

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.