The Four Noble Truths

K.R. Norman

[Indological and Buddhist Studies (Volume for J.W. de Jong)]

© Pali Text Society – Oxford 2003
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABBREVIATIONS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABORI</td>
<td>Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ai.Gr.</td>
<td>J. Wackernagel, Althindische Grammatik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJP</td>
<td>American Journal of Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMg</td>
<td>Ardha-Māgadhī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMg Dict.</td>
<td>Ratnachandraji, An Illustrated AMg Dictionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AO</td>
<td>Acta Orientalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apa.</td>
<td>Apabhramśa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Abhidhāna-rājendra, Ratlam 1913-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Āş.</td>
<td>Aśokan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Āv.</td>
<td>Āvassaya-sutta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Āyār.</td>
<td>Āyāraṁga-sutta (ed. H. Jacobi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCDRI</td>
<td>Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BD</td>
<td>Book of the Discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bᵉ</td>
<td>Burmese (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyana) edition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhav.</td>
<td>Bhavisatta Kaha (ed. H. Jacobi, Munich 1918)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHS</td>
<td>Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHSD</td>
<td>F. Edgerton, BHS Dictionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHSG</td>
<td>F. Edgerton, BHS Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BKS</td>
<td>Brhat-kalpa-sūtra (ed. W. Schubring, Leipzig 1905)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloch</td>
<td>J. Bloch, Les inscriptions d’Asoka, Paris 1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSL</td>
<td>Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSO(A)S</td>
<td>Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDIAL</td>
<td>R.L. Turner, Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cᵉ</td>
<td>Sinhalese edition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CII</td>
<td>Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
<td>Critical Pāli Dictionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cty/cties</td>
<td>commentary/commentaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cū.</td>
<td>cūrṇi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DED(R)</td>
<td>Dravidian Etymological Dictionary (revised edition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNM</td>
<td>Deśināmamālā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPPN</td>
<td><em>Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E²</td>
<td>European edition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ep. Ind.</td>
<td><em>Epigraphia Indica</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gk.</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOS</td>
<td>Gaekwad's Oriental Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>Indo-Aryan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>Indo-European</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IHQ</td>
<td><em>Indian Historical Quarterly</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Indo-Iranian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIJ</td>
<td><em>Indo-Iranian Journal</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL</td>
<td><em>Indian Linguistics</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ind. Ant.</td>
<td><em>Indian Antiquary</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isibh.</td>
<td><em>Isibhāstāṁ</em> (ed. W. Schubring)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td><em>Indologica Taurinensia</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JA</td>
<td><em>Journal Asiatique</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAIH</td>
<td><em>Journal of Ancient Indian History</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAOS</td>
<td><em>Journal of the American Oriental Society</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JASB</td>
<td><em>Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAS Bombay</td>
<td><em>Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JIABS</td>
<td><em>Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOI(B)</td>
<td><em>Journal of the Oriental Institute (Baroda)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JPTS</td>
<td><em>Journal of the Pali Text Society</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRAS</td>
<td><em>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapp. Sām.</td>
<td>= part III of prec. (pp. 86-95)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abbreviations

Lüders, Phil. Ind.  H. Lüders, *Philologica Indica*, Göttingen 1940
MIA  Middle Indo-Aryan
MRE  Minor Rock Edict
MSL  *Mémoires de la Société de Linguistique de Paris*
MS(S)  Manuscript(s)
NAWG  Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen
Nāyā.  *Nāyādhammakahādo*
NIA  New Indo-Aryan
Nirayāv.  *Nirayāvaliyādo*
Nisīh.  *Nisīha-sutta*
OIA  Old Indo-Aryan
OLZ  *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*
Ova.  *Ovāvāiya-sutta* (ed. E. Leumann, Leipzig 1883)
Pā.  Pāli
Pañh.  *Pañhāvāgaranāṇīṃ*
Paum.  *Pauma-cariu*
PE  Pillar Edict
PED  The PTS’s *Pali-English Dictionary*
Pischel  R. Pischel, *Grammatik der Prākrit-Sprachen*, Strassburg 1900
Pkt  Prakrit
PMWS  F.B.J. Kuiper, *Proto-Munda Words in Sanskrit*, Amsterdam 1948
PTC  *Pāli Tipiṭakaṃ Concordance*
PTS  Pali Text Society
Ratnachandraji  see AMg Dict.
RE  Rock Edict
RV  *Ṛgveda*
SBB  Sacred Books of the Buddhists
SBE  Sacred Books of the East
SepE  Separate Edict
Sheth  see PSM
Sinh.
Skt
StII
Sutt.
Süyag.
Thañ.
țīkā
TPS
Turner, CDIAL
Utt.
Uvās.
Vivāg.
Whitney, Gram.
Whitney, Roots
WZKS(O)

Sinhalese
Sanskrit
Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik
Suttāgame
Süyagaṭṭamga-sutta
Thañamga-sutta
țīkā
Transactions of the Philological Society
R.L. Turner, Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages
Uttarajhayana-sutta (ed. J. Charpentier, Uppsala 1922)
Uvāsaga-dasāo (ed. Hoernle)
Vivāga-sutta
W.D. Whitney, Sanskrit Grammar, Cambridge (Mass.) 1889
W.D. Whitney, Roots and Verb-forms of the Sanskrit Language, Leipzig 1885
Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- (und Ost-)asiens
49. The Four Noble Truths\*  

1. The problem  

<377> 1.1. I want in this paper, offered in honour of Professor J.W. de Jong, to examine the grammar and syntax of something which, although fundamental to Buddhist doctrine, has never been satisfactorily explained at the linguistic level. I refer to the statement, in Pāli, of the four Noble Truths (= NTs).  

1.2. This statement occurs in the Dhammacakka-ppavattana-sutta (Vin I 10 foll. = S V 420 foll.),\(^1\) which is traditionally the first sermon preached by the Buddha after his enlightenment, in the following form: idaṃ kho pana bhikkhave dukkham ariya-saccan, idaṃ kho pana bhikkhave dakkha-samudayaṃ ariya-saccan, idaṃ kho pana bhikkhave dakkha-nirodham ariya-saccan, idaṃ kho pana bhikkhave dakkha-nirodha-gāminī paṭipadā ariya-saccan. I shall refer to this as the ‘introduction’ set.\(^2\)  

1.3. It is clear that there is something strange about the grammar and syntax here. The most recent statement that I have seen made about this is that of Johansson, who says:  

‘Syntactically, these expressions are somewhat loosely formulated and of different types. Note that samudaya and nirodha are masculine and therefore must be acc. sg., if the compounds are not of the possessive type and therefore adjectively adapted to saccan; paṭipadā can only be nom. sg. ... Probably dukkham and paṭipadā should be understood as nom. and translated “truth (which is) pain” = “truth about pain”;\(^3\) dukkha-samudayaṃ and dukkha-nirodhami are probably possessive.


\(^{1}\) Abbreviations of titles of texts are those of the CPD; in addition : CPS = Catuṣpariṣatsūra.

\(^{2}\) The names ‘introduction’, etc., are given merely for convenience of reference, without prejudice as to the original form or function of the sets to which they refer.

\(^{3}\) For consistency, I translate dukkhal/duḥkha hereafter as ‘pain’, except when quoting other persons’ translations, without implying that this is necessarily the best translation.
compounds adjectively related to saccam and therefore nom. sg. nt., literally “pain-originating truth”, i.e. “truth about the origin of pain”. “truth about the cessation of pain”. There are other possibilities: dukkham may also be adj., and so the same type of attribute as <378> dukkha-samudayaṁ taken as poss. compound; it may also be taken as acc. sg. of the noun, because acc. is sometimes used as a “case of reference”, although the loc. is more common in this function; dukkha-samudayaṁ and dukkha-nirodham could also be understood as acc. of reference. On the other hand, paṭipadā is certainly nom., if it should not simply be combined with ariya-saccam to form one long compound.¹

1.4. Johansson did not quote, and possibly was unaware of, Weller’s suggestion that the statement of the four NTs in Pāli is based upon an earlier version in an Eastern dialect, where the nom. sg. of both masc. and nt. nouns was in -e.² In that dialect, according to Weller, the 2nd and 3rd NTs would have had the form dukkha-samudaye ariya-sacce and dukkha-nirodhe ariya-sacce, and by a faulty piece of ‘translating’ on the part of the Pāli redactor, -samudaye -sacce and -nirodhe -sacce were changed to -samudayaṁ -saccam and -nirodham -saccam instead of the correct -samudayo -saccam and -nirodho -saccam.

1.5. It seems that others, too, believed that the correct form of the statement should be -samudayo -saccam and -nirodho -saccam, for there is a v.l. -samudayo at D II 308,1 and M III 250,32, and a v.l. -nirodho at D II 310,4, while Weller quotes the comment of the editors of the Siamese edition, who read -samudayo -saccam and -nirodho -saccam, against their manuscripts, on the grounds that samudaya and nirodha are masculine nouns.³ The general tendency of the manuscripts, however, to read -samudayaṁ and -nirodham indicates that this is what the Pāli tradition felt was correct, and consequently refrained from ‘correcting’.

1.6. Neither Johansson’s nor Weller’s explanation is entirely satisfactory. As we shall see (§2.2), the four NTs also occur in Pāli in a set where -samudayo and -nirodho are found, and Weller’s suggestion does not explain why the two compounds should appear to have different genders in different contexts. Johansson’s explanation does not take

³ Ibid., p. 73, note 3.
account of the fact that we should expect the grammar and syntax of each of the four NTs to be the same, and therefore the explanation must be the same for all four.

1.7. It could also be suggested that in the statement of the four NTs the gender of *samudaya* and *nirodha* is genuinely neuter, but this does not meet the objection which has beenlevelled against Weller’s solution, that in other sets the two words have the expected masculine gender. It would be possible <379> to suggest that *samudayo* and *nirodho* were changed to *samudayam* and *nirodham* on the analogy of *dukkham* in the 1st NT, and then the expected form of the pronoun *ayaṃ* was changed to *idam* to agree with *samudayam* and *nirodham*. This does not, however, explain why we also have *idam* in the 4th NT, although *paṭippadā* is feminine.

2. Other statements of the four Noble Truths in Pāli

2.1. Later in the *Dhammacakka-pavattana-sutta* we find the four NTs stated again in two sets (Vin I 111 foll. = S V 422.3 foll.): idam dikkhaṃ ariya-saccan ti me bhikkhave ... āloko udapādi. taṃ kho pan’ idam dikkhaṃ ariya-saccam pariṇīeyam ... pariṇātaṃ ... idam dikkha-samudayaṃ ariya-saccan ti me bhikkhave ... āloko udapādi. taṃ kho pan’ idam dikkha-samudayaṃ ariya-saccam pahātabbaṃ ... pahiṇaṃ ... idam dikkha-nirodhaṃ ariya-saccan ti me bhikkhave ... āloko udapādi. taṃ kho pan’ idam dikkha-nirodhaṃ ariya-saccam sacchikātabbaṃ ... sacchikatam ... idam dikkha-nirodha-gāminī paṭippadā ariya-saccan ti me bhikkhave ... āloko udapādi. taṃ kho pan’ idam dikkha-nirodha-gāminī paṭippadā ariya-saccan bhāvetabbam ... bhāvitaṃ. I shall call the set which is followed by ti ... āloko udapādi the ‘enlightenment’ set, and that followed by pariṇīeyam, etc., the ‘gerundival’ set.

2.2. There are other statements of the four NTs in Pāli which differ from those in the *Dhammacakka-pavattana-sutta*. One set occurs in an alternative version of the enlightenment story at M I 23.14-17,1 where each item omits the word ariya-saccam and is followed by ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhaṅgīsaṃ. I shall call this the ‘basic’ set. It is noteworthy that in this set each item has the correct gender for the nouns

----

1 I normally give a single reference for each Pāli quotation. Other references, if they exist, can be found in PTC.
2.3. We also find in Pāli versions various shortened forms of the four NTs. I shall call these the ‘mnemonic’ sets, since they were probably intended to remind the hearer of the full form of the NTs. The shortest set of all is (a): cattāri ariya-saccāni ... dukkham samudayo nirodho maggo (Th 492).\(^1\) This seems to be a ‘short-hand’ way of referring to the four NTs, for the 1st NT is not ‘Pain’, but the realisation of the fact that ‘This is pain’. Another set, without the word ariya is (b): cattāri saccāni: dukkha-saccāṃ samudaya-saccāṃ nirodha-saccāṃ magga-saccāṃ (Pp 2.1–3). A longer version, with ariya, is found in set (c): cattāri ariya-saccāni: <380> dukkham ariya-saccāṃ, dukkha-samudayaṃ ariya-saccāṃ, dukkha-nirodham ariya-saccāṃ, dukkha-nirodha-gāmini paṭipadā ariya-saccāṃ (D III 277.8–11). The 4th NT also occurs in the form dukkha-nirodha-gāmini-paṭipadā ariya-saccāṃ (Vism 494.4), where -gāmini- probably represents an attempt to write the stem form of gāminī in a compound.

2.4. It would appear that in mnemonic set (c) the Pāli tradition takes dukkham, dukkha-samudayaṃ, etc., as being in apposition to ariya-saccāṃ, so that when the latter is in an oblique case, so too is the former, e.g. dukkham ariya-saccāṃ ... dukkha-samudayaṃ dukkha-nirodham dukkha-nirodha-gāmini-paṭipadām ariya-saccāṃ pucchanti (M II 10.21 foll.); dukkhassa ariya-saccassā ananubodhā ... dukkha-samudayaṃsa ... ariya-saccassā ananubodhā ... dukkha-nirodhasa ... ariya-saccassā ananubodhā (D II 90.12 foll.); dikkhe ariya-sacce dukkha-samudaye ariya-sacce dukkha-nirodhe ariya-sacce dukkha-nirodha-gāminiyā paṭipadāya ariya-sacce (M I 184.31 foll.).

2.5. It is interesting to note that in such contexts with an oblique case usage, the Pāli tradition was not always certain about the way in which to handle the 4th NT. Besides reading -gāmini-, which probably represents an attempt to write a stem form (as in § 2.3), we find the vv.11. -gāmini- and -gāminiṃ at M II 10.25. Besides the reading -gāminiyā at D II 312.2 we find the vv.11. -gāmini- and -gāmini-. Not only is there doubt about -gāminiyāl-gāmini-l-gāmini-, but there is evidence that there was doubt about the correct form of paṭipadā in such oblique usages. At Vin I 230.30 foll. we find the equivalent of D II 90.12 foll. (see § 2.4), with the 4th NT written as a compound: dukkha-nirodha-gāmini-paṭipadā-

\(^1\) At Th 492 the order of the last two items is reversed for metrical reasons.
ariya-saccassa ananubodha. An examination of more editions and
manuscripts might help to settle the correct form of the 4th NT in
oblique cases, but any conclusions reached are not likely to be totally
persuasive, since the possibility of scribal error or emendation can never
be completely eliminated.

2.6. Despite the problems which the grammar and sytax of the four NTs
present, translators have shown little doubt about the way in which they
should be translated. In the ‘basic’ set (§ 2.2), without ariya-saccam, the
interpretation is straightforward: ‘I understood properly “This is pain,
This is the origin of pain”, etc.’ We can translate the mnemonic set (a):
‘The four NTs: pain, (its) origin, (its) cessation, the path’. Mnemonic set
(b) is normally translated: ‘The four truths: <381> the truth of pain, the
truth of the origin, the truth of the cessation, the truth of the path’, where
dukkha-saccam, etc., are translated as though they were dependent
(tatpuruṣa) compounds. For mnemonic set (c) the same translation is
given, with the addition of ‘noble’ to ‘truth’, as though the words in
apparent apposition to ariya-saccam were adjectives or adjectival
compounds in agreement with ariya-saccam: ‘The four NTs: the NT of
pain, the NT of the origin of pain, etc.’

2.7. A comparable translation is given for the ‘introduction’ set (§ 1.2),
and the pronoun idam which occurs in each NT is taken as agreeing with
-saccam, so that the translation is usually given in the form: ‘This is the
NT of pain, this is the NT of the origin of pain, etc.’ No-one, to my
knowledge, has commented upon the strangeness of the fact that, on the
basis of the translation given for the ‘basic’ set (§ 2.6), we should expect
the correct translation to be: ‘The NT (that) “This is pain”, the NT (that)
“This is the origin of pain”, etc.’ I presume that the syntax has always
dissuaded translators from giving the interpretation which reason told
them was the correct one.

2.8. It is possible to translate the 1st NT in this set as ‘This pain is a NT’,
and in the 4th NT we might translate ‘This (thing, namely) the path ... is
a NT’, or ‘This NT (is) the path’, but such translations are not possible
for the 2nd and 3rd NTs, since -samudayaṃ and -niruddhaṃ are not in the
nom. case, unless we assume a change of gender, which is unlikely
(§ 1.7). In the ‘gerundival’ set (§ 2.1), it would be possible to take the
pronoun tam, which occurs in each NT, as agreeing with ariya-saccam,
and the pronoun which follows it as agreeing with dukkham, etc. This
gives good sense for the 1st NT: ‘That truth (that) “This is pain”’, but it
is not satisfactory for the other NTs because, as noted above (§ 1.7), the
pronoun has the form idaṁ which is not appropriate for the expected
masculine forms -samudayo and -nirdho, nor for the feminine form
patiṣapaḥ.

3. The four NTs in other traditions

3.1. It might be thought that an investigation into the form which the
four NTs take in BHS texts might produce a solution to this problem. In
fact, such texts produce problems of their own. I quote from the Mvu.¹
the Lal.² and the CPS.³

<382> 3.2. Where the Pāli version of the Dhammacakka-ppavattana-
sutta has the ‘introduction’ set (§ 1.2), Mvu and Lal have the
‘mnemonic’ set (c); CPS has neither the ‘introduction’ set nor the
‘mnemonic’ set, although it includes the ‘mnemonic’ set later (§ 3.4).
The equivalent of the Pāli ‘enlightenment’ set (§ 2.1) occurs in the
following versions: idaṁ duḥkham iti bhikṣavaḥ ... ālokaṁ
prādurbhūṣi; ayaṁ duḥkha-samudayo ti ... āloko prādurbhūṣi;
ayaṁ duḥkha-nirodho ti ... āloko prādurbhūṣi; iyaṁ ca duḥkha-
nirodha-gāminī pratipadā iti ... āloko prādurbhūṣi (Mvu III 332.13
foll.); duḥkha-samudaya iti ... ālokaḥ prādurbhūtaḥ; ayaṁ duḥkha-
nirodha iti ... ālokaḥ prādurbhūtaḥ; iyaṁ duḥkha-nirodha-gāminī
pratipad iti ... ālokaḥ prādurbhūtaḥ (Lal 417.15 foll.); idaṁ duḥkha-
samudayo 'yaṁ duḥkha-nirodha iyaṁ duḥkha-nirodha-gāminī pratipad
ārya-satyaṁ iti ... buddhir uḍapādi (CPS 12.2–3). For the omission of
the word ārya-satyaṁ in the 2nd and 3rd NTs we can compare the
similar omission in ‘mnemonic’ set (c) in the same text (§ 3.4).

3.3. The BHS versions of the ‘gerundival’ set are as follows: tam khalu

2.13–14), it is of the Vinaya-piṭaka according to the text (pāṭhena) of the
Lokottaravādin of the noble Mahāsāṅghikas of the Middle Country.
² S. Lefmann, Lalita Vistara, Halle 1902. M. Winternitz, (History of Indian
Literature, Vol. II, p. 248) quotes the Chinese tradition that this Mahāyāna text
originally contained the life story of the Buddha for the Sarvāstivādins of the
Hinayāna.
³ E. Waldschmidt, Das Catuspārisaṭṣātra, ADAWB, 1960, 1, Berlin 1962. The
CPS is a Sarvāstivādin text, but is identical with the Saṅghabhedavastu of the
Mūlasarvāstivādins, from which the Introduction in Waldschmidt’s edition of
CPS was taken, if I understand the situation correctly.
punar imaṃ duḥkhaṃ ārya-satyam pariṇeyam ... tena khalu punar ayam duḥkha-samudayo ārya-satyo prahātavyo ... atha khalu punar duḥkha-nirodho ārya-satyo sākṣikṛto ... sā khalu punar iyaṃ duḥkha-nirodha-gāminī pratipad ārya-satyā bhāvītā (Mvu III 333.3 foll.); yat khalv idaṃ duḥkham pariṇeyam ... sa khalv ayam duḥkha-samudayaḥ prahātavya(h) ... sa khalv ayam duḥkha-nirodhaḥ sākṣāt kartavya(h) ... sā khalv iyaṃ duḥkha-nirodha-gāminī pratipad bhāvayitavyā(a) ... tat khalv idaṃ duḥkham pariṇātām ... sa khalv ayam duḥkha-samudayaḥ prahān(h) ... sa khalv ayam duḥkha-nirodhaḥ sākṣāt kṛta(h) ... sā khalv iyaṃ duḥkha-nirodha-gāminī pratipad bhāvita(h) (Lal 418.1 foll.); tat khalu duḥkham ārya-satyam ... pariṇātavyam ... tat khalu duḥkha-samudayam ārya-satyam ... prahātavyam ... tat khalu duḥkha-nirodhām ārya-satyam ... sākṣāt kartavyam ... tat khalu duḥkha-nirodha-gāminī pratipad ārya-satyam ... bhāvayitavyā ... tat khalu duḥkham ārya-satyam ... pariṇātām ... tat khalu duḥkha-samudayam ārya-satyam ... prahān(h) ... tat khalu duḥkha-nirodhām ārya-satyam ... sākṣāt kṛtam ... tat khalu duḥkha-nirodha-gāminī pratipad ārya-satyam ... bhāvita(h) (CPS 12.4–11). There is a version of the ‘basic’ set in the introduction to CPS: idaṃ duḥkham ārya-satyam iti yathābhūtam praṇāti; ayam duḥkha-samudayaḥ; ayam duḥkha-nirodhaḥ; iyaṃ duḥkha-nirodha-gāminī pratipad ārya-satyam iti yathābhūtam praṇāti (CPS E.24). For the omission of the word ārya-satyam in the 2nd and 3rd items we can compare the similar omission in ‘mnemonic’ set (c) in CPS (§ 3.4).

<383> 3.4. Versions of the ‘mnemonic’ set occur as follows: catvāri ... ārya-satyāni seyyathidāṃ duḥkham ārya-satyam, duḥkha-samudayo ārya-satyam, duḥkha-nirodho ārya-satyam, duḥkha-nirodha-gāminī pratipad ārya-satyam (Mvu III 331.17 foll.); catvāri ... ārya-satyāni — duḥkham duḥkha-samudayo duḥkha-nirodho duḥkha-nirodha-gāminī pratipad (Lal 417.2 foll.); catvāri ... ārya-satyāni — duḥkham ārya-satyam duḥkha-samudayo duḥkha-nirodho duḥkha-nirodha-gāminī pratipad ārya-satyam (CPS 14.2–3). The omission of the word ārya-satyam in the 2nd and 3rd NTs in the CPS version has already been noted in the ‘enlightenment’ and ‘basic’ sets (§ 3.2–3). We find a different form of the 2nd and 3rd NTs at Mvu II 138.4 foll.: duḥkha-samudayam ārya-satyam duḥkha-nirodham ārya-satyam.

3.5. It would appear that in the ‘mnemonic’ set at Mvu III 331.17 foll. (§ 3.4) the words duḥkham, etc., are in apposition to ārya-satyam, although it would be possible to take the 4th NT as a compound, since
pratipad has the same form whether it is nom. sg. or the stem form. If it is a compound, however, we should have to regard -gāminī- as an irregularity, since it is the nom. sg. fem. form instead of the expected stem form. We have already seen (§ 2.5) that -gāminī- sometimes occurs in compounds in Pāli, and we find a comparable example in BHS at Mvu III 408,17 foll., where the four NTs occur as the objects of a group of verbs beginning with ācikṣati ‘he teaches’. The statement includes duḥkham, duḥkha-samudayaṃ and duḥkha-nirodham, all of which could be taken as accusative in apposition to ārya-satyaṃ. The 4th NT, however, is in the form duḥkha-nirodha-gāminī-pratipad-ārya-satyaṃ (ācikṣati), which can only be a compound.

3.6. The problems which the syntax of the four NTs presents have led to some inconsistencies in their translation in BHS texts. Ria Kloppenburg, in her translation of CPS,\(^1\) translates the 1st NT as ‘This suffering is a noble truth’ when it occurs in the ‘basic’ and ‘enlightenment’ sets,\(^2\) as ‘Suffering, that noble truth’ in the ‘gerundival’,\(^3\) and as ‘The noble truth of suffering’ in the ‘mnemonic’ set.\(^4\) As we have noted (§ 2.8), it is possible to take the 1st NT in Pāli as ‘This suffering is a noble truth’, but it is not possible to follow her in taking the 2nd and 3rd NTs as ‘This origin of suffering is a noble truth’ and ‘This cessation of suffering is a noble truth’ because in the Pāli version -samudayaṃ and -nirodham cannot be nom. Nor can we translate the Pāli version of the 4th NT as ‘This path leading to the cessation of suffering is a noble truth’, because idaṃ cannot be taken as agreeing with paṭipadā.

3.7. Nor do the BHS versions of the ‘gerundival’ set help with the interpretation of the Pāli version of that set. In place of the pronoun tāṃ which introduces each item in the Pāli version (§ 2.1), Mvu has tāṃ, tena, atha and sā. The first three of these suggest that Pāli tāṃ is the adverbial use of the pronoun in the sense of ‘then, therefore’, but sā in the 4th item goes against this, as do yat/tat, sa, sa and sā in the Lal version. The CPS version partly agrees with Pāli in having tat in each item, but it omits the pronouns idaṃ, ayaṃ, ayaṃ and iyaṃ. These

---

1 Ria Kloppenburg (tr.), *The Sūtra on the Foundation of the Buddhist Order*, Leiden 1973.
2 Ibid., pp. 4, 24.
3 Ibid., p. 24.
4 Ibid., p. 28.
4. The problem reconsidered

4.1. If we consider the form of the ‘enlightenment’ set in Pāli (§ 2.1) and the other traditions (§ 3.2), we note that Pāli has *ariya-saccāmi* in each item (with -*samudayāmi* and -*nīrođhaṃ* in the 2nd and 3rd NTs); Mvu and Lal omit *ārya-satyam* in all four items (with -*samudayo* -*nīrođho* and -*samudaya(h)*/-*nīrođha(h)* respectively); CPS omits *ārya-satyam* from the 2nd and 3rd items (with -*samudayo* and -*nīrođha(h)*). In the ‘gerundival’ set the Pāli version (§ 2.1) has *ariya-saccāmi* in each item (with -*samudayāmi* and -*nīrođhaṃ*); Mvu (§ 3.3) has *ārya-satyā* in each item, but makes *-satyā* agree with the gender of *duḥkhām*, *-samudayo*, etc.; Lal omits *ārya-satyam* from each item; CPS has *ārya-satyam* in each item (with -*samudayām* and -*nīrođham*). In the ‘basic’ set the Pāli version (§ 2.2) omits *ariya-saccāmi* from each item; CPS omits *ārya-satyam* from the 2nd and 3rd items (with -*samudayaḥ* and -*nīrođhaḥ*).

4.2. If we examine the form of ‘mnemonic’ set (c) in Pāli (§ 2.3) we find *ariya-saccāṃ* in each item (with -*samudayāṃ* and -*nīrođhaṃ*); Mvu (§ 3.4) has *ārya-satyam* in each item (with -*samudayo* and -*nīrođho* in one version, and -*samudayām* and -*nīrođham* in the other); Lal omits *ārya-satyam* from all four items; CPS omits *ārya-satyam* in the 2nd and 3rd items (with -*samudayo* and -*nīrođho*).

4.3. Woodward made a very perspicacious remark about the Pāli version of the ‘gerundival’ set (§ 2.1). With reference to the statement that the second NT should be given up (paḥātabbāṃ), he noted that the word *ariya-saccām* should be omitted, since what the Buddha meant was that the origin of pain should be given up, not the truth about it.1 As we have seen, in the Lal version (§ 3.3) the word *ārya-satyam* is <385> omitted from all four items, and consideration shows that this must be correct. What the Buddha said was that pain should be known, its origin given up, its cessation realised, and the path to its cessation practised. Woodward did not, therefore, go far enough. He should have suggested the removal of the word *ariya-saccāṃ* from all four items in the ‘gerundival’ set.

4.4. Further consideration shows that in other contexts, too, the word

---

ariya-saccanā should be omitted. Following the statement of the ‘basic’ set at D II 304.26 foll., there is a series of questions about them, e.g. katamaṃ dukkhāṃ arīya-saccanā, etc. (D II 305.1 foll.). This is normally translated ‘What is the NT of pain?’ but since the answer is jāti dukkhaṃ, again without arīya-saccanā, it is clear that the original form of the question must have been katamaṃ dukkhāṃ — ‘What is pain?’ Mvu (III 332.1 foll.) and CPS (14.4–10) agree with the Pāli version in having ārya-satyam in each question, although in these two texts they come after a statement of ‘mnemonic’ set (c), which includes the word ārya-satyam in each item. The version in Lal (417.4 foll.) has tatra katamad dukkham, etc., without ārya-satyam. A version of the questions without arīya-saccanā occurs in Pāli at M I 48.29 foll.

5. A proposed solution

5.1. I suggest that the original form of the ‘enlightenment’ set was the ‘basic’ set: idam dukkhaṃ, ayaṃ dukkha-samudayo, ayaṃ dukkha-nirodho, ayaṃ dukkha-nirodha-gāmini patipadā (to quote it in its Pāli version, without prejudice as to the actual dialect or language in which it was first uttered), as found at M I 23.14 foll. This is supported by the Mvu and Lal versions. The earliest form of the ‘mnemonic’ set was the four words dukkhaṃ samudayo nirodho maggo, without any reference to sacca, e.g. yā buddhānaṃ ... dhamma-desanā tam pakkāsesi dukkhaṃ samudayaṃ nirodhaṃ maggaṃ (Vin I 16.3). When these items became known as ‘truths’, they were so designated: cattāri arīya-saccāni — dukkhaṃ samudayo maggo nirodho (Th 492).

5.2. Their designation as saccāni led to the introduction of the word -sacca into each item: cattāri saccāni — dukkha-saccaṃ samudaya-saccanā nirodha-saccaṃ magga-saccaṃ (Pp 2.1–3). Although these items are usually translated as though they were dependent <386> (tatpuruṣa) compounds (§ 2.6), they should rather be taken as descriptive (karmadhārāya) compounds: ‘The truth “pain”, etc.’, cf. uposatha-saddo ‘The word “uposatha”’. They might even be taken as abbreviated forms of syntactical compounds: 1 *idam-dukkha-saccaṃ, etc., ‘The truth (that) “This is pain”, etc.’, cf. idamsaccābhīnivesa ‘The inclination (to say) “This is true”’, i.e. ‘The inclination to dogmatise’.

1 For such compounds in Pāli see G.V. Davane, Nominal Composition in Middle Indo-Aryan, Poona 1956, pp. 135–39. For syntactical compounds in Sanskrit see
5.3. When the truths became known as ariya-saccāni, then this word was added to the ‘mnemonic’ sets. It was added to the simplest form in apposition to the four items: yā sā buddhānāṃ ... dharma-deśanā tadyathā dukkhaṃ samudaya nirodho mārgaś ca tvāry ārya-satyāni ... samprakāśayati (CPS 16.13). The introduction of the word ariya- into ‘mnemonic’ set (b) gave a set: *dukkha-ariya-saccāṃ, etc. I suggest that the hiatus between dukkha-, etc., and -ariya-saccāṃ was avoided by the insertion of a sandhi -m-, producing dukkha-m-ariya-saccāṃ, etc. Wrong word division led to this being taken as dukkham ariya-saccāṃ (S V 434.9–11), and then dukkhaṃ ariya-saccāṃ (D II 277.8–11), i.e. as two words in apposition. This was probably helped by the fact that dukkhaṃ could be taken as an adjective in agreement with ariya-saccāṃ. The same wrong division of dukkha-samudaya-m-ariya-saccāṃ and dukkha-middle-ariya-saccāṃ led to the appearance of dukkha-samudayaṃ and dukkha-middle. Despite the fact that these two words were felt to have an independent existence,¹ so that they could be declined in apposition to ariya-sacca (§ 2.4), nevertheless the Pāli tradition, with the few exceptions noted above (§ 1.5), recognised that these were the correct forms, and refrained from ‘correcting’ them.

5.4. In the 4th NT, the replacement of magga by paṭipadā produced a hiatus between -ā- and -ariya-saccāṃ, which was tolerated, and no sandhi -m- was inserted. Since the stem form was identical with the nom. sg. form, it was possible to take paṭipadā and ariya-saccāṃ as being in apposition. It was therefore possible to take dukkha-middle-gāmini as being a separate adjective in agreement with the nom. sg. form paṭipadā, although it is clear from the variety of forms we find (§ 2.3–5) that the tradition was not certain about this. It is, again, possible that we have examples of abbreviated forms of syntactical compounds here. If the original form was *ayam-dukkha-middle-gāminī-paṭipadā-ariya-saccāṃ, then the compound forms we have noted (§ 2.5) are easily understood. To this extent, Johansson’s suggestion of a long compound (§ 1.3) is correct, although he did not realise that all four NTs can be

Wackernagel, Ai.Gr., II.1, §§ 121–24 and Whitney, Gram., § 1314.

¹ In a version of the ‘mnemonic’ set found in an inscription in Brāhmī characters of the second or third centuries A.D. at Sarnath, we find the word bhikkhave inserted between dukkham and ariya-saccāṃ in the 1st NT. See Sten Konow, “Two Buddhist inscriptions from Sarnath” in Ep. Ind., IX (1907–08), pp. 291–93.
taken as compounds.

<387> 5.5. Of the BHS versions of the ‘mnemonic’ set, that in Lal omits the word ārya-satyam, and so the problem of hiatus does not arise there. At Mvu II 138.4 (§ 3.4) we find duḥkham ārya-satyam duḥkha-samudayam ārya-satyam duḥkha-nirodham ārya-satyam duḥkha-nirodha-gāmini pratipad ārya-satyam, which in the light of the discussion in the previous paragraph can all be taken as compounds, with sandhi -m- in the first three items. In the 4th NT pratipad, which can be either nom. sg. or stem form, creates no hiatus. At Mvu III 331.17 foll., however, we find duḥkha-samudayo ārya-satyam and duḥkha-nirodho ārya-satyam. It would seem most likely that these forms represent false attempts to ‘correct’ what was thought to be faulty grammar when wrong word division led to the appearance of the anomalous forms -samudayam and -nirodham, just as we have seen occasionally in the Pāli tradition (§ 1.5). The CPS version omits ārya-satyam from the 2nd and 3rd items, where we find -samudayo and -nirodho.

5.6. As suggested above, the word āriya-sacca is not appropriate in the ‘enlightenment’ (§ 5.1) or the ‘gerundival’ (§ 4.3) sets, but its presence in the ‘mnemonic’ set doubtless led to its introduction there by analogy. Theoretically, its introduction should have led to syntactical compounds: *idaṃ-dukkha-m-ariya-saccam, *ayaṃ-dukkha-samudaya-m-ariya-saccam, *ayaṃ-dukkha-nirodha-m-ariya-saccam, *ayaṃ-dukkha-nirodha-gāmini-patipadā-ariya-saccam, but just as a misunderstanding of the structure of the compounds in the ‘mnemonic’ set led to a faulty word division, so another misunderstanding led to the separation of the pronouns from the beginning of the compound. Since in the first item in the Pāli version idaṃ seemed to agree with saccam, the other three pronouns were changed to idam to agree in the same way.

5.7. Lal does not include the word ārya-satyam in either the ‘enlightenment’ or the ‘gerundival’ set (§ 4.1). Mvu does not include the word in the ‘enlightenment’ set, and that it is an addition to the ‘gerundival’ set is clearly shown by the fact that the syntactical problem of fitting it into each item was solved by making -sativa agree in gender with duḥkham, -samudayo, etc. The CPS version of the ‘enlightenment’ set omits ārya-satyam in the 2nd and 3rd items, as it does in the ‘mnemonic’ set, and has -samudayo and -nirodha(h) as in the same set. The CPS version of the ‘gerundival’ set has ārya-satyam in each item, with -samudayam and -nirodham in the 2nd and 3rd items. It is not
obvious why CPS sometimes includes ārya-satyam in the 2nd and 3rd items, and sometimes omits the word. It is, however, clear that when ārya-satyam <388> is included we find -samudayam and -nirōdham; when it is omitted we find -samudayo (-āḥ) and -nirodho (-āḥ). We do not find -samudayo ārya-satyam or -nirodho ārya-satyam, which indicates that tradition felt that this combination of words was incorrect. In the CPS versions of the ‘enlightenment’ and the ‘basic’ sets we find idaṃ-dukkha-mārya-satyam and iyaṃ-duḥkha-nirodha-gāmini-pratipad-ārya-satyam in the 1st and 4th items respectively, which are precisely the forms which are expected as syntactical compounds.

5.8. The ‘introduction’ set, found only in the Pāli version, resembles the Pāli form of the ‘enlightenment’ and ‘gerundival’ sets, with the words kho pana bhikkhave inserted between the pronoun and the noun. Its absence from the three BHS versions and the fact that it is replaced in the Mvu and Lal versions by the ‘mnemonic’ set suggests that it is not an original feature of the sutta. It is possible that in the earliest version there was no set of four NTs at the beginning of this portion of the narrative at all. When the idea of the NTs became more widespread, and the word ariya-saccam was inserted into the ‘basic’ set which, as suggested above (§5.1), was the original form of the ‘enlightenment’ set, a statement of the four NTs was prefixed to the story as a heading or rubric, in some traditions. If this was so, then it is likely that the Mvu and Lal versions independently prefixed the ‘mnemonic’ set as being a very appropriate introduction to what was to follow.

6. Conclusions

6.1. A number of problems remain. The precise relationship between the different versions is not clear. The reasons for the inconsistencies in some texts, e.g. in the form of the 2nd and 3rd NTs in the CPS, are unknown, but in some cases they may be due to a mixture of material from various sources. The relative chronology of the changes which must be assumed to have taken place in the form of the NTs is hazy. Nevertheless it seems possible to come to some conclusions.

6.2. The correct form of the NTs in Pāli is: idaṃ dukkhaṁ, ayāṃ dukkha-samudayo, ayāṃ dukkha-nirodho, ayāṃ dukkha-nirodha-gāminī paṭipadā — ‘This is pain, this is the origin of pain, this is the cessation of pain, this is the path leading to the cessation of pain’. When the word ariya-saccam is included in the statement, we should translate: ‘The NT
<389> 6.3. The grammatical form of the four NTs when the word *ariya-
*saccam is included is a syntactical compound. This was not understood
by the tradition, with the result that faulty division of the compounds led
to the apparent production of nom. sg. forms -samudayam and
-nirodham. The belief that in the 1st NT idam was an independent
pronoun agreeing with -saccam led to the pronouns in the other three
NTs being changed to idam.

6.4. The earliest forms of the ‘enlightenment’ and ‘gerundival’ sets did
not include the word *ariya-saccam. Since the ‘introduction’ set is an
addition to the Dhammacakka-ppavattana-sutta, we may conclude that
the earliest form of this sutta did not include the word *ariya-saccam.

6.5. Nevertheless, as John Brough stated in his note on pamādol
*pāmado,¹ these readings are so well entrenched in the Pāli tradition
that, even if agreement could be reached upon the original form of the
four NTs, no editor would think of inserting an emendation of them into
his text.