

Conclusion: From the Eightfold Path to the Tenfold Path

*For one who is concentrated, there is no need to intend:
“May I know and see things as they really are!”
It is a natural law for one with a concentrated mind
to know and see things as they really are.*

—The Buddha (AN 10:2)

The primary purpose of the Eightfold Path is to bring an end to greed, hate and delusion and the suffering that inevitably accompany them. In describing the fulfillment of this purpose the Buddha occasionally mentioned a Tenfold Path. In this expanded list, Right Knowledge and Right Release are added after the more familiar list of eight factors. The Eightfold Path creates the conditions for the ending of clinging and suffering; Right Knowledge is the insight that triggers Right Release, i.e., the cessation of suffering.

Right Knowledge is neither an abstract truth nor something we learn from a teaching; it isn't something mysterious or supernatural. As a continuation of the Eightfold Path, Right Knowledge is knowing first-hand the benefits experienced through living the path and the suffering experienced when we don't live the path. The benefits include greater peace, compassion, well-being, integrity, and spiritual freedom. And the suffering includes all the familiar states we humans know so well—agitation, fear, conceit, greed, hostility, and more. The more fully we experience the benefits, the more clearly we see the differences between being attached and being free, having ill will and having goodwill, having ethical integrity and not having integrity. As we begin to make different choices, the contracted and agitated states of clinging begin to lose their appeal and their power over us, and we learn that they are neither hardwired nor necessary. As we see and experience healthy alternatives, these painful states begin to diminish in strength and frequency.

Right Knowledge is the understanding we gain from directly experiencing the absence of suffering. The more practicing the Eightfold Path alleviates suffering, the

better we understand that clinging causes suffering. And experiencing the expansive, peaceful and happy states that come with the absence of clinging makes us increasingly sensitive to the reappearance of clinging, even in its most subtle forms. It becomes more and more clear that contracting, attacking, resisting and other expressions of greed, hate, and delusion are painful and cause harm.

Right Knowledge also includes recognizing that letting go of these contracted states and behaviors is reliable and trustworthy. It is not something we need to fear, even if what we are letting go of is our most precious and tenacious attachments to self. Freedom from clinging does not diminish us. Rather, it leads to some of the healthiest and most beneficial states of mind humans can experience.

Through the mindfulness and concentration factors of the Eightfold Path, Right Knowledge sees how all our perceptions and conceptions are in flux, constantly changing. With their fleeting appearance and disappearance they are not stable and thus cannot provide the fullest experience of peace. They cannot serve as the basis for a liberated mind. Instead, the basis for liberation is release.

Right Knowledge sets the stage for Right Release by helping the mind to relax and appreciate the process of letting go. Knowing the tangible suffering of clinging brings a disinclination to cling. Knowing the peace and well-being of non-clinging teaches that letting go of clinging is letting go *into* peace.

Right Release differs from ordinary letting go in that it has a bigger and more lasting impact. It is a ceasing of clinging so clear that Right Knowledge then becomes a knowing that is always available to us. In much the same way that we are no longer fooled by a magic trick once we have been shown how the trick is performed, a person who has experienced a mind released will begin to see through the tricks of the mind.

For most people Right Release includes a gradual process of becoming free in more and more areas of their life. The Buddha described these areas in terms of beliefs, biological drives, and subtle mental tendencies.

Because ultimate freedom does not, in itself, require any beliefs, Buddhism is particularly sensitive to the problems of clinging to beliefs, interpretations, and stories. An important part of living the Eightfold Path is loosening the grip on our

views, including views about ourselves. A significant experience of release shows us that we don't need to be defined by any self-concept or identity.

More tenacious than clinging to beliefs is the clinging stemming from the biological drives of sensual desire and hostility. Even when people know that such clinging causes suffering it can be difficult to let go. Even the wisest people can easily succumb to these. This is where practicing the Eightfold Path is important. It provides a satisfying sense of well-being that is an effective alternative to desire or anger. Our strong biological drives can relax and fade away when something better is being experienced. Often enough, it is not helpful to be instructed to let go of desire and aversions. More useful is relaxing deeply, settling into a unified sense of being, and enjoying the pleasant feelings that can come with non-clinging. Sensual desire and hostility can then simply fade away.

The most difficult areas of clinging to overcome are subtle forms of conceit, agitation and ignorance. A person who is trying to let go of these can be caught in the conceit of individuality and personal agency. Sometimes the effort to let go agitates the mind. Believing there is something to let go of supports ignorance. The way to final release is to settle deeply into a relaxed, alert state where one doesn't try to do anything. Some people refer to this as a state of equanimity. Others refer to it as resting in being. It is with this kind of ease that the mind can let go of itself.

The Eightfold Path is called a noble path because of the integrity and dignity it bestows. As it is not dependent on beliefs, those who walk this path do not champion Buddhism in opposition to the beliefs of others. In overcoming clinging, people on the path do not create conflict. Instead, practicing the Eightfold Path develops an open mind, an open heart, and an open hand. May this openness be of benefit to the whole world.

Conclusion: Coming Home to the Eightfold Path

And what is the middle way producing vision, producing knowledge and leading to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to ultimate release?

It is just this Noble Eightfold Path:

right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

—The Buddha (SN 56:11)

For 2500 years Buddhists have been walking the Eightfold Path. On this journey they have found purpose, personal transformation, and peace. Those who have practiced the path factors have served as an inspiration for others to do the same. From one generation to the next, the teachings and practices of the Eightfold Path have been passed down to our own time. Amazingly, the ancient teachings of the Eightfold Path are as relevant today as they were in the time of the Buddha. The basic teachings on the path are unchanging.

What changes is how the teachings are applied and lived in the different times and cultures. It is the task of everyone who engages in the Eightfold Path to discover how it is relevant to his or her own life. For us in contemporary times this means to consider how each of the path factors can be practiced in modern lives. What does it mean to practice Right View in the context of our own cultural views of self and others? What is Right Intention in a world where social, economic, and ecological inter-connectedness is global in scale? How do we engage in Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood with our increased involvement with the Internet? What ways do we practice Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration that can overcome the mental restlessness that comes with increased time looking at screens?

One guiding star for these questions is our own potential for inner peace. It is possible to settle the mind so it is clear, tranquil and wise. It is possible to relax the heart so it is at ease, radiant with its own goodness. The more we experience

this inner peace the better it can guide us so our peace and radiance becomes as bright as a full moon in a cloudless sky.

Another guiding star for walking the Eightfold Path is the potential for social peace. It is possible to contribute to the welfare of our society. It is possible to live in harmony with the communities we are in contact with. The practices of the Eightfold Path are foundational to becoming peacemakers as they make it possible to act effectively with compassion and kindness. The stronger the Eightfold Path becomes, the more we step into an ever-available ocean of wisdom.

Please don't think of the Eightfold Path as something external to you. It is not meant to be something you adopt as techniques or external guidelines. Rather the Eightfold Path lives in you. It is you when you are motivated by the innate goodness of your heart. As you discover the great value of the Eightfold Path, may you discover yourself.

*The gift of Dharma surpasses all gifts.
The taste of Dharma surpasses all tastes.
The delight of Dharma surpasses all delights.
The destruction of craving conquers all suffering.*

—The Buddha (Dhp 354)