

A Dharma talk given on the book:

**The Eightfold Path**

Edited by Jikyo Cheryl Wolfer

Covering the book's first half (Intro through chapter 4)

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Given to the CT sangha of the DTO 2/29/2020

## **The Eightfold Path**

### **Introduction**

The book begins with an Introduction of the Four Noble Truths edited by Byakuren Judith Ragir.

In the story of the First Discourse the Buddha teaches the 4 noble truths.

1. There is suffering in human life.
2. We cling to our personal desire system.
3. Personal desire system can be released
4. Noble 8 fold path.

Buddha experienced two extremes, one of pursuing happiness through sensual pleasure, the second extreme is having a severe sense of discipline which might lead to self-mortification. For the Buddha self mortification led to aestheticism through which he became emaciated and weak. These extremes did not lead him to enlightenment. The Buddha began teaching the Middle Way and expounded on the Four Noble Truths which are based on the principle of cause and effect. Inherent in cause and effect is the great ability to change or transform.

In the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta the Buddha describes suffering as having origins in:

Birth, ageing, illness, death

union with what is displeasing is suffering

separation from what is pleasing is suffering

not getting what one wants is suffering

the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering

### The First Noble Truth

The story of the 83 problems:

The Buddha used a random number, 83, to quantify our human problems. These are the never-ending disappointments, the mind of complaint. Here is a story from the Buddha about our problems in life:

A farmer came to the Buddha and laid out all his problems.

The farmer hoped the Buddha, as a wise man, would help him resolve some of his problems.

The Buddha said, "I can't help you."

The astonished man said, "What do you mean?"

The Buddha said, "Everyone has problems, in fact everyone has got all eighty three problems and there's nothing you can do about it. If you fix one problem, another will pop up. There's nothing you or I or anyone else can do about it."

The man became furious, "I thought you were a great teacher". He shouted. "I thought you could help me. What good is your teaching then?"

The Buddha said, "Well, maybe it will help you with the eighty-fourth problem?"

"What's the eighty-fourth problem?"

The Buddha said, "You don't want to have any problems."

(Hagen 16-17)

We have a fantasy that a spiritual life can eradicate our suffering. Yet there is **No Escape**. We can study and practice how to hold our pain in a different way and change our perspective on life. We gain spiritual stability, a place in our self that is quiet, connected to everything, and beyond identity. This provides us with an inner strength and resilience to see the real truth of the world. As we find this place in ourselves, our obsession with our problems seems to calm down and we begin to practice with "things as they are".

Ms. Ragir quotes Katagiri Roshi who writes in his book Returning to Silence:

“Suffering is not merely suffering as opposed to pleasure. **Suffering is a holy truth.**”

This means that it is one aspect of human life from which no one can escape. It is completely beyond what one likes or dislikes. You have to face it directly because your life is right in the middle of suffering. Directly facing the suffering "as it is" is to be free of the suffering. It is an opportunity to touch the core of human life. This is the total acceptance of suffering.

### The Second Noble Truth

We cling to our personal desire system. Our desires come from holding on to that which we think will produce happiness for our self.

Buddha spoke about the 3 hungers that help produce the system of desires:

- Holding on to sensual pleasure
- Craving being, want to be alive,
- Craving non-being, want to escape pain of being.

Other desire systems come from:

- Three objects - like, dislike, neutral
- Three poisons - greed, anger, ignorance
- Eight Worldly Winds- pleasure, pain; gain, loss; success, failure; praise, blame

Welcome either side of these worldly winds, welcome as the Buddha himself, as energy of the moment. Plant seeds of virtues - bring forth a soft heart in the middle of the desires, such as seeds of kindness, patience, clarity, changing our habits, reconnecting with universal energy, and open up to something larger than our self.

When our attachment to positive things and aversion to negative things are absent, life presents itself just as it is and each moment is suchness itself.

May I be at peace with the ups and downs of life.

### The Third Noble Truth

The personal desire system can be released. It is possible to heal our difficult lives.

Unravel idea of a separate self - we are whole. Mindfulness helps provide the energy that can help us stop harmful behaviors. Being aware of the 3 poisons in myself, greed, anger, ignorance.

Egolessness - forget ego, forget self - subject\object merged into present activity and encourages us to let go of our interpretations. There is a great sweetness in loving your life, accepting and taking care of it.

Contemplate the basic wisdom teachings presented in **Three Dharma Seals**:

- Impermanence - constant comings and goings
- Non self - no solid particle. Interbeing exists.
- Nirvana - see fully that there is impermanence and no self. Insight

A quote from Katagiri Roshi Each Moment is the Universe

“Just as everything that exists in the phenomenal world, your suffering is a being that arises from the original nature of existence and every moment it returns to its source. So when you see suffering, all you have to do is accept it and offer your body and mind to ultimate existence. Then you and suffering return to emptiness and there is freedom from suffering. A new way of seeing through our Buddha eyes.”

### The Fourth Noble Truth

#### **Living the Eightfold Path to well being**

How to of Buddha's teaching and how to practice. It is the cause for the effect in Third Noble Truth

Hold your mind on 1 point - NOW - as it is

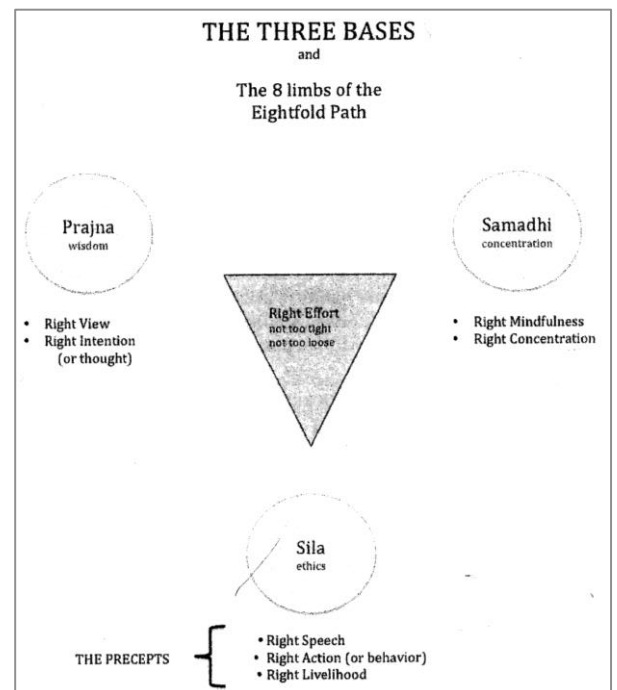
NOW – wisdom                      view, intention  
 NOW – concentration            mindfulness, concentration  
 NOW –ethics                              speech, action, livelihood

Right Effort is in the Center on the wheel - not too tight, not too loose, as taught by Pema Chodron. Effort generated with energy, practice, diligence, enthusiasm, etc. and is crucial because each person has to work out his own deliverance.

Let's explore the word RIGHT which precedes the steps on the path.

"Right" - it is not "right" as opposed to "wrong" in a dualistic way of thinking. It is not good or bad, because there are no solid, unchanging definitions of good and bad. A famous Buddhist story illustrates the changing views of good and bad:

In a village, a farmer's horse runs off. The villagers say, "Oh, too bad. You've lost your horse." A while later the horse comes back accompanied by a herd of wild horses. The villagers say to the farmer, "Oh how lucky you are, you now have a herd of horses." The farmer's son then tries to ride one of the untamed horses and breaks his leg. The villagers say, "Oh, too bad, I'm so sorry." Next, the army comes to town recruiting all the young men but the farmer's son is passed over



because he has a broken leg! All the villagers say, "Oh what good luck you have." In the ever-changing circumstances of life, who knows what is good and what is bad?  
(Hagen 42)

This story encourages us to look deeper into what  
"right" means.

Remember the three bases and we can stop swirling around and find the freedom Buddha talks about. Continuous practice becomes easier as our life becomes a series of moments. We can move from a mind of complaint to a mind of gratitude. With this new perspective we can receive and deeply feel the natural suffering that comes from being human. The Holy Truth of suffering is practiced with grace.

### **Chapter I Right View - *And Its Actualization***

by Myoan Grace Schireson

Right View is part of the wisdom base.

8 Fold Path is an ongoing experiential process, something I do. 8 limbs of the path integrate daily with life activity. We consciously engage the 8 limbs. Finding and adhering to the path requires Right View. This is a continuous activity not an object we grasp and keep. A View of this very moment as it is, not as we wish it to be.

Contemplation in daily life - it is awake, curious, and non judgmental. Use our attention to review what led to our upsetness or someone else's. Concentration and Right View - Practice deepens as we become more intimate with and more accepting of our own dynamic personal experience and reactivity within the big field.

Watch our own thoughts and impulses in the big pasture - these are known as cows. Don't ignore or control them. When we engage our thoughts by watching them we enter an interactive relationship with them and through this we can change our habits and get a new spacious view.

View is the contemplation of current distress - Ask oneself:

- What is this?
- Is that so?
- What just happened?
- What's next?
- Now what?
- What?

View encounters with daily life and tune in to awareness in the body. Scan the mind\body. Encourages curiosity and acceptance rather than judgement. Give wise consideration in situation, look for what is true, not pleasant. When we practice contemplation there is a neutral witness who becomes a more reliable observer of mind and its contents. We can more readily track what just happened.

## **Chapter 2 Right Intention - Arousing the Vow of Practice**

by Zenke Mary Mocine

Right Intention\Thought is part of the wisdom base.

The Buddha gave us instruction on how to practice with thought in his Sutra on the Two Sorts of Thinking. Do not get entangled with thoughts and also not trying to push them away. Easy to say, difficult to do. Simply sit down, get quiet, and pay attention?

In this Sutra he tells the monks that he divided his thoughts into two sorts; first, unwholesome thoughts (sensuality, ill will, and harmfulness), and second, wholesome thoughts of renunciation, loving kindness and compassion. He noticed that when thoughts of sense desire and ill will arose, they led to affliction for himself or others or both, and that such thoughts obstructed his judgment and promoted vexation.

When he noticed this, such thoughts tended to subside. When he indulged them, their habit force increased. The Buddha noticed that the opposite sorts of thoughts, wholesome thoughts of renunciation, loving kindness and compassion did not lead to affliction for himself or others. In fact they led to liberation and their habit force increased leading to peace and joy. And the habit force of unwholesome thoughts decreased.

Deeply own our karmic foundations or habits and explore the causes and conditions that led to our hindrances. Confess and repent, deeply own them and the real harm that arises from our unwholesome habits of mind. Pay attention and quietly explore the farthest reaches of these causes and conditions. Check out the body - is there a clenching of the jaw, or in the gut? Does the breath get shallow, is there a grasping after something, a longing? Aversion? It is fundamental to know when such thoughts arise and their consequences.

As we see our unwholesome thoughts and their unfortunate consequences we develop the deep vow to let them go, to renounce them. And at the same time we begin to see our bodhisattva nature and be able to rejoice in it. Again, this generous view supports our intention to renounce unwholesome habits of mind. When we dig through our own manure and exercise our own faith muscle discernment and learn to explore, we develop ability to see. Over and over let go of the story.

Give your true self to your true self.

Loving kindness foundations-

Discover the good in your enemy - this is an antidote when in state of ill will. Seclude mind from hate seen as a danger and introducing it to patience known as an advantage. Begin with oneself. This is metta meditation.

Compassion is the Buddha's antidote to thoughts of cruelty and harm. Notice how thoughts are harmful to self and others. How thoughts of harm arise from our own difficulties. Include oneself in compassion. Stay close and do nothing.

Do nothing - arise organically from the heart vs. idea of what should be done. Know the connection to self and other. Tune in to self and know what's going on so we can respond to self and the other.

### **Chapter 3 Right Speech - *The Dance of Understanding***

by Tönen O'Connor

Right Speech is part of the ethics base.

Buddhists have a particular and very deep understanding of our world as completely interdependent and constantly changing. We live within complex, constantly altering relationships. I'm changing, you're changing, everything is changing. Tönen O'Connor says that as he looks at this, he sees that however we approach speech we must be light of foot, engaging in the dance of changing understandings. We need to be aware not only of what we say, but how we react to what others say. Our intentions may be good, their intentions may be good, and we may still find hurt in the air.

Compassion lies behind right speech, as with the heart of the 8 fold path. Buddha suggests that, out of compassion for living beings, it is not fully right speech unless it is delivered at the appropriate moment, for among other things, it may not be really heard or absorbed if the time is not ripe. It's not just what comes out of my mouth, but embraces a wide assortment of direct communication.

Methods of communication include the written word and on line words which can be a source of so much misunderstanding. Non-verbal communication includes our demeanor, stance, gestures. It's hard to deliver loving words from an angry face as a kind of deceit becomes obvious when words and demeanor don't match.

Right speech is true, correct, beneficial, welcome and agreeable to others. Refrain from speaking falsely. Speech must be factual in nature and true to emotion of both speaker and hearer and we must be aware of whether or not this is the right moment to say things. Our lives are inextricably bound and recognizing this I must not blurt out hastily something inappropriate to the moment.

Speech and Silence - we refrain from saying something untrue, or true but harmful. Silence includes not gossiping, not spreading rumor, or needless speculations. Sometimes we may seem convinced that if we discuss in great detail what may happen we are speaking the truth. No predictions, as it might be better to keep our mouth shut in right silence. Speech is one of the effective means we have for influencing others and being active in the world to relieve others from suffering.

Dogen speaks of our pleasure in hearing kind speech and also great pleasure in utilizing kind speech because we see its effect reflected in others pleasure. We sense its rightness as an acknowledgement of the truths of impermanence and interdependence.

Another component to right speech is right hearing. This may be the most difficult thing of all. We hear the words of others as filtered through our ego, tainted by our delusions about our self. How often do misunderstandings arise because we have misconstrued something said? I may hear a comment about myself and interpret it as an attack when the person really meant it as a complement.

Even more difficult is hearing the meaning beneath the words. To do so we must be able to perceive that the speaker does not mean what she said or has been fed a viewpoint that she's adopted thoughtlessly.

The 8 Fold Path is a road map for an enlightened life. We've considered so many aspects of right speech, we ask, how am I going to keep all that in mind? We should be aware that the path is paved with words said in truth and in kindness by beings as ordinary and fallible as we. Let us embrace Buddha's Right Speech.

#### **Chapter 4 Right Action - *The World is my Body*** by Shodo Spring

Right Action is part of the ethics base.

Author Shodo Spring issues an inspiring call on behalf of the tribe of all beings. Shodo begins with her experience with a meal chant.

As we desire the natural condition of mind, to be free from clinging we must be free from greed. To support our life we take this food. To attain the Buddha Way we take this food. This food is for the Three Treasures, for our parents, teachers, leaders and homeland, and for beings in the six worlds. Thus we eat this food with everyone. We eat to end all evil, to practice good, to save all sentient beings, and to accomplish the Buddha Way.  
(Minnesota Zen Meditation Center chant book)

We receive food simply to support life. We receive food so we can practice the Buddha Way. We receive food on behalf of the four benefactors as: parents, teachers, worldly leaders, homeland, the culture that shapes us. We receive food for all beings. And so we also receive food along with everyone. We are part of this crowd of life.

Life is a gift. She asks if our virtue and practice deserve it. There is no such thing as deserving this gift. To be alive is a gift, freely given by the world around us, which does not judge or censure us.

Right Action is like this - it arises simply and directly from understanding our place in the world. When there is nothing but the gift, what can there be but gratitude. When there is nothing but gratitude, what arises will be right action. There is no need for control or even a decision on our part. And because we are part of the whole throng of living beings, right action is action on behalf of those beings and on behalf of the Way that sustains us.

Author quotes Katagiri Roshi's writing in **Returning to Silence**.

“All sentient beings are allowed to live and are, from the beginning, forgiven for living their lives in this world. Everything, whatever it is, has some reason why it exists: evil, good, even something neither evil nor good. You cannot destroy devils just because you don't like them. Even though you don't like monsters, still there is some reason why they exist. Everything is entitled to live in this world in peace and harmony beyond our judgement, our evaluation. This is the first condition we have to realize, everything is Buddha. (73)  
The second condition we have to realize is that the self must readily accept the compassion of Buddha's world .. We must actualize Buddha's compassion in our everyday lives. We have to live our lives in the complete realization that we are already forgiven, that we are already allowed to live, and that we, ourselves, must make our lives come alive. (73-74)”

Sentient beings are "forgiven for living their lives in this world". Author continues - we are forgiven for living our lives, having emotions, actions and impact, for taking space, for using air, water and food that might be better spent elsewhere. No, it wouldn't be better spent elsewhere. I'm welcome here, belonging forgiven, embraced. If I were gone, the whole world would miss me.

#### What I do matters

My actions create my own world and also the world of those around me, just as their actions create my world, just as everyone's actions together create the whole world. Our lives take place in the middle of Buddha's compassion and to be alive we must realize that compassion.

We do not have a separate existence; we are in relationship embraced by everything that lives. All of us create a world and are created by the world.

The teachings help us bring Right View into our lives to inform Right Action.

Is Right Action informed by Right Intention?

#### Lovingkindness Metta Meditation

Let one be strenuous, upright, and sincere, without pride, easily contented, and joyous. Let one not be submerged by the things of the world. Let one not take upon oneself the burden of riches. Let one's senses be controlled. Let one be wise but not puffed up and let one not desire great possessions even for one's family. Let one do nothing that is mean or that the wise would reprove.

SFZC, par 2

Let no one deceive another nor despise any being in any state. Let none by anger or hatred wish harm to another. Even as a mother at the risk of her life watches over and protects her only child, so with a boundless mind should one cherish all living things, suffusing love over the entire world, above, below, and all around, without limit, so let one cultivate an infinite good will toward the whole world.

SFZC, par 4

The teachings encourage us to be at peace, to do good, to spread metta. Our tribe is all sentient beings. There are 3 pure precepts which ground us in relationship which sustains right action:

- Avoid evil
- Cultivate good
- Cleanse one's mind

To cleanse one's mind is to realize everything is Buddha. We embrace all beings.

Uchiyama Roshi teaches in the Three Minds:

Opening the Hand of Thought. Joyful, magnanimous (spacious, and big), nurturing (unconditional love).

How shall we treat others? There are no others- an attitude to cultivate. Love, not control.

Right Action in context of compassionate functioning of the whole, we see the self slipping away. Life has suffering- allow some gentleness around people then we can talk and think about hard subjects.

What are teachings of a whole lifetime? An appropriate statement. Situation driven. When suffering arises we always have to decide what to do. We have to get out of the way and let appropriate action arise, but usually we call that deciding. Finding "an appropriate statement" may take a whole lifetime. Actually, she says, I don't think we find it. We allow Right Action to come forth having prepared the ground through practice and meditation.



Quoting Katagiri Roshi: "Everything is Buddha". In the ground of Buddha's compassion the whole world arises. Receive the Buddha's compassion, acknowledge ourselves to be forgiven and allowing ourselves to be exactly who we are, we come to realize ever more deeply how we belong to this world. The entire world without exception really is the true human body, as Dogen said, and if we allow ourselves to meet it we are verified by all things.

Presented by:  
Janet Crocker  
Feb 29, 2020

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An addendum to The Eightfold Path, as communicated with Shodo Spring of the Minnesota Zen Center and the author of Right Action in Chapter 4:

Greetings;

I am a Zen student and my sangha read the above referenced book. I have several questions to ask you if you don't mind helping clear my mind.

You quote Katagiri Roshi who wrote in Returning to Silence, that sentient beings are "forgiven for living their lives in this world".

"We are animals dependent on the whole community of beings in a very physical way. Let us forgive ourselves as we are already forgiven for being animals".  
Life is a gift "whether our virtue and practice deserve it."

Who is doing the forgiving?

I bow to you,  
Metta,  
Janet

Dear Janet,

What a lovely question. Koan, actually.  
Sometimes we pretend that we have an individual existence, and then we can forgive. Since we experience ourselves that way, it's not possible to keep all of our language in the Absolute.

Of course I can't read Katagiri Roshi's mind.

Bows  
Shodo

asked by:  
Janet Crocker  
2/28/2020