

2020-10-23 Nibbāna (5 of 5) The Birth of the Eightfold Path

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SPEAKERS

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So greetings again. And this will be the last of the five talks on Nibbāna, Nirvāna in Sanskrit. And this is kind of the ultimate goal of mindfulness practice as taught by the Buddha. Mindfulness practice is meant to be an onward leading practice where we're led and supported onwards into some of the deepest potentials for freedom that a person can have. Freedom of the heart, freedom of the mind.

One of the core definitions of Nibbāna is release from all suffering. And the word all is important here. There could be a lot of kind of partial Nibbānas, partial freedoms that come along as things we've been troubled with for a long time get released. But the definitive experiencing Nibbāna is generally a temporary experience. But an experience which is a radical cessation of all suffering that catches our attention, takes our breath away almost, wow this is possible. And some people don't even understand the subtlety in kind of the deep way in which suffering is embedded in the fabric of life until it really drops away and the Wow, this is possible. To release from suffering.

Sometimes Nibbāna is defined by the psychological forces which are the cause for suffering and which are suffering themselves, greed, hatred and delusion. And Nibbāna is defined as the release of those, the freedom from those, the cessation, the destruction of those. And this is not a blank slate, because Nibbāna in the ancient India is strongly associated with positive associations. It is associated with health, is associated with happiness and well being, and with peace. And so, the experiencing Nibbana, the word Nibbāna kind of means to going out, like going out of a fire. And think of it as going out of the fire of a fever, going out to the fever passes or breaks. And then you have more health, and feels good. Finally, relief, sense of piece that fever is gone. And the fever of greed, hate and delusion.

We often talk about it as an experience. I like to think of it as an event because experience puts a little bit in personal terms, which is fine. But there's something about the freedom that comes with Nibbāna.

This really, really deep release, where it is not really so easy to take it in a personal terms. It's kind of like almost a transpersonal experience or beyond personal or just kind of has the personal, we're kind of freed from the personal in a certain kind of delightful way. So it's an event that goes on. And it's an event that involves this radical absence. And that absence, a radical full absence of suffering, or radical or full absence of greed, hate and delusion of clinging, has a big impact on a person who has it.

And so yesterday, I talked about the function of it, and how people are changed. And I want to talk a little bit more about that today. So this was kind of a review up to now. And so Nibbāna changes the person who experiences it. And in the Buddhist tradition, they say they become a noble person. And there's a kind of a state shift that's strong enough and what is that change? And the tradition will often describe it as in relationship to the Eightfold Path. And with the experience of Nibbāna or experiences on the way to Nibbāna, they're similtudes of it's, a very similar, sometimes there's traces or hints of Nibbāna that we have along the way. In those events, something gets born inside of us. And the language of being born is used by the Buddha. And what is born is the Eightfold Path. The other languages that one enters the current of the Eightfold Path.

Usually someone who's experiences first experience of the Nibbāna is said to become a stream enterer, someone who's entered the stream. That's the usual English way of saying it. Sota, which is the word that's translated a stream, literally means current. And it means entering the current of a river. And it's a little bit important to appreciate that because a current is what carries you all the way to the ocean in the plains of India. And so we're being carried to deeper and deeper, fuller experiences of Nibbāna, of freedom. As long as we're in the river there's some freedom. But the idea is when it comes to the ocean, the fullness of waters in the ocean, the fullness of freedom is there, maybe is the metaphor. And so it's one thing to be in a river. You might be in an eddy. There might be no current where you are. But to finally be in the current and feel you're being carried. And generally currents are peaceful, gentle, you know, in a big river. Over the rapids they're not, but so you are kind of carried by this current.

And so when the Buddha was asked, when someone else was asked at the time of Buddha, when Śāriputra his disciple, what is the current that one enters? Śāriputra said it's the current of the Eightfold Path. The Buddha himself also said that a person who has Nibbāna as this experience of real deep release, is now endowed or possesses the Eightfold Path. I like the idea of endowed with eightfold path. So something is born, something is endowed with, something we enter into the current and are carried by it, gives a very different idea of what the Eightfold Path is. Then it is when it's instructive to someone who's a beginner, who first comes to Buddhism is that this is what you do, you do right view, right intention, right action, right speech, right livelihood, right effort, right, mindfulness and right concentration. But they say that with Nibbāna, with a big enough release, all eight factors of the path are not steps along the way, but they're unified and become kind of who we are. Are unified in such a full way that they're all their present together.

And so some people say that with Nibbāna, eightfold path, the right of each of these steps shouldn't be called right so much, but more maybe more complete, or in harmony. Literally the original word for samma means everything going along with. To going along with a current. Being in harmony with something. And what we're being in harmony with, what what really opens up and why this eightfold path becomes something we possess, is that the freedom, the openness, the sense of release from clinging and craving and attachments, from suffering, then a person kind of naturally lives by the Eightfold Path. To not live by it is to live wrong view and wrong intention and wrong action, all these things, require some clinging and attachment and holding on. But when all that's gone, what comes out of that the Buddha talked about someone who has Nibbāna has virtue, has noble virtue. There's a sense of noble, samādhi, noble wisdom that comes from that. There's a sense of integrity or sense of place inside and knowing inside of a kind of completeness, a kind of freedom, a kind of absence of clinging, that itself protects us or teaches us or guides us to avoid messing that up, soiling it with attachments and clinging and unethical behavior. And so, there's a reference point inside for being ethical, for being settled, for being free. And it's phenomenal to have this reference point.

And so the Eightfold Path, as many of you know, it begins with the right vision, or actually usually say right view. Someone who has the experience of Nibbāna now has a vision of what is possible. And that vision is some degree, you know, it's a memory of how full that release is. But when the experiencing Nibbāna is full enough, that vision is kind of ever present, available, ever available in the present moment. This vision of freedom, the sense and feeling of release, of the cessation of suffering, of freedom. And it's that vision of that possibility or that vision of that potential that creates the foundation for all the other parts of the Eightfold Path. That's why right vision, right view is first on the path.

And it seems that when the Buddha first was teaching the Eightfold Path, the Noble Eightfold Path, he was teaching it for people who had an experience of Nibbāna. In fact, it's been pointed out now by many people, including the ancient commentators, well they don't say, but that the expression, Noble Eightfold Path is not quite the right translation of the Pāli, the original word wording of it. The original meaning is the Eightfold Path of the noble ones. The Eightfold Path of those who have some degree of freedom. And so we possess it, we're in the current of it, of the Eightfold Path. And then someone who has a first experience with Nibbāna, their task is then is to develop the Eightfold Path further. The Eightfold Path that we develop before Nibbāna. And all eightfold factors, eightfold path converge it said, unite for the experience of Nibbāna, for the release, the letting go, for the removing the fuel that keeps suffering going, and the fires of suffering going. And then once we have that experience then we know what it's kind of all about. And then we develop the Eightfold Path further. We develop our intention, our ethics, our efforts, our mindfulness and concentration. In a sense, the practice is the same before and after Nibbāna. But after Nibbāna there's a new reference point for it that gives us kind of unshakable confidence. We know what it's about. And in a kind of, I don't know if metaphoric way or certain kind of symbolic way, the tradition sometimes will say that a person's practice begins with a significant enough experience of release, of freedom. And maybe that's true for some of you

that you've had some degree of freedom, some degree of letting go of some clinging, some holding, that has given you inspiration, given you enthusiasm for, a vision of what's possible, that maybe can serve as a guide, as a support for your practice in which you're developing and growing. And may you have experiences of Nibbāna, whether it's kind of the traces of it that can happen along the way, or whether it's the full entering the stream. And then may that stream carry you and may you be carried by it and carried by the Dharma. And to greater greater freedom. Greater and greater freedom from suffering. It's a phenomenal path to be on. And it's a tried and true path if you practice it. If you in trust yourself to it. And it doesn't work if you don't practice it.

So thank you. And so the next weeks for the 7am in the morning meditation, I'll go through the Eightfold Path. And it's such an important topic. And for those of you here this week, you can keep in mind that as I give this teachings, that part of what we're talking about is how to practice and the reference point for practice. Or with freedom as the guide or as the rationale or as the source for the Eightfold Path.

So thank you very much. And I look forward to our next time together and on Monday, and may you be well and thank you.