

The Eightfold Path

Triratna Buddhist Community New York City

Introduction and Right View

Part of the Eightfold Path By Barbara O'Brien, About.com

The Fourth Noble Truth Is the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path is the means by which enlightenment may be realized. The historical Buddha first explained the Eightfold Path in his first sermon after his enlightenment, preserved in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta.

The Eightfold Path is:

- Right View
- Right Intention
- Right Speech
- Right Action
- Right Livelihood
- Right Effort
- Right Mindfulness
- Right Concentration

The Path is divided into three main sections: wisdom, ethical conduct and mental discipline.

Wisdom: Right View and Right Intention are the wisdom path. Right View is not about believing in doctrine, but in perceiving the true nature of ourselves and the world around us. Right Intention refers to the energy and commitment one needs to be fully engaged in Buddhist practice.

Ethical Conduct: Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood are the ethical conduct path. This calls us to take care in our speech, our actions, and our daily lives to do no harm to others and to cultivate wholesomeness in ourselves. This part of the path ties into the Precepts.

Mental Discipline: Through Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration we develop the mental discipline to cut through delusion. Many schools of Buddhism encourage seekers to meditate to achieve clarity and focus of mind.

The Buddha taught that Right View is an essential part of the Buddhist path. In fact, Right View is part of the Eightfold Path, which is the basis of all Buddhist practice.

What Is the Eightfold Path?

After the historical Buddha realized enlightenment, he pondered for a time how he could teach others to realize enlightenment for themselves. A short time later he gave his first sermon as a Buddha, and in this sermon he laid out the foundation of all of his teachings -- the Four Noble Truths. In this first sermon, the Buddha explained the nature of suffering, the cause of suffering, and the means to be liberated from suffering. This means is the Eightfold Path.

It is important to understand that the Eightfold Path is not a series of progressive steps to be mastered one after another. Each of the steps is to be developed and practiced together with the other steps, because they all support each other. Strictly speaking, there is no "first" or "last" step. The eight steps of the path also support the three essential factors of Buddhist training -- ethical conduct (sila), mental discipline (samadhi), and wisdom (prajna).

Buddhism & the Triratna Buddhist Community in a Nutshell

The Triratna Buddhist Community. It is a movement that derives its inspiration from the Buddha. Buddhism is a tradition of teaching and practice that helps people to unfold the inner riches of love, wisdom, and energy that lie within us all. It is a treasure house of guidance and help for those who wish to develop ever higher levels of being and consciousness. It is a path, which culminates in Enlightenment, or Buddhahood.

The word 'Buddha' means 'One who is awake' in the sense of having 'woken up' to Reality. It is therefore not a name but a title, first given to a man called Siddhartha Gautama, who lived 2,500 years ago in northern India. At the age of thirty five, after years of striving, he gained Enlightenment while in profound meditation. During the remaining forty five years of his life he walked over much of northern India, spreading his teaching about the way to Enlightenment. This teaching is therefore known in the East as the Buddha Dharma the 'teaching of the Enlightened One'. Traveling from place to place, the Buddha taught numerous disciples, many of whom also gained Enlightenment. They in turn taught others, and in this way an unbroken chain of teaching has continued, right down to the present day.

The Buddha made no claim to divinity; there is no concept of a creator god in Buddhism. He was a human being who through tremendous efforts transformed himself and transcended the human predicament with its attendant sufferings. The state of Enlightenment which he reached has three main facets. It is a state of wisdom, a total understanding of the true nature of things. It is also a source of infinite compassion, of boundless love for all beings, which expresses itself in the spontaneous desire to help them free themselves from suffering. Lastly, it is the total liberation of all the energies of the psycho physical organism, so that they are at the service of the fully conscious mind.

Buddhism sees life as being a process of constant change. This process can be confined to a single 'level', or it can consist of development and evolution. The decisive factor is always our own mind. An ancient Buddhist text begins: 'Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think.' Buddhism has developed a number of highly effective methods for working on the mind, methods which allow people to transform themselves positively.

As there is no creator (or judging) god, there is no idea in Buddhism of anyone having to be a Buddhist. Buddhism has never, in its 2,500 years, looked for converts with 'fire and sword'. Love and non violence are essential Buddhist principles. Naturally, Buddhists would say that one can become a happier and better person if one decides to follow the Buddhist path, but Buddhism offers itself as an opportunity: its methods and teachings are available to all those who want to make use of them. People are welcome to take as little or as much of Buddhism as they feel ready for. They may simply practice some meditation to gain peace of mind and relief from psychological difficulties, or they might want to go all the way to Enlightenment.

To become a Buddhist in the full sense means committing oneself to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha sometimes referred to as the 'Three Jewels'. One centers one's life upon gaining Enlightenment as the Buddha did. To do this one takes advantage of the Dharma the various teachings and practices of the Buddhist tradition as tools of self transformation. One also needs to be in contact with a Sangha other people who are trying to transform themselves in the same way. Thus one can share experiences, offer mutual help and friendship, and learn from those more advanced than oneself.

Buddhism is a path to freedom. The gate to that path is open to all: men and women, young and old, people of all nationalities, races, and backgrounds.