

2020-12-03 Eightfold Path-Right Knowledge

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freedom, eightfold path, suffering, knowledge, actualize, wrong, sense, experience, release, unlimited funds, free, stability, caught, impatience, lives, express, clinging, healthy, wholesomeness, dirty

SPEAKERS

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So now we come to this penultimate talk on the Eightfold Path. This Eightfold Path is a path to freedom. And it is an expression of freedom. But then there comes the freedom itself. And so a few times in this teachings, the Buddha then adds two more steps or two more aspects, factors to the Eightfold Path. And this is right freedom, right release. Actually, it's right knowledge ... right understanding, right knowledge. And then right release, right freedom.

And so the first is the liberating knowledge. And so this idea that there is an insight, there is understanding, there is kind of direct knowledge that's not book learned. It's not something you have to figure out and not something you have to believe. Not something you've had to find by reasoning your way to it. But rather, it's knowledge that comes from direct experience. The direct experience of what is suffering and what is release of suffering.

The simplest knowledge that is at the heart of Buddhism is this simple thing: to really understand suffering, to be present for it, to not to cower from it or recoil from it or to attack it. But really to have the ability, the stability, to be present for how we feel despairing, upset, angry, all kinds of frustrated, all kinds of ways in which we suffer - some small, some big - and the stability to see it clearly. And with that stability, then at some point, to also be able to see freedom. To see the release from it. And the knowledge of that is the right knowledge. Is the right understanding, that is part and parcel of this eightfold path, and is also the result of it.

For people who have no experience of liberation. Then the eight factors that Eightfold Path are what we engage in out of faith, out of receiving instructions from the tradition, teachers. And we do it out of faith is a good thing. But hopefully very quickly, we start getting personal experience that teaches "Oh, this is true. I have my own way of knowing now. No one has to teach me anymore." Feeling the goodness of it, the wholesomeness of it. And then keep moving in this wholesome, good, supportive direction, healthy direction. Until we get clear experience of freedom from suffering. And in the United States, I think we have to a little bit make the distinction between freedom to and freedom from. That there is a strong idea that we should be free to vote, free to assembly, free to shop, free to all kinds of things that Americans want to do, which can lend itself to a certain kind of conceit. In this kind of free to movement,

having an unlimited credit card to be free to shop would be you know a great thing. And you feel a lot of ease and shopping if you had unlimited funds for your credit card. But if you had unlimited funds to spend and buy and buy and buy, you would have no, maybe no awareness of how we're actually caught, enslaved, or imprisoned by our desires. But because we can act on them freely, we don't see that actually the desires are in control of us. In Buddhism, freedom is freedom from clinging, from being caught. So really, we can let go of the inner forces that some people want to have freely express. But we really realize we've actually lost ourselves in this free expression to shop unlimitedly or to express our opinions unlimitedly because we have free speech. The idea is to learn how to free ourselves from the compulsions inside. And so the freedom from the very forces inside that lead to suffering. Either right away or sometimes when they get frustrated or down the road.

And so at some point, we're beginning to see this how this works. suffering and freedom from suffering. Clinging and the release from clinging. And sometimes we see it in small ways. We see that we were impatient about something. And then we could let go that impatience and we feel "Wow, this is a much better way to be, it's not dramatic. But why add this tension to my life when I don't need to. And I just be patient here are like, I don't have to even be patient, I just have to let go of the impatience." And so to begin tuning into that the experience of having something which has tension, suffering, pain, all kinds of things that fit into this suffering category. And to have an experience of it being like letting go. That there's freedom from it. And then we start tasting for ourselves what the Buddha is about. We start becoming our own teacher in a sense of the path of freedom. So that for beginners, the Eightfold Path is putting in place a healthy sense of self, healthy way of living in the world. So we don't have any remorse. So we don't have any self criticism. We don't get caught by doing things which are wrong speech and wrong action and wrong way of thinking and things like this. And so we're putting together a kind of a healthy sense of self, so that we can let go of at all. And ease, so we can see more clearly where freedom is. And then as it goes further along, this Eightfold Path, that experience of freedom is so qualitatively distinct that it could almost take our breath away. It's like, "wow, that's the potential. It's not just, you know, letting go of impatience at a traffic light. There's a phenomenal release of, even of self, even of self concern, even of the deepest ways in which we're attached or in which we organize our lives. And it's, wow, this is good." And then we really know the full potential of this freedom. To know a kind of a full experience of the heart's freedom. And have that now as a reference point. Then we become increasingly sensitive to all the different ways in which we do cling. And this is part of the ongoing path is to develop a greater and greater understanding of the subtler and subtler or deeper and deeper. Because ways in which there's clinging, attachment, wanting, that limits us. That keeps us from being free. And because we've had the experience of a very full freedom, we have a heightened sensitivity to it. It's like having a piece of clothing which you've been wearing for a long, long time. And it's gotten really dirty and you don't really ever wash it. You don't even even notice it getting dirty anymore, because just one more dirt doesn't show any more than all the others. And finally, the cloth is completely cleaned, and 100% clean, like it was new. And then we know this is what it can be like, a clean. And then putting a little dirt on it. "Oh, look, it's dirty now. I see now it's really clear." So the mind can be that way as well. And so the knowledge, the right knowledge that comes at the end of the Eightfold Path in a sense, is really the dramatic knowledge, the fuller knowledge, oh, this is what freedom can be like. Something that really gets our attention so much so that it shows a potential for psychological health, health of the heart that's so palpable and so compelling that now seems so much

more important than many other things that people are caught up in their lives. Many other things that people think are really important, and they have to have or need to have.

At some point, their sense of freedom, or we learn to realize that it's a safest thing going. It's not something to be afraid of, It's the place of safety. And it's a place from which we can take care of ourselves. And which we have a really healthy perspective of what's important, and no matter what happens to us, we realize, "you know, I'm responsible for some degree of my inner happiness. Some degree of my inner peace. And no matter what happens, maybe I don't have to give that up. And I can go through the world with that reference point of that peace - that sense of inner health and inner freedom - and use that to make wise choices of how to live and what to do.

So the knowledge of freedom. The knowledge of release. The knowledge of liberation. The knowledge of letting go. Then with that knowledge, the Eightfold Path has a whole different orientation. Then not as a beginner, but as someone who knows what freedom, we start on the Eightfold Path again. Or the Eightfold Path then becomes a way that we live that begins to express or manifest or actualize this freedom in our lives. And the Eightfold Path then is an actualization of freedom. Because you cannot have wrong view, wrong consideration, wrong speech, wrong action, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness, and wrong concentration, if you're actualizing freedom.

So right knowledge, right understanding. This is I think maybe one of the most important thing I want to repeat is this is knowledge understanding that you have through your direct experience. That the book you're supposed to read, to understand the Eightfold Path and right knowledge is the book in your heart, the book in yourself. And this in developing this mindfulness and the strong sense of awareness of what's happening is so that you can read the book of freedom that's within you and your own heart. And once you can read that book and have that knowledge, then the Eightfold Path opens in a whole other way. And it becomes what you actualize, as opposed to what you're cultivating.

So, thank you very much. And so we'll finish this whole series tomorrow with the related topic of right release, right freedom. Thank you.