The Four Noble Truths

1) True sufferings (or) the truth of suffering
2) True origins (or) the truth of the origin
3) True cessations (or) the truth of cessation
4) True paths (or) the truth of the path

The 16 Aspects (or Characteristics) of the Four Noble Truths

The four aspects of true sufferings
1. Impermanent
2. Suffering
3. Empty
4. Selfless

The four aspects of the true origins (of suffering)
5. Cause
6. Origin
7. Strong producer
8. Condition

The four aspects of the true cessations (of suffering)
9. Cessation
10. Pacification
11. Satisfying state
12. Definite release

The four aspects of the true paths (that lead to the cessation of suffering):
13. Path
14. Appropriate means
15. Actualizing means
16. Means for a definite eradication

The 16 aspects of the four noble truths counteract the following 16 wrong views:

The 16 Wrong Views

The 16 wrong views can be divided into four categories:

a) The four wrong views with regard to true sufferings
b) The four wrong views with regard to true origins
c) The four wrong views with regard to true cessations
d) The four wrong views with regard to true paths
The four wrong views with regard to true sufferings:

1. The wrong view that true sufferings such as the contaminated aggregates are pure
2. The wrong view that true sufferings such as the contaminated aggregates are in the nature of happiness
3. The wrong view that true sufferings such as the contaminated aggregates are permanent
4. The wrong view that true sufferings such as the contaminated aggregates have a self

The four wrong views with regard to true origins:

5. The wrong view that suffering has no origin
6. The wrong view that suffering has only one cause
7. The wrong view that suffering is generated by a creator god
8. The wrong view positing something that is permanent by nature but occasionally changes

The wrong views with regard to true cessations:

9. The wrong view that there is no liberation from cyclic existence
10. The wrong view that contaminated states are liberation from cyclic existence
11. The wrong view that states which are in the nature of suffering are liberation from cyclic existence
12. The wrong view that although the elimination of suffering is possible, it can also be reversed

The wrong view with regard to true paths:

13. The wrong view that there is no path to liberation from cyclic existence
14. The wrong view that the mind that has familiarized itself with selflessness is not an appropriate path to liberation
15. The wrong view that the worldly meditative concentrations are paths to liberation
16. The wrong view that there is no path that eradicates suffering

The 16 aspects, the 16 wrong views and the persons who hold those views

Please note that the understanding of the first aspect of the four noble truths, impermanence, counteracts the wrong view that true sufferings are permanent. The understanding of the second aspect, suffering, counteracts two wrong views: the wrong view that true sufferings are pure and the wrong view that they are in the nature of happiness. The understanding of the third aspect, empty, and the fourth aspect, selfless, counteracts the wrong view that apprehends a non-existent self (i.e., a permanent, partless, independent self and a substantially existent, self-sufficient I).

The understanding of each of the remaining aspects corresponds to a single wrong view.

True sufferings:

(1) Impermanent:

True sufferings such as the contaminated aggregates are impermanent, because they arise temporarily and change from moment to moment.
The understanding that the contaminated aggregates are impermanent counteracts the wrong view that the contaminated aggregates are everlasting and do not change moment by moment.

(2) **Suffering:**

*True sufferings* such as the contaminated aggregates are in the nature of suffering, because they are under the control of contaminated karma and craving.

The understanding that the contaminated aggregates are in the nature of suffering counteracts the wrong view that the contaminated aggregates are pure and in the nature of happiness.

With regard to the persons who hold the three wrong views that are counteracted by the first two aspects: in general, non-Buddhist Indian philosophers do not hold that the five contaminated aggregates are permanent, pure, and in the nature of happiness. According to some scholars, the first three wrong views are held instead by ordinary people who innately apprehend the psycho-physical aggregates to be unchanging, pure and in the nature of happiness.

The following wrong views are held mainly by the proponents of the different non-Buddhist Indian philosophical systems.

(3) **Empty:**

*True sufferings* such as the contaminated aggregates are empty, because there is no self of a different nature that controls them.

The understanding that the contaminated aggregates are empty counteracts the wrong view that there is a permanent, partless, independent self.

Most followers of the different non-Buddhist Indian philosophical systems, such as the Samkyaas (Tib: *grangs can pa*), Vaisheshikas (Tib: *bye brag pa*), Mimamsakas (Tib: *spyod pa ba*) and so forth, assert a self characteristics of which are not compatible with the characteristics of the five aggregates, in that the self is said to be permanent while the aggregates are impermanent; to be partless, while the aggregates possess parts; and to exist independently of the aggregates.

Since most of the non-Buddhist Indian philosophers accept past and future lives, they are interested in what it is that travels from one life to the next. They understand the ever-changing nature of the five aggregates, and posit a self that is more stable than the psycho-physical complex. Hence, many of them assert the existence of a self that is static and unchanging (*permanent*), does not have spatial and temporary parts (*partless*), and that exists independent of the five aggregates (*independent*). Such a self is compared to a pea in a jar, the jar being the psycho-physical aggregates and the pea being the self residing within the aggregates until the aggregates disintegrate at death, at which point the self goes on to its next rebirth.

(4) **Selfless:**

*True sufferings* such as the contaminated aggregates are selfless, because they are free from an independent self.

The understanding that the contaminated aggregates are selfless counteracts the wrong view that there is a substantially existent, self-sufficient I.
Most followers of the non-Buddhist Indian philosophical systems assert also the existence of such a self. The misapprehension of that type of self is slightly subtler than the misapprehension of a permanent, partless, independent self. It conceives the existence of a self to which the mind and body belong, an owner or governor of them, something which has a different character to them and possesses, controls, and utilizes them, thinking, "Mine". Furthermore, there is a sense that it is possible to apprehend that self without having to apprehend any of the five aggregates, and that one’s own mind and body could be exchanged with another person’s mind and body, i.e. that one’s self could become the owner of another person’s psycho-physical aggregates.

**True origins:**

(5) **Cause:**

True origins such as contaminated karma and craving are *causes*, because they are the root of suffering.

The understanding that contaminated karma and afflictions are causes of suffering counteracts the wrong view that suffering does not have a cause.

For instance, the followers of the non-Buddhist Indian Charvaka (Tib: rgyang 'phen pa) or Nihilist system assert that the sharpness of thorns, the roundness of peas, the colorful pattern on peacock feathers, and so forth were not produced by causes since they hold that such causes cannot be perceived. Also, they do not accept the concomitance of a cause and its effect because they observe, for example, that some misers become wealthy and some donors of charity become poor. Therefore, they do not assert that suffering has a cause but that it arises naturally.

(6) **Origin:**

*True origins* such as contaminated karma and craving are *origins*, because they generate all kinds of suffering, again and again.

The understanding that the contaminated karma and afflictions are origins of suffering counteracts the wrong view that suffering has only *one* cause.

The followers of the non-theistic Samkya system, for example, assert that all physical phenomena, mind, suffering, and so forth are manifestations of and thus results of a single entity, called “the fundamental nature” (Skt: mulaprakrti, Tib: rtsa ba’i rang bzhin).

(7) **Strong producer:**

*True origins* such as contaminated karma and craving are *strong producers*, because they generate suffering forcefully.

The understanding that contaminated karma and afflictions are strong producers counteracts the wrong view that suffering is generated by a creator god.

For instance, the followers of the non-Buddhist Indian Shaiva (Tib: dbang phyug pa) and Vaisheshika systems believe that the world, living beings, happiness, suffering, and so on are created by the god Ishvara. They believe that Ishvara’s mind forcefully (or mainly) gives rise to these phenomena which is why understanding that contaminated karma and afflictions forcefully create suffering counteracts that wrong view.
(8) **Condition:**

*True origins* such as contaminated karma and craving are **conditions**, because they are the cooperative conditions of suffering.

The understanding that contaminated karma and afflictions are conditions counteracts the wrong view that a phenomenon can be permanent by nature and yet occasionally change.

For example, the Samkyas hold the wrong view that the *fundamental nature* is permanent by nature but that it nonetheless changes as it manifests physical phenomena, suffering etc.

Understanding that contaminated karma and afflictions serve as cooperative conditions of suffering counteracts that wrong view, for if something is a result of particular conditions, its cause cannot be permanent and must have the potential to give rise to that particular result.

**True cessations:**

(9) **Cessation:**

A *true cessation* such as a separation that has completely removed suffering by means of antidotes is a **cessation**, because it is a separation that has eliminated suffering.

The understanding that an elimination of suffering is a cessation counteracts the wrong view that there is no liberation from cyclic existence.

The followers of the non-Buddhist Indian Charvaka and Mimamsaka (Tib: *spyod pa ba*) systems, for instance, assert that liberation is impossible.

The Charvakas hold that the mind was produced from the elements and thus there is no reincarnation or liberation from afflicted states of mind. The Mimamsaka assert reincarnation but they believe that the obstructions to liberation such as attachment, anger, and so forth are in the nature of the mind and therefore cannot be removed.

(10) **Pacification:**

A *true cessation* such as a separation that has completely removed suffering by means of antidotes is a **pacification**, because it is a separation that has eliminated the afflictions.

The understanding that an elimination of suffering is a pacification counteracts the wrong view that certain contaminated states constitute liberation from cyclic existence.

For example, the non-Buddhist philosophers of the Jain (Tib: *gcer bu pa*) system believe that liberation refers to a place on top of the different worlds that resembles an upside-down umbrella. This is where a person goes when they have consumed all previous karmic actions and no longer accumulate new karma.

(11) **Satisfying state:**

A *true cessation* such as a separation that has completely removed suffering by means of antidotes is a **satisfying state**, because it is a liberation that brings benefit and happiness.

The understanding that an elimination of suffering is a satisfying state counteracts the wrong view that certain states of suffering are liberation from cyclic existence.
The liberation asserted by the Samkyas, for instance, is such a state. The Samkyas hold that in reliance on meditative concentration, a person attains the divine eye and uses it to observe the *fundamental nature*. Subsequently, all manifestations of the *fundamental nature* dissolve back into it and it separates from the self. The self that is left behind is asserted to be attainment of liberation.

(12) **Definite release:**

A *true cessation* such as a separation that has completely removed suffering by means of antidotes is a **definite release**, because it is an irrevocable liberation.

The understanding that an elimination of suffering is a definite release counteracts the wrong view that although the elimination of suffering is possible, that elimination is reversible.

For example, if Samkyas with some clairvoyant abilities become aware that after they supposedly attained liberation they are taking rebirth again in cyclic existence, they come to believe that liberation is reversible and that one can lose one’s spiritual attainments.

**True Paths:**

(13) **Path:**

A *true path* such as the wisdom directly realizing selflessness is a **path**, because it is a path that proceeds to liberation.

The understanding that the wisdom directly realizing selflessness is a path counteracts the wrong view that there is no path to liberation from cyclic existence.

As mentioned above, Charvakas and Mimamsakas hold that liberation is impossible and therefore believe that there is no path to liberation.

(14) **Appropriate means:**

A *true path* such as the wisdom directly realizing selflessness is an **appropriate means**, because it serves as the direct antidote to the afflictions.

The understanding that the wisdom directly realizing selflessness is an appropriate means counteracts the wrong view that a mind that has familiarized itself with selflessness is not an appropriate path to liberation.

Since the followers of the major non-Buddhist Indian philosophical systems assert a permanent, partless, independent self, they do not accept selflessness and thus do not hold that meditation on selflessness leads to liberation.

(15) **Actualizing means:**

A *true path* such as the wisdom directly realizing selflessness is an **actualizing means**, because it is a pristine wisdom that directly realizes the final mode of existence of the mind.

The understanding that the wisdom directly realizing selflessness is an actualizing means counteracts the wrong view that the ordinary meditative concentrations of the form and formless realms are paths to liberation.
For instance, the Samkyas assert that the ordinary meditative concentrations of the form and formless realms are means to attaining liberation.

(16) **Means for a definite eradication:**

A *true path* such as the wisdom directly realizing selflessness is a **means for a definite eradication**, because it is an antidote that irrevocably eliminates suffering.

The understanding that the wisdom directly realizing selflessness is a means for a definite eradication counteracts the wrong view that there is no path that eradicates suffering.

Since the Charvakas and the Mimamsakas do not accept liberation they do not hold that there is a path that eliminates suffering.