

2020-11-18 Eightfold Path-Right Effort (3 of 3)

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SPEAKERS

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So today I'll give the third talk on right effort. And this time about the effort to evoke skillful wholesome states and actions. And to maintain or protect the wholesome and skillful activities that were involved in. Activities of mind, body and speech. So as to introduce this topic, one of the most natural things about life is that a living being, a human being that's born, if all the appropriate good conditions are present, that person will grow. Will grow physically, mentally, emotionally. As they grew up, and it's delightful to watch a young child grow and develop and learn skills and learn how to walk and talk. And learn how to navigate the world and find their way and eventually become independent and be able to take care of themselves. And it's kind of a completely natural phenomena to watch this grow. And you can't really stop. If you keep feeding and caring for a young child, generally, you can't stop them from growing. They just grow. And that growing and maturing of human beings, that unfolding and movement continues into adulthood. It isn't that we turn 18 or 21 and something gets turned off, and you will never mature ever again. But we continue to mature and develop psychologically, emotionally, intellectually.

And even if we're not thinking we're doing that. But we're also, what happens is that we have all kinds of influences on how that evolving, growing happens. And some of them are not so healthy. The influence of media and community and society and advertisers and politicians, all kinds of things can skew a person in the direction of unhealthy states of mind. And they'll grow. Those states will grow and develop. And somebody can start off with the tendency towards a little bit of hostility. And it can get fueled and fed by conditions and by repetition and habit, and it becomes full blown hate. Someone else has conditions or situations where the positive unfolds and develops. And they grow in that direction.

Now, if we don't do anything, we make no choices. If we are not taking some responsibility for what influences us and what direction our habit formations go, then society - there're people who are paid a lot of money to influence others and to affect how people's mind streams go on develop. Meditation is placing us in a place where we could start being wise, attentive, and choiceful about which of these two directions do we go. Do we go into skillful direction or do we go in the unskillful direction? In the direction of what's wholesome and helpful, conducive to happiness and well being, conducive to deep peace? Or conducive to the opposite? And so something as simple as being really present, mindfully for your experience. And maybe even learning to not do anything else, not have positive thoughts, not promote more kindness, not try to develop and yourself in any kind of way, no self improvement project. Just to be mindful. Well, that very mindful, that habit or that continuity of being mindful, that's letting go

of all kinds of self improvement projects. That itself, not only can be healthy and wholesome, it actually brings along with it, it's like a magnet for all kinds of developing, all kinds of healthy things. Partly because it interrupts the flow, the influence of the unhealthy thoughts and unhealthy choices and ways of being that we have. And when the unhealthy things are interrupted and stopped and put to rest for a while, there's lots of more room for a different kind of sensitivity to be there. And there's a tendency then to allow what is good and what is healthy, what feels good, what feels freeing, what feels kind and compassionate. There's like a tendency of gravitation to it or space for that operate. There's a space for wisdom to operate, to come about. The more clearly we see, more clearly, we can get out of the way of our experience and just be there. There's a lot of wisdom. And there's a wisdom of freedom. Wisdom of how we get caught and how not to be caught. And that makes a world of difference. So just simple mindfulness by itself, develops the skillful because it is a very skillful thing in itself.

But also we could choose. Likely not out of greed, not out of hatred, not out of expectation, not out of conceit. We can choose to redirect our mindstream in healthy ways. If we find ourselves going along in our day and starting to have a lot of mean thoughts, it might be possible to let go of that. And then in an appropriate natural and easy way, not artificially, start thinking about the things in our life we appreciate. And, instead of following along with this kind of negative bias that many human beings seem to have, we can choose to reinforce the positive bias, the positive side of things. Not to pretend that everything is good. Not to avoid understanding the difficulties and what's unhealthy in life. So that's not what the influences on us. We want to be influenced by the positive side of us, the healthy side, the supportive side. That in the Eightfold Path, is really so to be influenced by that which is freeing, that frees us from suffering. Suffering is not necessary. Though, to understand that is very difficult. But as we kind of go on this eightfold path, the whole path is oriented towards a healthy direction. The whole path is skillful. And as we engage in the different parts of the Eightfold Path, we're beginning to recondition the mind, create different habits, and create different conditioning that supports a healthy, skillful way of thinking.

So in this right effort the Buddha talks about, there is first to evoke, to bring about a skillful state. So you have to start being mindful, for example. Or you have to think about "I think kindness is a good idea. Maybe I should think about where I already have kindness. Where's it natural for me to be friendly? Oh, yeah, I have this good friend. And when I think of my my friend, I just feel kind of warm and kind. And kind of, I get a smile in my heart when I think about that person." And so to move our mind to what already brings kindness or compassion. And then from that, began kind of seeing if that could spread. And can they be more friendliness? Can you even find a place inside where you evoke friendliness to a person normally you're not friendly towards? Maybe privately, you don't have to tell them. But to begin to kind of experiment and stretch and open to a kind and friendly way of being supported by the Eightfold Path. Which means supported by the idea to develop kindness and friendship and friendliness, without any clinging. Without any suffering or stress or strain. Remembering it's not a should, it's not an obligation. But rather, it's a kind of inspiration to be freer, to breathe more easily. So how is it we can be kind and compassionate? And when we do so we breathe more easily. We feel more at ease in doing it. That's kind of the art to make it really skillful. Generosity is also. How does generosity, it that also is a skillful thing to live a generous life. To let generosity be kind of a habit. Not because it's a burden or stress, but in a way that's freeing. It's like "Oh, of course I'll be generous. Because that's good for me. I just feel so much easier. My breath becomes easier and more relaxed. My chest becomes more open. My mind opens up and I'm not so narrow in my mind when I'm

generous." And to learn that. And patience is skillful. Letting go. Learning the art of letting go is skillful and healthy. Equanimity. Learning to develop a sense of resolve and a little bit of determination or aspiration, "yes, this is important, I want to really follow through and have a strength here for do it."

So there's all kinds of inner qualities of the mind that will either develop in you in the wake of practicing mindfulness meditation. Or as you recognize it in yourself, you can evoke it more often. You can tap into it and let it be a companion in your life. And let it be what influences you, inspires you and changes you for the better. And then once you've aroused these things and recognize them, then to maintain it, to protect them. And that doesn't mean that we hold tight and guard them against all things at all cost. It can be very simple things. Like once you start feeling more calm or mindful or more present, more at home in yourself. Then safeguard that, don't give it up easily. Don't then kind of rush to see what the latest news is and lose touch with this deeper sense of wholeness that you have. Maybe take your time. Start living at the speed of ease, the speed of freedom. Because you're learning what it's like to lose that freedom by rushing and doing too many things and getting anxious and spinning off in your thought. The speed of your freedom. It doesn't mean that you go slow, but it does mean you stay close to this freedom. And in that freedom, you can maybe protect some of these other good qualities. Qualities of kindness and compassion and care and patience and love and generosity and determination, aspiration. There's all these good qualities that we have. That there's an abundance of them. And if you want to really kind of get more familiar develop a vocabulary of good skillful qualities, then you might want to learn about the 10 paramis, the 10 perfections, paramis. These are 10 particularly valued inner dispositions, qualities, mental states, that the Buddhist tradition puts a lot of value on. And simply learning them starts creating the condition to evoke and arouse skillful states. And then to learn the art to protecting them without it being a strain. Without it being a duty or without it being putting blinders on and avoiding the full range of what's happening in this world.

May it be that this eightfold path and right effort becomes the most natural thing in the world for you. Not something you do as a should or something that is a strain for you. But it's the opposite. Maybe you do it because you love it and it makes you more free and more yourself and more at ease. And then you become a gift to the world. May your ease, your freedom, and your peace, be a gift to all the people you meet.

Thank you.