

2020-10-29 Eightfold Path Right View (2 of 3)

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SPEAKERS

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So, warm greetings to you all and I'll continue this series of talks on the Eightfold Path. And for these three days, today being the second day, the topic is the first factor of the Eightfold Path, the eight factored path. And that is right view. And right view, as I said yesterday, is not a belief as a usual kind of like a proposition or tenant of creed, but rather as the word view suggests is a perspective, or orientation, or a way of seeing, a frame of reference, for our experience. For our life.

And the discourses, the teachings of the Buddha, distinguishes between two kinds of right view. I call them conventional and liberative right view. The Buddha calls it mundane and super mundane right view. And that the conventional one has to do with understanding that actions have consequences. And some actions are helpful and supportive and skillful, wholesome, and some are unhelpful, unskillful, unwholesome. Some lead to what is wholesome. Some lead to what is unwholesome. Some lead to suffering and some lead to happiness, some actions. And so appreciating that lets us be able to choose the actions we do, what we say, what we do. And we start doing things more skillfully. And one of those things is to meditate. And the same applies to meditation, that our actions have consequences. So we have some care and how we engage in meditation.

The liberative right view, the right view that brings liberation, has to do with a sensitivity to change. And this word change, sometimes the Buddha calls things will be different than they are, things will change, is sometimes called in Pāli, anicca, which is often translated into English as impermanence. But more literally means inconstant. And if we understand it impermanent meaning that it's going to die at some point or no longer be here. That's one understanding. But that's true that many things will end completely. But the flow of life, the ongoing river of life that we're in, is inconstant. The waves on the river, the current on the river, is in constant change, and shifts directions and all kinds of ways it's not steady and constant. But it's not in impermanent, the current, the river doesn't just stop. The current of life, maybe when we die, maybe but as we live. And so this sensitivity to things that are changing. So right view is the orientation, the frame of reference, the insight into the changing nature

of this life of ours. And this is such an important, I mean, I can't underscore how much in the teachings of the Buddha that this is emphasized. This is kind of probably more important for the Buddha than anything that you would believe. Some beliefs are okay, like believing that actions have consequences. But what we're looking for in vipassana practice is to get quiet, concentrated, steady enough in our meditation to see ... not to see, but to have it revealed to us the changing nature of our experience. And experience is changing much more than we think. And that's kind of a little bit of a pun, I guess, or something. Because it's thinking that will often give things, will assume permanence or relate to things as being something that's permanent, unchanging.

I might think that I'm having a lousy day. And the concept of lousy days is an idea that I could repeat to myself and hold on to. And every time I think about the day, I think it's lousy. So because my thinking is that way, it can seem like the day is lousy. But if I get more fine tuned, not to the global day, but to the what's happening moment by moment, I discover that it's not a constant lousy day. I step outside into the sun on a cool day. And it feels really pleasant for a moment or two. I look at the blue sky and it's pleasant for a moment too. And then I go back to having a lousy time and thinking about something. If I look at them carefully, that lousy day has a lot to do with my evaluation of the day and my predictions and my fears and my remembering and the way I have critical thinking about something, maybe myself. And to see that those kinds of thoughts are also coming and going and changing all the time. I'm having a negative thought about myself. And then I get hungry. And I start thinking about how nice it would be to have oatmeal for breakfast. And for a few moments, I'm not thinking that way. And so, as long as we are caught in the thoughts or we're always kind of oriented towards seeing through the filter of particular thoughts, it's easy to assume that things are constant or have a certain temporary permanence to them. This is the way it is. And so, issues of how we define ourselves. We might define ourselves as one way, but things are changing. And we're changing all the time. And we're holding on to an old idea. One of the kind of curious things in my life, I don't know about other people I haven't asked too many people, but my self image of myself is usually a few years behind. I usually think of myself or see myself as being younger than I actually have become or something. And so the idea I have is I change less than I'm actually changing. And if I'm holding on to the idea or resisting the change because I have an idea it should be a certain way, then there's there's resistance. There's suffering, there's stress that builds up from it.

And so the idea the Buddha, the right view, is to become attuned to the changing nature of phenomena for the purpose of no longer being caught in the ideas we have. Ideas often that impute more permanence than things actually are. And more than not caught in the ideas, not caught at all. And caught is a word for being tied up in, being entangled with ideas and concepts and stories and memories and predictions of the future. Sometimes we use the word clinging for it, grasping, holding on. Or resisting and stopping and something. And all those movements are a very strong drivenness or compulsion, craving, clinging, attachment, are understood in Buddhism to be forms of stress. Forms of suffering. Forms that debilitate us, that undermine us, that limit us, that keep us from being free. And so as we tune in to become atuned to change, sometimes it's hard than if you really see how

changing things are. It's hard to keep holding on to that. So if I really pick up the changing nature of the day, maybe say I have a lousy day, but I go for a nice walk. And I go to a park and there are kids playing and it's beautiful flowers and it's a sunny day, and there's nice birds and maybe turtles come up from the pond. And maybe there's an unusual bird, maybe there's a white heron standing there gracefully. And as I kind of walk through the park, I've kind of begun to let go of all those thoughts of the day. And I'm free of those thoughts. I come to the end of the lunchtime, I go back and then I pick them all up again, those thoughts.

But if I see the inconstant nature and how these thoughts come and go, then I might not pick them up. The thoughts might return, but I don't pick them up. I don't get involved with them. I don't fuel them. I learn how to be free. And so the right view the Buddha is talking about is the view of change, the view of impermanence, in such a way that we don't hang on to things so much. We don't come to temporarily fixed conclusions. This is the way it is in such a way that we hurt, that we suffer, that we strain ourselves, we stress ourselves. There's much more fluidity and ease with how things are. Things might still be difficult. Things still might be challenging in deep ways. But they're a lot easier to navigate if we're not picking ideas up and holding on and imputing more permanence, more fixity to things than's actually there.

And so that's my attempt to try to begin to explain why the Buddha's emphasis on experiencing, seeing, insight into change and impermanence is such an important part of what he has to teach. And I'll say more about it tomorrow. But I like to say that as we begin to see change in such a way that we start experiencing more freedom, then right view, the view of change, leads onward to the other factors of the Eightfold Path. It leads us to change how we want to live, how we behave. Freedom begins changing our priorities and what drives us and motivates us. And so in a kind of natural way, the next steps of the Eightfold Path can flow out of this liberative right view, liberating right view. The insight into the changing nature of our experience.

So I'll talk more about this tomorrow and about how to come to this insight. It's not meant to be a belief. You're not supposed to go around and just now remind yourself, oh, everything's impermanent, everything's impermanent. The idea is to really see how we actually see it. It's one thing to believe that the river flows always. It the other to be in the river, on the edge of the river and see it flow. And that's where we want to be. We want to see the flow or be in the current, in a sense.

But I'll end with a little story that's the belief that things change. To know that things come and go can be a very useful idea to carry with you in your back pocket. I know people for whom something happens, like they go out and discover they have a flat tire. The first reaction to that or seeing that it is of course, everything is impermanent, everything changes. As opposed to the first reaction is, Oh, no, this shouldn't have happened. So this reminder that things are constantly changing and shifting and being impermanent, can bring a little more ease to life when we encounter things that have changed in ways that are surprise. And there's a Sufi story of a man who goes to a Sufi teacher and says, I have

this ring here. Can you engrave something into the ring, some statement, that whenever I look at the ring, it'll always help me to be happy or to be free. And so the Sufi master takes the ring and has it engraved. And then the man comes back for his ring and he puts it on. And on the ring is written the phrase, this too will pass. This too will pass.

So sometimes, kind of knowing this principle as an idea can help keep us fluid. It can help keep us from getting entangled. But for the Buddha, the point was to have insight. To be in the river, to be the edge of the river and really see that that's what's happening.

So thank you and I look forward to our time tomorrow.