things and events really are*. By seeing how concepts and objects exist, we can gradually recognize our delusions more and more, and comprehend the suffering they cause. This leads us to fulfil the task of understanding suffering itself (the first Noble Truth).

To identify and understand our delusions, and then to consciously eliminate them, as well as making effort to avoid wrong actions, will begin to automatically destroy two primary *causes of suffering and hardship* – namely, the delusions and wrong actions. This involves the task of abandoning the origin of suffering (the second Noble Truth) and the task of developing oneself along the revealed eightfold path to end suffering (the fourth Noble Truth).

As we continue this process, it will allow us to progressively and ultimately reach the state of liberation – that is, the task of the realization of cessation (the third Noble Truth).

A specific example follows. The Two Truths show the delusion or ignorance of believing that there is an inherently existing, or controlling, "self" or "me". Regarding this concept of "self", in Dharmakirti's *Elucidation of Valid Cognition*, it states that:

When there is self, one conceives of other,
And from self and other come clinging and aggression.
Becoming thoroughly enmeshed in these factors
Brings about every problem there is.

This is a profound insight – the fact that the concept of "self" *brings about every problem there is*. The irony of this never ceases to amaze me! The more we think of ourselves, the more miserable we are. With problems, the truth of suffering is experienced and understood (the first Noble Truth). By understanding our delusion about "self", we can begin to abandon the origin of suffering (the Second Noble Truth). To lose the delusion of "self" involves developing ourselves by following the path to end suffering (the Fourth Noble Truth), which will lead eventually to realizing the cessation of suffering (the Third Noble Truth).

As Geshe Tashi Tsering writes in *Relative Truth, Ultimate Truth*, "it is extremely clear . . . that we need an understanding of the two truths if we want to really understand the Buddha's first teaching, the four noble truths . . ." (p. xii).

In sum, we can see that *both* the Two Truths and the Four Noble Truths are the essence of the first teachings of the Buddha.