

Eightfold Path: Right Consideration (3 of 3)

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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So my friends, it's the task to continue with the Eightfold Path. And the topic is quite topical for our times. The first two factors of the Eightfold Path are usually considered to be wisdom factors. Some people translate the word *paññā* as discernment. The ability to discern, to see clearly what's going on here. And with wisdom comes action.

The second part of the Eightfold Path is called *sīla*, usually translated to English as ethics or as virtue. But the word *sīla* literally means conduct. It is usually understood in this context to mean virtuous conduct. Wisdom, the first two factors of the Eightfold Path, prepare us for conduct – how we act, the actions we have in the world.

There are three kinds of actions that Buddhism emphasizes: the actions of the body, of speech, and of the mind. The wisdom factors encourage us, maybe in small baby-steps at first, to begin taking responsibility to avoid actions that are unwholesome, unhealthy. And to choose those that are healthy. Not to force ourselves, not to overlay something on top of ourselves, not to pretend exactly, or to live under heavy obligation.

We always begin with ourselves. And the world begins with us. It begins by us looking at what is here for us. And really getting to know what's here, before we act. Or to say it differently, "To be mindful is the first act."

Maybe we can allow the world to begin with each act of mindfulness. This simple knowing, recognizing what's here. And of course, there's going to be all kinds of things that we do which are unwholesome, unhelpful, caught up in anger, hostility, greed, or delusion. Of course. As the mindfulness gets strong, we learn to see that clearly – without shame, without conflict. Seeing in a certain kind of way, allowing it to be there. Just sitting in inner awareness.

And then in seeing clearly, having the wherewithal to say, "No, I don't have to get involved with that. That has arisen. I've had those thoughts. I don't have to invest in them, or believe in them, or go along with them." And that can be done peacefully. It can be done without conflict, without hostility, without shame. Just, "No." And we choose what's wholesome.

Maybe we can take some reflections, some consideration to discover what's wholesome. And to discover it in a way that has integrity. Not to do it because it's a policy that we should do it. That's why this phenomenal benefit of meditating is to discover a way of being where there's response-ability, but without the burden of responsibility, without a sense of obligation. Because where the Eightfold Path is going, or what it's really about, as the goal, or as the beginning, is freedom. The heart's release from all its suffering, all its constriction.

So as I've been saying, there are two versions of the Eightfold Path. The version that takes us to freedom, and the version that arises from our freedom. On the way to freedom, we learn to pay attention to all these different factors. The first factor is to really appreciate deeply that our actions have consequences.

As we begin to discover freedom, then that's where we really begin to have more and more freedom in choosing how to create our world. How the world flows out of us. And we can choose that which is wholesome. But sometimes it takes some consideration. And some kind of reflection, some kind of discernment about what is it that's helpful here, what's wholesome, what's good. This is the second factor of the Eightfold Path, the consideration that in whatever we do, we have these considerations, these concerns, as part of figuring out what to do.

One is to avoid addiction to sensual pleasure, to being caught in the grip of that. To avoid ill will. And to avoid cruelty. This might be translated as avoiding harmfulness, doing harmful things. And then to do the skillful and wholesome things. That's right consideration, appropriate consideration.

So to renounce the addiction to sensual pleasures, and to avoid ill will, and to avoid cruelty. But there are also positive sides to this. I think of the renunciation of sensual pleasure as a life of blessed simplicity. Where there's this beautiful quality of simplicity of being that doesn't need sensual pleasure for satisfaction, for happiness, for joy, for a sense of being alive and connected. There's a deep sense of blessed simplicity, which is a phenomenal wealth.

The positive side of non-ill will is kindness, care, and *mettā*. To act with kindness, friendliness – that is skillful and wholesome.

The idea of non-harm or non-cruelty encompasses the world of compassion and care that we have. To really care for the world. On the way to freedom, we understand that this kind of care for the world, with kindness, friendliness, or compassion – this really sets up the conditions for freedom. It sets up the conditions for growth in the Dharma. It really nourishes us and supports us. And it's meant to nourish the world.

Not to be sensually involved with addictions to sex, which creates so much suffering in our society. Not to be caught up in addiction to alcohol, which causes so much widespread suffering in families, often for generations.

To care for our society is to avoid sensual addictions. To care for our society is to be kind and friendly. To care for our society is to be compassionate. This right consideration is integrally connected to the actions we set in motion in the world.

The second set of factors in the Eightfold Path has to do with action. And right consideration sets the stage for the quality of those actions. We're giving consideration to what we want to infuse our actions with. What do we want to flower and flow from our actions? What do we want the fruit of our actions to be? And the consequences of our actions in the world make a world of difference if we avoid the unwholesome and we do the wholesome, especially in our social actions. Kindness, friendliness, loving kindness, compassion, care, to really care for others.

I love the word 'care' because of its dual meanings. It means to have kind regard, concern about something, to appreciate something, I care for something, I appreciate it, I value it. And the other meaning is to tend to, to fix, to repair, to heal, to do something supportive for something. I care for my family, and therefore I care for them. I do things for them. I care for this world.

And so the question for you is, "What is it for you: something wonderful, blessed simplicity, blessed friendliness and kindness, blessed compassion and care? How is it? How can it arise out of your freedom, your tenderness, a place of being non-conflictive? Really, when you settle deeply." Maybe answer that question coming out of something like meditation, or a walk in nature, or a time when you really feel like you're at home, at peace and centered. How is it that these beautiful qualities flow from our inner non-conflict, our inner peace, our freedom?

If you have some sense that this is possible, then even when you don't feel your freedom, maybe you can discover a quality of freedom in acting with kindness and friendliness. In acting in compassion and care. In acting in being simple.

To consider and act and be this way, can also be a discovery of freedom. It's important then we don't do it as an obligation, forcing ourselves, and gritting our teeth. But what do we have to let go of? What do we have to release? How do we open up in a genuine way so that we can have blessed simplicity, friendliness towards all people, and have compassion and care for everyone in this world?

How can we be free from looking at the wider world around us and expecting it to be different? To expect the wider world to behave well. The wider world provides its own answer to the ills of our society. Why give that authority away? Of course we can wish and work for a better world. But let the world begin with you.

Let your goodness – let what you most strongly believe is the best and nourishing and wholesome parts of who you are – act in ways that nourish and bring forth the best in other people as well. And out into the world. Let

your goodness, your freedom, your wholesomeness be the beginning, every day, for a better world that spreads from you. Right consideration, the second factor of the Eightfold Path, is to think deeply and considerately about what is wholesome and unwholesome, so that we act in ways that are beneficial.

This brings us to the next step of the Eightfold Path. The next three all have to do with what we do. Right consideration is setting the foundation. The next three factors all have to do with action, and how our actions affect the world around us. This path of Dharma is intimately integrally connected to making a better world. To being in the world in a particular way.

That's why at the end of the meditation I said, somewhat as a challenge – or heuristically for a particular teaching point – that meditation is the preparation for the practice. And the practice begins as we leave our meditation and are out in the world.

May you take very good care of yourself today and in this week in all kinds of ways.

And if you have this practice, you will find your way. It might take a while, but you will find your way. Thank you.