Four Noble Truths Summary

(Buddhism textbook pages 26-35)

The specification says:

• The Four Noble Truths:   
1 **suffering** (dukkha) including different types of suffering  
2 **the causes of suffering** (samudaya); the Three Poisons, ignorance, greed and hate  
3 **the end of craving** (tanha), interpretations of nibbana (nirvana) and Enlightenment  
4 **the Eightfold Path** (magga) to nibbana/nirvana; the path as the Threefold Way: ethics (sila), meditation (samadhi) and wisdom (panna). Dhammapada 190 –191.

Buddha taught four things to do with suffering and overcoming it. They are called the Four Noble Truths.

**1) Suffering exists.** (dukkha)

Dukkha literally means unsatisfactoriness and refers to all kinds of imperfection and suffering:

* physical pain,
* aging process,
* mental suffering,
* emotional unhappiness,
* death, etc.

**2) The cause of suffering: *craving***

Dukkha is caused by our craving (tanha) for things:

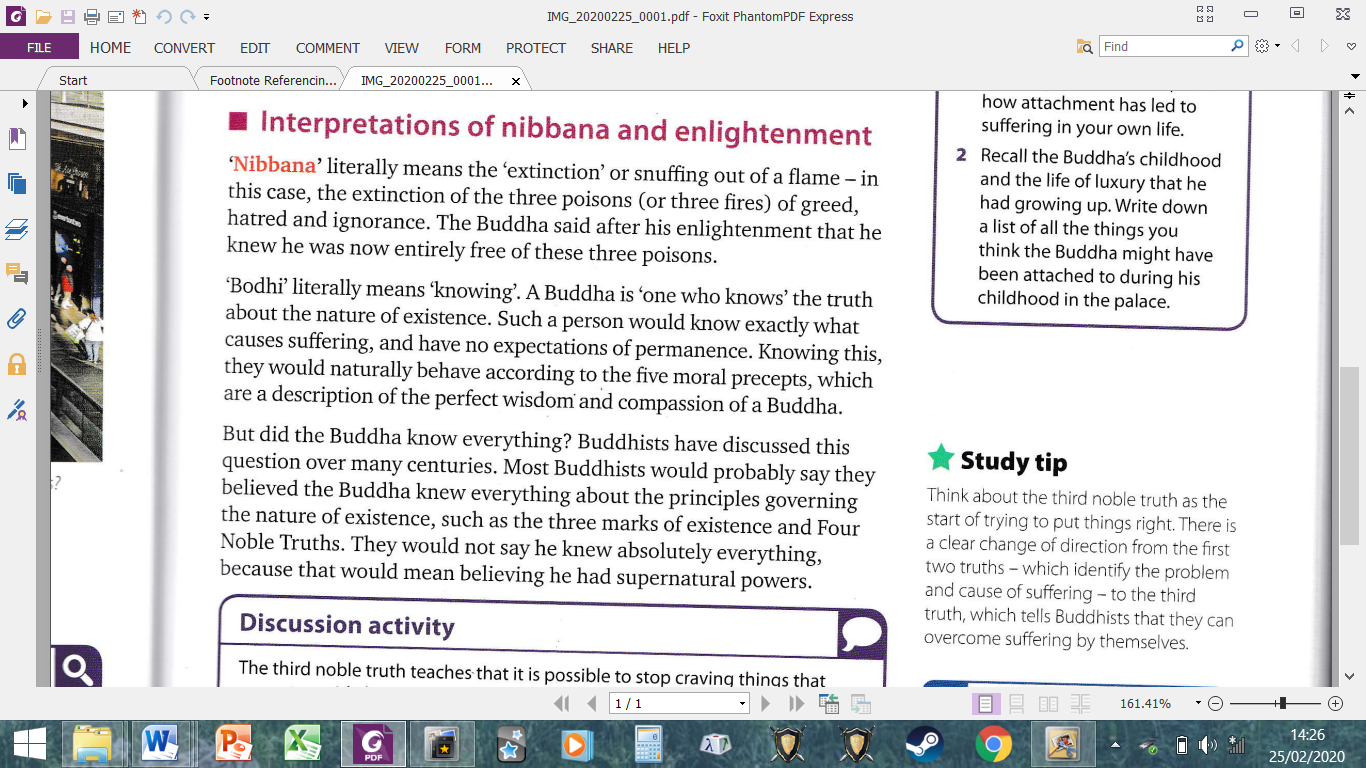
a. things that please the senses or possessions (e.g. food, drink, sleep/house, car, phone);

b. wanting to be something that you are *not* (e.g. rich or powerful);

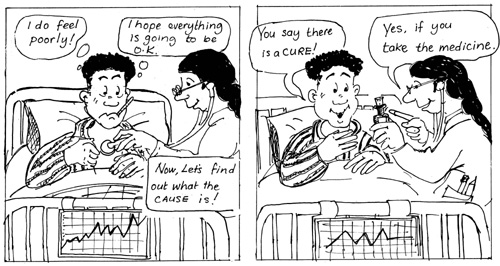
c. wanting not to be something that you *are* (e.g. wanting not to be overweight).

Buddha talked about the Three Poisons that cause suffering:

1. ignorance (of the way to enlightenment)
2. greed and
3. hate.

**3) Suffering can end** – without craving there would not be suffering. If we can let go of craving then we can overcome our suffering. If we can be free from ignorance, greed and hatred then we will be enlightened and not suffer.

**Enlightenment** means a full realisation of the nature of reality or gaining complete understanding of these life issues. **Nibbana** is a state of perfection achieved because of enlightenment; peace, happiness, freedom from greed, ignorance, hatred and suffering.



Buddha is compared to a doctor. The Eightfold Path is seen as being like medicine.

**4) The cure for suffering - The Eightfold Path** is the way to nibbana.

1. Right speech
2. Right action
3. Right livelihood
4. Right effort
5. Right mindfulness

These ideas are found in a Buddhist holy book called the *Dhammapada*. It says:

‘He who has gone for refuge to the Buddha, the Teaching and his Order, penetrates with transcendental wisdom the Four Noble Truths — suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the Noble Eightfold Path leading to the cessation of suffering.’

(Dhammapada 190 –191)

1. Right concentration
2. Right understanding
3. Right intention

This can be split into three; the **Threefold Way**:

1. **ethics**: right speech, action, livelihood;
2. **meditation**: right effort, mindfulness, concentration; and
3. **wisdom**: right understanding and intention.

Ethics means the study of good & bad behaviour.

More detail on the Eightfold Path

1. Right speech – speaking only truthful, helpful things – not lying or saying hurtful true things
2. Right action – behaving in a good, peaceful way – not harming others or getting drunk, etc.
3. Right livelihood – doing a job that helps others and does not harm animals (e.g. butcher)
4. Right effort – trying hard in meditation to free yourself from negative thoughts & emotions
5. Right mindfulness – having a good, clear awareness of yourself and the world around you
6. Right concentration – staying focussed in meditation
7. Right understanding – understanding of Buddha’s teaching and how it applies to life
8. Right intention – following the Dhamma with good motives

**Simple summary of the Four Noble Truths:**

1. **Suffering exists.**
2. **The cause of suffering**
3. **Suffering can end.**
4. **The cure for suffering (Eightfold Path)**

Possible exam questions:

1. Explain two ways in which the Four Noble Truths could be seen as part of the refuge of the Dhamma. (4 marks)
2. Explain the meaning of two of the Four Noble Truths. (4 marks)
3. Explain two connections between the Four Noble Truths and other aspects of the Buddha’s teachings. (4 marks)
4. Explain two reasons why Buddhists consider it important to admit suffering is a part of life. (4 marks)
5. Explain two ways in which happiness with things can lead eventually to suffering. (4 marks)
6. Explain two ways in which the Three Poisons can lead to suffering. (4 marks)
7. Explain two ways in which attachment can lead to suffering. (4 marks)
8. Explain two of the Eightfold Path. (4 marks)
9. Explain two of the Threefold Way. (4 marks)
10. Explain two examples of how letting go of craving can end suffering. In your answer you must refer to scripture. (5 marks)
11. Explain two Buddhist teachings about the causes of suffering. In your answer you must refer to scripture. (5 marks) - **from the textbook**
12. Explain two Buddhist beliefs about the third Noble Truth. In your answer you must refer to scripture. (5 marks) - **from the textbook**
13. ‘Buddhism is a negative religion because it focusses on suffering.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)
14. ‘Without help from a God it is impossible to end suffering.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)
15. ‘It is wrong to avoid suffering because we learn important lessons from it.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)
16. ‘It is possible to end suffering.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)
17. ‘Enlightenment leads to greater satisfaction than anything else in life.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)
18. ‘The Eightfold Path is a naturally logical way of living a happy life.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)