

।। दृष्टिमुद्राचतुष्टयम् ।।

|| dr̥ṣṭimudrācatuṣṭayam ||

The Four Seals of the View



मौगतम्

Saugatam
Sanskrit Buddhism

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Introduction

|| namo buddhāya ||

There are different ways in which one may use the term “Buddhist”; the Four Seals determine that a view is Buddhist, and that someone who upholds that view is Buddhist by view (rather than by vows).

Elements of existence are called saṃskāra as they assemble together (sam) to produce their effects (-kāra), and also, because they themselves are the effects of other such assembled factors. Everything that is the result of causes and conditions is impermanent: this is the first seal.

Impermanence, in turn, is the basis for suffering. That things amount to suffering – either immediately, or eventually – is the second seal. A more nuanced wording (found in Mahāyāna Sūtras, for example) states that all things “with fluxes” (sa-āsrava) are suffering. “Fluxes” are mental afflictions; all entities that allow mental afflictions to stick to the mind and grow are suffering – but from this, we can exclude all those entities that are part of the Buddhist path, which eventually will eradicate, rather than promote, mental afflictions.

Everything whatsoever is without self – this is the third seal. A self is a permanent core independent and not affected by causes and conditions, that may be the basis for a continuous, real, personal identity. Such thing does not exist – the Buddhist schools that regard certain entities (like space) as being permanent are emphatic that even those entities are without self.

Nirvāṇa is peace – this is the fourth seal. Nirvāṇa is free from mental afflictions, free from suffering, and even free from such conceptual limitations as arising, cessation, existence, non-existence, etc.

Chanting and reflection on the four seals is also recommended as a way to turn the mind away from worldly concerns, towards the Dharma.

सर्वसंस्कारा अनित्याः ।

सर्वसंस्कारा दुःखाः ।

सर्वधर्मा अनात्मानः ।

शान्तं निर्वाणम् ॥

sarvasaṁskārā anityāḥ |

sarvasaṁskārā duḥkhāḥ |

sarvadharmā anātmānaḥ |

śāntaṁ nirvāṇam ||

All assembled factors are impermanent,

All assembled factors are suffering,

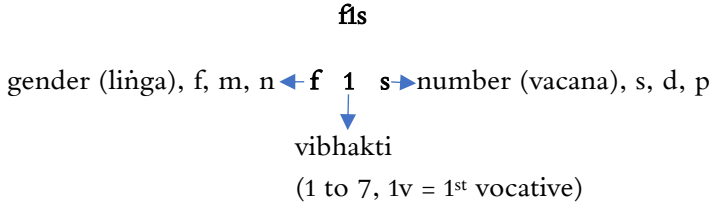
All dharmas are without self;

Nirvāṇa is peaceful.

Grammatical notes and glossary

Nouns have three grammatical genders (feminine, masculine, neuter), three numbers (singular, dual, plural), and seven vibhaktis (the vocative is regarded as a subtype of the 1st vibhakti).

Example of abbreviations for nouns:



Thus, f1s means:

feminine gender, 1st vibhakti, singular number.

Other examples:

m3p = masculine, 3rd vibhakti, plural

n5d = neuter, 5th vibhakti, dual

sarvasaṁskārā anityāḥ |

sarvasaṁskārā duḥkhāḥ |

sarvadharmā anātmānaḥ |

śāntam nirvāṇam ||

sarva-saṁskārāḥ, a-nityāḥ, sarva-saṁskārāḥ, duḥkhāḥ, sarva-dharmāḥ, an-ātmānaḥ, śāntam, nirvāṇam

sarvasaṁskārāḥ | *sarva-saṁskāra* m1p, all (sarva) assembled factors (saṁskāra) ||
anityāḥ | *a-nitya* m1p, impermanent, not (a-) permanent (nitya) || *sarvasaṁskārāḥ* |
sarva-saṁskāra m1p, all (sarva) assembled factors (saṁskāra) || *duḥkhāḥ* | *duḥkha*
m1p, suffering, painful || *sarvadharmāḥ* | *sarva-dharma* m1p, all (sarva) dharmas

(here “dharma” refers to an entity, any entity || *anātmānaḥ* | *anātman* m1p, self-less (ātman = self) || *śāntam* | *śānta* n1s, peaceful, pacified || *nīrvāṇam* | *nīrvāṇa* n1s, nirvāṇa ||

References

This wording was extracted from a longer passage in the Mahāvastu-Avadāna:

sarvasaṃskārā anityāḥ sarvasaṃskārā duḥkhā sarvadharmā anātmānaḥ || etaṃ
śāntaṃ etaṃ praṇītaṃ etaṃ yathāvad etaṃ aviparītaṃ yam idaṃ
sarvopadhipratiniḥsargo sarvasaṃskārasamathā dharmopacchedo tṛṣṇākṣayo virāgo
nirodho nirvāṇaṃ ||

For the full text of the Mahāvastu:

http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/corpustei/transformations/html/sa_mahAvastu-avAdana.htm