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F O U R N O B L E T R U T H S

A L M O S T B U D D H I S T P O E M S

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A L M O S T B U D D H I S T P O E M S





1

Life ain't easy, the Buddha taught, but we make it harder
by clinging to our vision of the way it ought to be,
who we are, what we want, don't want, what's so, what isn't.
Life, living, today, tomorrow—things don't have to be that hard.

There's an answer—although there's more than one question.
More than one answer—eight in fact—although
there's really only one question...or maybe no questions.
Stop clinging to our own notions, stop inventing dream worlds,

start living right...*right view, right intention, right speech,*
right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness,
right concentration. Help!...sounds so complicated, so much to do.

Here's the secret—walk that dharma road one step at a time.
Life is empty but living's full. Nothing to do. No one to do it.
Just plain doing. Not my life, not your life, just plain living.

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2

We didn't need the Buddha to tell us life is hard, unhappiness, discontent, suffering, on every hand.

The first noble truth's a given, but still, you've got to start somewhere. Start here, the Buddha said,

and ask why? Why? Why so much suffering? Follow that unhappiness back to the mind that made it, yours, mine. What does the mind do that hurts so? Attachment? but to what?... Ah, now it gets interesting.

The second noble truth's a puzzler. Follow that trail of attachments: we cling to things, but no, we cling to our ideas of things, the self's picture of the world.

And the self itself? Knock, knock, who's there? The big attachment's me. I'm real, I swear. But the Buddha says no: a shadow in progress, shifting as the world breathes.



3

Grasping, clinging, attachment—how else could one put it? Hung up? But hung up on what? on what we want? what we think we want? or what we want to think we want?

Take one step back. Are we really talking—was the Buddha really talking—about suffering, and its causes? deep suffering? or only simple dissatisfaction? Or is it all the same, if we cause it?

Unhappiness by any other name's still unhappy: dukkha, dissatisfaction, a nagging worry sliding downhill toward deep despair. The Buddha cast

a wide net with one phrase. Did he mean it?

Do we get it? The simpler the lesson the harder it is to learn. Or is it?



4

It doesn't have to be this way, the Buddha said.

It ain't necessarily so. The cessation of suffering is possible, even better, achievable, there's a path that will take us there. Sounds good. But one wonders:

is that it? Is that where we really want to go?

Is the cessation of suffering really the same as fulfillment, as awakening, as liberation?

Is the cessation of suffering happiness?

Happiness sounds like a middle-class hangup.

But if the Dalai Lama can talk about happiness without blushing, why can't we? One wonders:

does happiness just happen when suffering ends?

Can one, should one, get beyond happiness?

Is the cessation of suffering end or beginning?



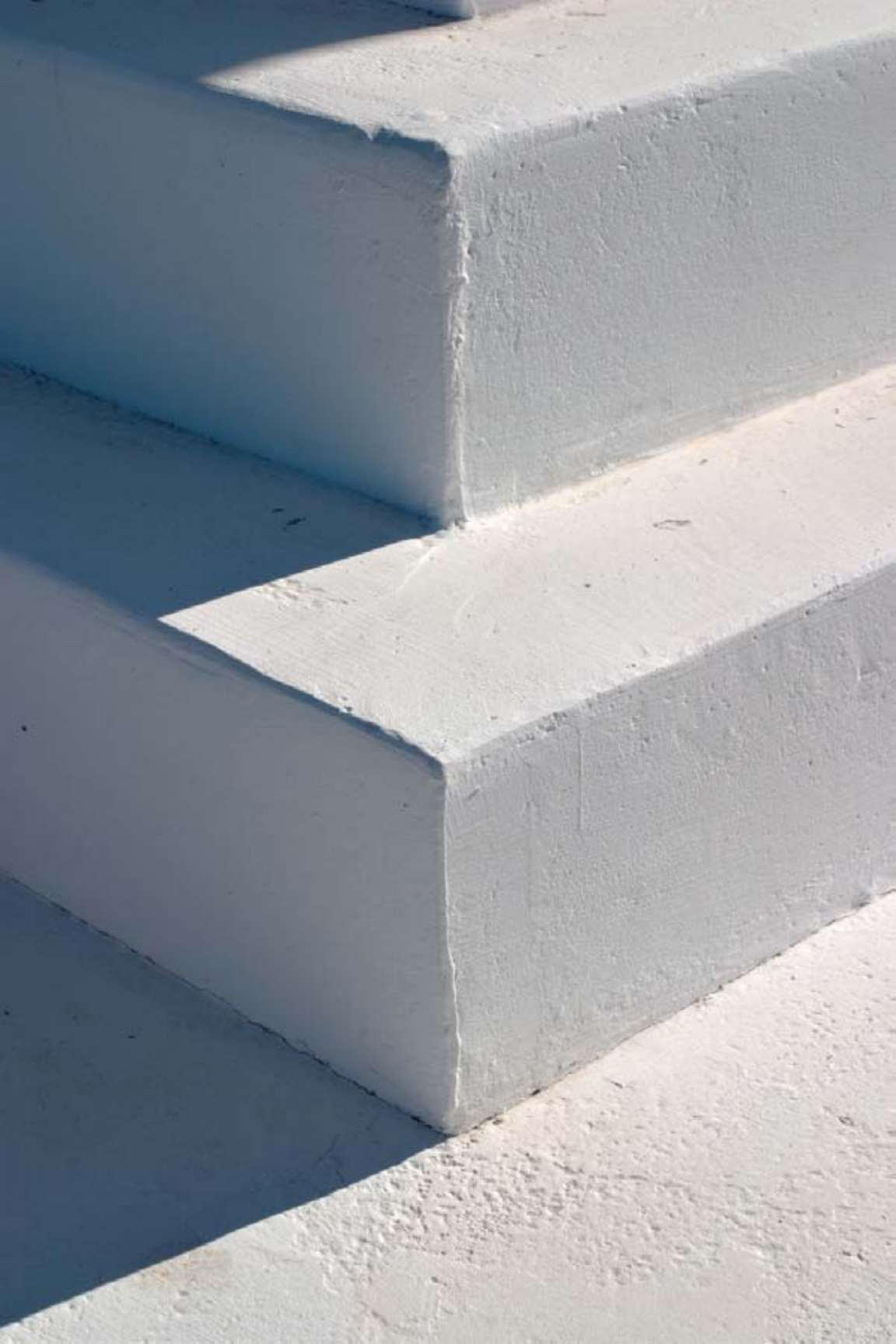
5

At the heart of the dharma—
the mind of no clinging.
How do they fit together
dharma and mind? Do you

think the dharma or live it?
Does living the dharma
mean clinging to dharma?
is living clinging to life?

The mind of no clinging
is still a mind—a metaphor
for what? Is there nothing

in this rich, empty-full world
more interesting to observe
than our own minds?



6

It sounds so simple, the first time you hear those four noble truths—*I get it...that's it!*

Yes & no. Simple & not so simple. If all life's sorrows come from clinging, then why

an eightfold path to get beyond them?

Why not just stop this grasping, renounce this clinging, this vain attachment

to what we desire? what we think we desire?...

A single cause for suffering suggests a single solution. Just do it. Just stop clinging. Seems there's more to it. Maybe not feeling bad is

just the start. Maybe beyond not suffering the liberated self still has more to do. Maybe the Buddha meant *no more suffering*—for all.

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7

This business about suffering—if only
the Buddha were here for a little chat,
I know we could get it straight.

What if the first noble truth is only

about *needless suffering*? Most is, I guess.
Mind suffering made by mind. “Dukkha,”
scholars say the Buddha said, translating
it more as annoyance than anguish.

“Unsatisfactoriness” seems unsatisfactory.
We want a big answer to big problems,
hence suffering. Isn’t there also suffering

without attachment? A mouse suffers
pulled apart in bites by a hawk, a victim
of torture really suffers, not from attachment.

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8

Four Noble Truths – OK, I think I get it, but

why noble? Why not four simple truths?

They do seem pretty basic, don't they?

Who can argue with the Buddha? Not me,

not you. Buddhism came afterward, didn't it?

Noble came afterward. Four simple truths

that (maybe) add up to one. Pogo said it,

I think the Buddha would have agreed:

“We have seen the enemy, and he is us.”

We are the source of our own suffering,

our discontent. The harder we cling

to what we think we want, the worse

we feel, the harder it is to let go.

Four simple truths in one? *Let go?*

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