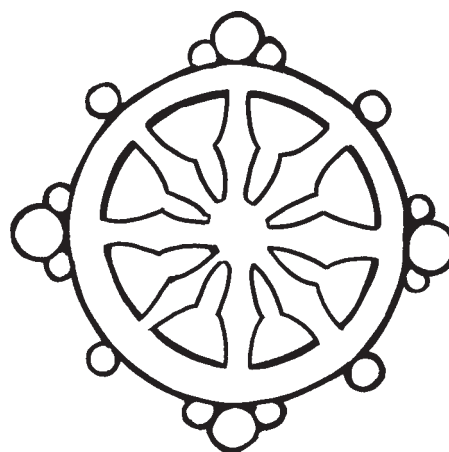


Programme 2

The Dharma I

Contents	Page
<u>Teacher's Notes:</u>	
The Four Noble Truths	14
The Noble Eightfold Path	15
The Story of Ashoka	16
<u>Information Sheets:</u>	
The Four Noble Truths	17
The Noble Eightfold Path	19
The Story of Ashoka	23



The Four Noble Truths

TEACHER'S NOTES

DISCUSSION POINTS

Part of the Enlightenment experience of the Buddha was the direct 'Knowledge and Vision of Things as they Really Are'; he realised the Truth, or the Dharma.

He decided that it was possible to help others to realise the Truth for themselves and gain Enlightenment and began to formulate the Dharma, the teaching that leads to Enlightenment. So he put his realisation, which is essentially beyond words, into the conceptual form of the **Law of Conditionality**.



*This being, that becomes;
from the arising of this, that arises;
This not becoming, that does not become;
from the ceasing of this, that ceases.*
(Majjhima Nikaya 11, 32)



As part of his Enlightenment experience the Buddha could see that existence has three characteristic qualities or 'marks': impermanence (Anicca), insubstantiality (Anatta) and suffering (Dukkha).



The Four Noble Truths are an application of the Law of Conditionality to the problem of human suffering. This teaching follows an ancient Indian medical formula:- illness, cause, cure, remedy.



The Noble Eightfold Path is the fourth Noble Truth - the remedy for human suffering.

The Four Noble Truths

Buddhism begins by addressing suffering because no-one can deny the existence of pain.

Simply put, the Four Noble Truths are:

1. **Dukkha** - PAIN - physical suffering, psychological pain and existential dissatisfaction.
2. **Samudaya** - The ORIGIN of Pain, which is craving.
3. **Nirodha** - The CESSATION of Pain, which is achieved by overcoming craving. The Third Noble Truth asserts that man can achieve Enlightenment through his own efforts.
4. **Magga** - The Way to the Cessation of Pain, which is the following of the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Four Noble Truths are a fundamental Buddhist teaching. Despite their concise and simple format, they are a profound teaching that can be understood on deeper and deeper levels.

Points of View

After his Enlightenment the Buddha walked to Sarnath to find his five friends. He wanted to explain to them exactly what he had understood.

- How do you put across your point of view?
- How do you respond when people disagree with you?
- How would you decide whether what someone said was true?
- Can it be a good thing to change your mind? Say why.

Suffering

The first Noble Truth states that there is suffering in life.

- How do we feel when we see or hear about suffering in the world?
Using a specific example discuss:
- What might have caused the suffering? (for example famine could be caused by crop failure or war.)
- How can we help?
- How could we stop it happening in the future?

Wanting

The second Noble Truth states that the cause of unhappiness is craving. At some time or other we all want things, whether it is an experience or a new possession. Think of something you wanted a lot.

- How does it feel when you want something a lot?
- How does it feel when you get it?
- What makes you want things? (e.g. T.V. adverts)
- In what ways can things go wrong or let you down?
- How does it feel when things let you down?

Happiness

The third Noble Truth states that it is possible to be happy.

- What makes you happy?
- Do you think that it is possible to be happy all the time? Say why.
- What do you think people need in order to be happy?
- How could your school, community or the world be a happier place?

The Noble Eightfold Path

TEACHER'S NOTES

The Noble Eightfold Path is perhaps the best-known of the Buddha's teachings. It corresponds to the fourth Noble Truth: the way to the cessation of suffering.

The symbol for the path is a wheel with eight spokes. It is called the Dharmachakra, or wheel of the Dharma, and stands as a symbol for Buddhism.

The first step of the path, Perfect Vision (sometimes also translated as Right Vision or Right Understanding), is concerned with a vision of the Ideal, the goal towards which all the other steps lead. The subsequent seven steps constitute the path by which Buddhists can transform every aspect of their lives in the direction of that goal. The path is essentially about practice.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Goals and ideals

Buddhists follow the steps of the Noble Eightfold Path to help them achieve their goal of Enlightenment.

- Do you think it is important to have goals in life? Why?
- What might those goals be?
- Do you have an ideal of what you would like to achieve in life?
- What would you like to have achieved:
 - one year from now?
 - five years from now?
 - by the end of your life?

Taking steps

The steps of the Noble Eightfold Path cover every aspect of life.

- How would you set about achieving your goals in life?
- What might stand in your way?
- What changes would you have to make in your life?
- What would help you to make these changes?
- How many steps do you think it would take you to achieve your goal?

Motivation

The second step of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Emotion, is about developing motivation.

- How important do you think motivation is in achieving your goal?
- How do you motivate yourself?
- What do you do when your inspiration runs out?
- Do you have any strategies for overcoming difficulties?
- In what ways can other people help?

The Story of Ashoka

TEACHER'S NOTES

During the first hundred years or so after the Buddha's death, Buddhism established itself mainly in the Kingdom of Magadha in North-East India.

It was during the reign of the Emperor Ashoka (289-232 BCE) that it spread across the Indian subcontinent and beyond, eventually becoming an international religion.

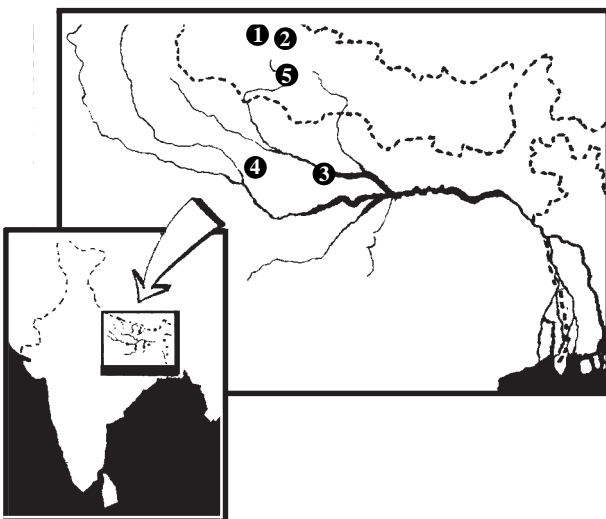
At first, Ashoka's policy was one of aggressive expansion. After his conquest of Kalinga, he converted to Buddhism and renounced the use of force. Instead, he put into practice the beneficial teaching of Buddhism and, as a result, the Dharma spread across the Indian subcontinent.

Ashoka devoted his life to the welfare of all, animals and people alike. Adopting a policy of religious tolerance, he recorded his edicts on rocks and stone pillars throughout the empire. He built stupas at the major places of pilgrimage and called the Third Buddhist Council, circa 250 BCE, to help restore the Sangha.

Ashoka's Buddhist missionaries travelled South towards Sri Lanka, North towards the Himalayas, South-East to Burma and West towards the kingdoms of the Greek Empire. As he lay on his death bed he decided to donate much of his wealth to the Sangha. His ministers succeeded in keeping hold of the treasury however. Undeterred, Ashoka gave what was in his hand, a piece of fruit.

Pilgrimage

One of Ashoka's contributions to Buddhism was the restoration and development of facilities for pilgrims at the holy sites associated with the life of the Buddha. Pilgrimage is not a religious observance for Buddhists as it is for Muslims, for example, but, nevertheless, Buddhists naturally feel reverence for, and a desire to visit, sites of special significance.



Significant Holy Sites for Buddhists

1. Lumbini - Birthplace of Prince Siddhartha.
2. Kapilavastu - Where the young Prince grew up.
3. Bodhgaya - Where the Buddha gained Enlightenment.
4. Sarnath - Where the Buddha gave his first teaching.
5. Kushinara - Where the Buddha died.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Radical Change

Because of what he realised on the battlefield, Ashoka completely changed his life.

- Is it really possible to change your life completely? Say why.
- Do you know of anyone who has changed their life dramatically?
- What caused the change?
- What personal qualities are needed to undertake dramatic change?
- Is there anything about your life that you have changed?
- Can you say why?

War and Peace

After his change of heart, Ashoka stopped going to war.

- Do you think war is ever justified?
- Explain your views.
- Do you think the use of force is ever justified in society?
- By what means can peace be maintained:-
in the world?
in the community?
in the family?

Exemplars

The way Ashoka lived his life was an inspiration to his people.

- What people inspire you?
- In what ways does personal example have an effect?
- Do you think leaders, and heads of state should set a personal example?

The Four Noble Truths

INFORMATION SHEET

When the Buddha became Enlightened, he found the answer to the question of why there is unhappiness and suffering in the world. He became free from suffering himself and saw that others could do the same. He walked a hundred miles to Sarnath to find his five friends. He wanted to tell them what he had discovered.

The Buddha used a well known Indian medical formula to help explain the Four Noble Truths to his friends. Buddhists believe that the Buddha's teaching is a cure for the world's illnesses.

1. What is the illness?
2. What has caused the illness?
3. Does a cure exist?
4. The remedy - what does the patient need to do in order to be cured?



1. **THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH** - the illness.

The illness is the suffering and unhappiness that everyone feels at some time in their lives.

2. **THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH** - the cause of the illness.

The cause of unhappiness is craving. We tend to want more and more of everything. We become unhappy with what we have. There is always something else that is going to make us feel right.

3. **THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH** - a cure is possible.

It is possible to be happy and free from craving. This state of perfect freedom and happiness is the same as Enlightenment.

4. **THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH** - the remedy.

The way to overcome the craving which causes our unhappiness is to follow the Noble Eightfold Path. This path is sometimes called The Middle Way; it is a middle way between extremes. The Buddha had once lived a life of luxury as a prince. He had also tried a life of extreme hardship - the ascetic life. He taught that following the Noble Eightfold Path, a middle way, leads to happiness and freedom from suffering.

ACTIVITIES

Collect photographs, and examples from the press, of suffering in the world.

With a partner arrange your examples under two headings:

- (a) suffering that can be changed.
- (b) suffering that cannot be changed.

Explain your choice.

Imagine you are trying to explain the Four Noble Truths to someone who has never heard them before. Use pictures to help you. Draw one for each of the Four Noble Truths and write what each one is.

Make a list of four things that you know to be true about life. Say how and why you know them to be true.

Sometimes we want something very much, thinking it will make us completely happy. Often, though, we end up disappointed. Make up a story about someone learning this lesson.

The Noble Eightfold Path

INFORMATION SHEET 1

All Buddhists should strive to follow the Noble Eightfold Path, whether they live in a remote monastery in Tibet or in a flat in the middle of Manchester. How do Buddhists follow the Eightfold Path?

Here are some quotes from Western Buddhists who are trying to follow this ancient Buddhist teaching in a modern setting.

RIGHT VISION

“Before I can practise Buddhism at all, I have to have some idea that there’s something to work towards. When I look at the Buddha image I remember that I, too, can be like that. I can become happier, wiser and more compassionate. I too want to gain Enlightenment. That’s my goal, my vision.”



RIGHT EMOTION

“It’s no good wanting Enlightenment in my head, if, in my heart, I can’t be bothered. One way I can motivate myself is by meditating. I can also inspire myself by reading some Dharma books”

RIGHT SPEECH

“We have a strong effect on others through our speech and communication. I need to speak kindly and truthfully. If I tell the truth, especially when it isn’t easy, I can develop honesty and fearlessness. By being truthful I do myself honour....What a challenge it is to be really honest and always kind.”



RIGHT ACTION

"We're engaged in actions all day. Buddhism says that the key to Right Action is intention. Behind every action is a state of mind. If I catch myself in a negative state of mind, I can choose to act differently and so practise Right Action."

RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

"We try to avoid any kind of work that might increase suffering in the world. We don't want to harm the environment, animals or humans. So we avoid work involving weapons, tobacco or alcohol. Instead, I want to find work that can help the world. I like to work with other Buddhists because it keeps me on my toes. It's not easy to forget the Noble Eightfold path when your mates are practising it too."

RIGHT EFFORT

"I can find myself in different states of mind from one moment to the next. What can I do about this? My states of mind can affect what I do. So I need to ask myself through the day: 'What state am I in?' Then I can change that by making more effort - I can change how I think and feel. With Right Effort I can develop a more positive and brighter outlook."



The Noble Eightfold Path

INFORMATION SHEET 2

RIGHT MINDFULNESS

“Often we are not aware of how we are feeling or what we are doing. If we can become more aware we can live in the present moment and transform our lives. Staying aware is a practice that can lead to happier states of mind. Instead of rushing through a job, I can slow down and even enjoy what I am doing. Right mindfulness makes the most of the present moment.”

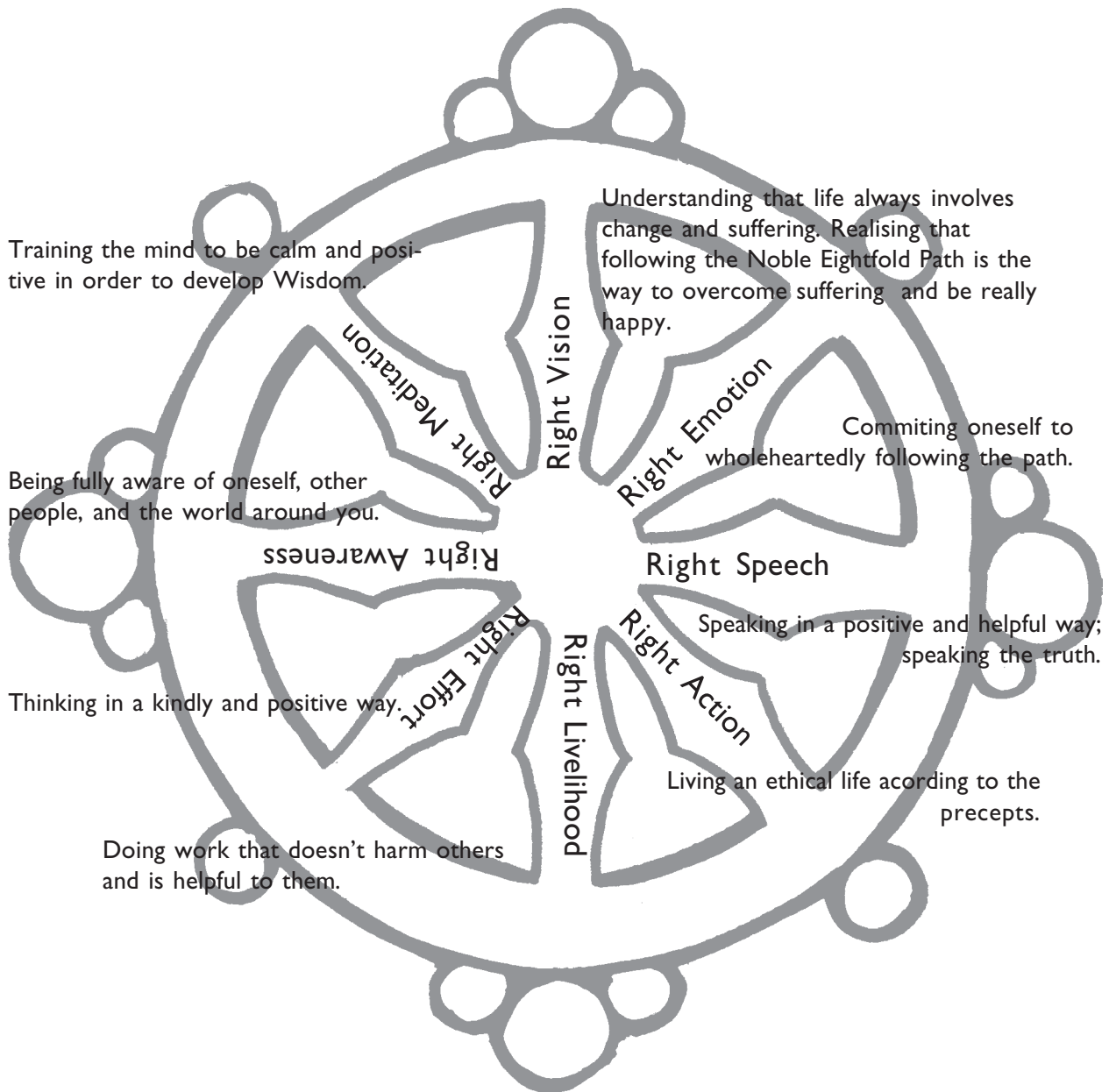


RIGHT MEDITATION

“I begin my day with meditation. Why do I meditate? I can only transform myself in all the other steps of the path, if I know myself well. Meditation helps me to develop calm and peaceful states of mind. Then I can begin to see myself more clearly. With the help of meditation, I can gradually progress through ever higher states of mind along the path. I can get nearer and nearer to Enlightenment, even if it takes much effort and many lifetimes.”

ACTIVITIES

- The symbol for the Dharma is a wheel with eight spokes. Using this symbol, draw a diagram showing each stage of the Noble Eightfold Path.
- Draw a picture to illustrate each step of the path as it might be lived today. Explain in your own words what each stage means.
- Think of a goal that you want to achieve. Say what this goal is. Write down eight steps you would need to take to achieve it.



The Dharmachakra is a Buddhist symbol for the Dharma. It usually has eight spokes to represent the teaching of the Noble Eightfold Path.

Although the 'Path' has eight separate steps, they are not intended to be followed one after another. The Buddhist way of life involves all of them and enables Buddhists to train themselves in every aspect of their lives.

The story of Ashoka

INFORMATION SHEET

Ashoka was an Emperor of India about 200 years after the Buddha. He was a cruel and ambitious ruler. Even though his empire covered most of what is now the sub-continent of India, he wanted to conquer even more kingdoms.

In a long and hard battle against the neighbouring kingdom of Kalinga, Ashoka's army killed thousands of men, and took many Kalingan prisoners.

After this battle King Ashoka realised the terrible extent of the suffering he had caused. He saw that his greed for land and wealth had caused thousands of people to die and he decided to change his ways.

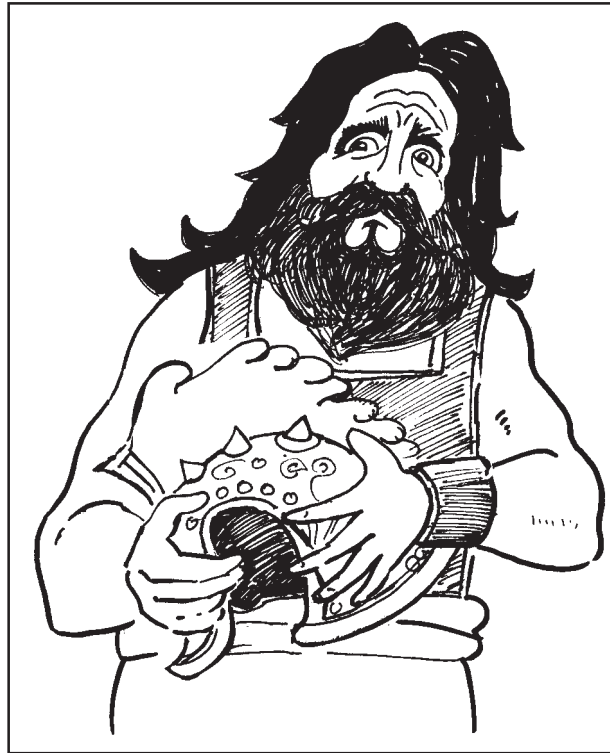
Ashoka gave up violence and war and became a follower of the Buddha. He turned his mind to the welfare of his people and built hospitals and rest-houses. He had trees planted along the highways of his kingdom in order to provide shade for weary travellers.

The king became a vegetarian and passed laws forbidding the killing or wounding of animals. He even built hospitals for animals.

He gave up his lavish imperial silks and jewels and began to wear simple robes. His people were inspired by his example.

Ashoka's new instructions for living an ethical life, following the Buddha's teaching, were carved on rocks and pillars all over the kingdom. For example, "Excellent it is to abstain from killing living beings. Excellent is generosity to friends. The king wishes men of all faiths to live everywhere in his kingdom."

King Ashoka sent teachers to travel to other kingdoms in order to let people know about the Buddha's Dharma. His own son took Buddhism to Sri Lanka.



Ashoka himself travelled on pilgrimage to the important places in the life of the Buddha. He visited Lumbini, the Buddha's birth-place, Bodhgaya, where the Buddha gained Enlightenment, and Sarnath, where the Buddha gave his first teaching.

To pay homage to the Buddha, he built great stone pillars at all the places associated with his life. Two thousand years later, a pillar still stands in Vaishali, once a great capital city where the Buddha taught. It stands as a reminder of the courage of a king who changed his life in order to follow the example of the Buddha. He dared to give up his old ways and devoted the rest of his life to helping other living beings.

ACTIVITIES

- You are a member of Ashoka's army. Tell the story of his change of heart from your point of view.

- Imagine you are a subject of Ashoka. Write about the changes you see, and experience for yourself, due to the Emperor's change of heart. What do you feel about them?

- Ashoka passed new laws to improve society. Write down a set of rules you would make to improve society today.

- Write down a list of the qualities you think the ideal ruler, or government, would have.

