

Motivation

The Buddha seeks to help all beings liberate themselves from suffering. Based on every being's natural desire for happiness, the Noble Eightfold Path is taught in response to this inner request. It is purely from one's own motivation that one follows the Path. Initially this motivation may be selfish, but one soon realises that a lasting, personal happiness is not possible without consideration for the happiness of others. Nor is it possible to achieve personal happiness first and happiness for others after. If we can follow the Eightfold Path as wisely and compassionately as it has been taught, our liberation is assured.

Sometimes we may treat teachings purely as an intellectual pursuit. If we find the teachings make sense, then we should put them into practice. In this way we can develop both wisdom and compassion equally.

The Noble Eightfold Path in Brief

This is also known as the 'Middle Way' because it avoids two extremes: one being the search for worldly happiness - a sign of attachment; the other being the rejection of worldly happiness through ascetic practices - a sign of aversion. The Buddha tried both these extremes and found them to have no lasting benefit. He discovered through personal experience the Middle Way which brings calm, insight and enlightenment. He taught the Eightfold Path as follows:

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|------------------------|---|------------|
| 1. Right Understanding | } | wisdom |
| 2. Right Thought | | |
| 3. Right Speech | } | morality |
| 4. Right Action | | |
| 5. Right Livelihood | | |
| 6. Right Effort | } | meditation |
| 7. Right Mindfulness | | |
| 8. Right Concentration | | |

All the Buddha's teachings are essentially directed towards the practice of the Eightfold Path, each explaining it in a way suited to the development and capacity of the disciple. The eightfold path is therefore a corner stone of all Buddhist practice.

*'Cease to do evil, learn to do good, purify your heart,'
This is the teaching of all the Buddhas.*

The Dhammapada, v. 183

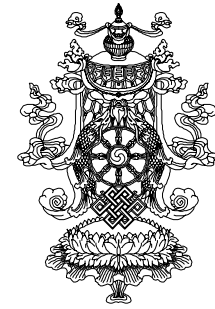
Recommended Reading

A library is available for general use with a limited selection of books. There is also a shop where books can be bought 'off-the-shelf' or to order. The following books are particularly recommended:

- Nagarjuna's Letter to a Friend. Trans. Geshé Lobsang Tharchin.
- The Fourth Noble Truth. Ven. Ajahn Sumedho
- The Noble Eightfold Path. Bhikku Bodhi
- The Requisites of Enlightenment Ledi Sayadaw
- What the Buddha Taught. Walpola Rahula
- Being Nobody, Going Nowhere, Ayya Khema

"... do not accept my teachings merely out of respect for me, but analyse and check them, the way that a goldsmith tests gold by rubbing, cutting and melting it".

Shakyamuni Buddha



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THE BUDDHIST WAY OF LIFE

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

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The Noble Eightfold Path

Nagarjuna wrote of the Four Noble Truths:

*All that arises is suffering.
Craving is its vast origination.
Its cessation is Liberation - the Path for
Attaining this is the Eightfold Arya Path.*

The Noble (or *Arya*) Eightfold Path is the Fourth Noble Truth. We all experience unpleasant conditions in our lives from time to time. When we realise that the very nature of our cyclic existence (or *samsara*) is inherently unsatisfactory; when we have some understanding of how this arises; when we believe it can be overcome; then we are ready to follow the Noble Eightfold Path to liberation.

The eight path factors are all described as 'right', meaning 'highest', 'supreme' or 'most-perfect'. These are 'right' in dependence on the result required (i.e. liberation from suffering) and not in terms of any external judgement. They are simply the cause necessary to achieve the effect.

There are several texts and commentaries on the Eightfold Path. These differ slightly in emphasis and categorisation but are essentially the same. The one followed mainly here is from Nagarjuna.

Right Understanding

According to Buddhism there are two sorts of understanding: a conventional, relative understanding which is intellectual in nature and an ultimate 'penetrating' understanding which sees things in their true nature, devoid of the notional labelling we provide. Right Understanding is the understanding of things as they *really* are. This direct perception is only possible when the mind is free from all impurities and is fully developed through meditation. Right Understanding is also known as the 'limb of ascertainment'

Right Thought

Right Thought is right mental conceptualisation. It has three characteristics: selfless renunciation or detachment, loving kindness or the wish for happiness, compassion or the wish to remove suffering. All these thoughts are totally committed to liberation, i.e. they are neither negative nor wasteful. With Right Thought, one generates working concepts and

favourable attitudes and establishes correct motivation. In the Mahayana school, these are developed for the benefit of all sentient beings equally. In this way, Right Thought can be seen as that which seeks to bring understanding to others.

Right Speech

Right Speech is true verbal expression. This is the actual conveyance of understanding to others. By the right comments at the right time, one provides the most benefit from one's understanding and thought. This is done in such a way as to instil a respect and belief in the qualities of the *Dharma*. If it were not for Right Speech from teacher to student, the *Dharma* would not be accessible and acceptable to us today.

Right Action

Right Action promotes a moral, honourable and peaceful conduct. In this description, 'action' refers to the 'three doors' of body, speech and mind. All these are subject to *karma* - the law of cause and effect. Moral behaviour with respect to these three doors brings good *karma* in this and future lives. With this in mind, the Buddhist refrains from the ten non-virtuous actions. There are three of body, four of speech and three of mind:

body:	stealing, killing, sexual misconduct
speech:	lying, slander, abuse, gossip
mind:	harmful mind, desirous mind, wrong view

These are interpreted in varying degrees of strictness according to one's path, e.g. a lay-person or a member of the ordained community.

Right Livelihood

Right Livelihood means abstention from earning a living which brings harm to others. Some examples of wrong livelihood are those involved in arms-trading, killing animals, intoxicants, cheating, etc. One should live by a profession which is honourable, blameless and innocent of harm to others. One can more easily be on good terms with oneself when livelihood doesn't create guilt and remorse and, of course, bad *karma*.

Right Effort

Right Effort is directed towards purifying one's own mind to achieve the *Bodhi* mind - the mind of the complete unity of wisdom and compassion. This is done in four ways: preventing negative mind arising; eliminating negative mind already arisen; causing positive mind to arise; increasing positive mind already arisen.

We put effort into many activities. This becomes Right Effort

when we are simultaneously developing in these four ways. The effort related to the activity itself is merely incidental.

Buddhism teaches us to rely on our own individual effort. Although others may provide us with favourable conditions, it is our own effort that brings us to enlightenment. No external being can do this for us - not even Buddhas.

Right Mindfulness

Right Mindfulness is to be constantly aware, mindful and attentive with regard to the activities of body, speech and mind. In order to do this we must not forget what we wish to achieve nor the way to achieve it. Right Mindfulness constantly monitors how we are 'shaping up'. If we are mindful we will continually recollect and be in touch with correct objectives and the means of achieving them. This has the two-fold benefit of using our time usefully and keeping ourselves from harmful activity.

Right Concentration

Right Concentration combines tranquillity and insight. Our concentration has limited duration due to the arising of distracting thoughts in our minds. These thoughts may be subdued by training in meditative concentration. This achieves tranquillity, or 'calm-abiding', which may be a very pleasurable state. However, this state is impermanent and is not the true liberation we seek. The Buddhist uses this favourable condition to develop insight through 'one-pointed' concentration to pure equanimity and awareness.

Treading the Eightfold Path

Although all these path factors should be developed concurrently, they may also be considered in a consecutive manner, each dependent on the arising of those previous. For example, Right Understanding will give rise to the production of Right Thought which in turn motivates Right Speech and Right Action. The establishment of Right Action leads naturally to Right Livelihood. Dependent on all these factors, our minds are not troubled with worldly concerns and Right Effort may be produced. Right Effort facilitates Right Mindfulness and thus Right Concentration may be developed. Then, with improved concentration, one may achieve a better understanding.

Although understanding appears at the top of the list, Geshé Damchö-la places a strong emphasis on morality and the generation of compassion, or *bodhicitta*. The *bodhicitta* mind is considered the highest, most beneficial, mind.

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