

## Session 4 – The Noble Eightfold Path

<b>Materials required for this Session</b>	
<i>Books:</i>	Rahula ( pp 45 – 50, Gethin (pp 79 - 84), Chah, (last 2 pages of the ‘Peace Beyond’ Chapter.
<i>Photocopies:</i>	
<i>Website:</i>	<a href="http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/bps/misc/waytoend.html">http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/bps/misc/waytoend.html</a>
<i>Further Study:</i>	Harvey (pp 68 – 72)

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### **Introduction**

In this session we will examine the fourth Noble Truth – the path leading to the cessation of dukkha – the Noble (or ennobling) Eightfold Path.

The Noble Eightfold Path covers ‘applied discipline’ and practice. The path brings the teaching to life and translates the Dhamma from a collection of ‘doctrines’ or ‘hypotheses’ into a daily practice.

‘To follow the Noble Eightfold Path is a matter of practice rather than intellectual knowledge, but to apply the path correctly it has to be properly understood. In fact, right understanding of the path is itself a part of the practice. It is a facet of right view, the first path factor, the forerunner and guide for the rest of the path. Thus, though initial enthusiasm might suggest that the task of intellectual comprehension may be shelved as a bothersome distraction, mature consideration reveals it to be quite essential to ultimate success in the practice.’

(<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/bps/misc/waytoend.html>)

### **The Noble Eightfold Path**

The Noble Eightfold Path can be grouped into 3 sections (Gethin p81 table 1). These are wisdom, virtue, and concentration. (Wisdom, conduct and meditation according to Gethin). Other alternative translations and the Pali are:

Wisdom (insight) - *Pañña*;  
Virtue (conduct, morality) - *Sila*  
Concentration (meditation, collectedness) - *Samādhi*

These three are very closely connected and none of them stands alone, or can be fully developed in isolation. As Ajahn Chah says ‘morality, concentration and wisdom are the path on which all the Noble Ones have walked to enlightenment. They are all one. Morality is concentration, concentration is morality. Concentration is wisdom, wisdom is concentration.’

Do you think that wisdom or virtue is the most important aspect of the path?

The list of the 8 factors (and some alternative translations) are as follows:

Right View (understanding)  
Right Intention (thought, aspiration)  
Right Speech  
Right Action  
Right Livelihood  
Right Effort  
Right Mindfulness  
Right Concentration (collectedness)

The factors are not to be seen as a linear path which one works down, but as factors to develop together, although there must be some basic right view (or insight into the 4 noble truths) in order to commence on the path.

Where do you think that loving-kindness (*metta*), and compassion (*karuna*), fit into the eight path factors?

## Wisdom

Wisdom includes the factors of **Right View** and **Right Intention**. The full development of right view is equivalent to deep insight into the four noble truths.

Basic Right View ( as we saw in session 1) is to believe that ones actions matter and do genuinely lead to greater or less suffering; that there are those who are more spiritually developed who can assist us; that our parents are worthy of respect; and that there is rebirth.

Do you find these aspects (beliefs?) of right view acceptable?

Right Intention (also seen as right thought or aspiration) is described by Bhikkhu Bodhi as - ‘The Buddha explains right intention as threefold: the intention of renunciation, the intention of good will, and the intention of harmlessness. The three are opposed to three parallel kinds of wrong intention: intention governed by desire, intention governed by ill will, and intention governed by harmfulness. Each kind of right intention counters the corresponding kind of wrong intention. The intention of renunciation counters the intention of desire, the intention of good will counters the intention of ill will, and the intention of harmlessness counters the intention of harmfulness.

Are these ‘good’ intentions – renunciation, good will and harmlessness – also ‘desires to do’? If so how can this be reconciled with the idea that *dukkha* is caused by desire?

The Buddha discovered this twofold division of thought in the period prior to his Enlightenment (see MN 19). While he was striving for deliverance, meditating in the forest, he found that his thoughts could be distributed into two different classes. In one he put thoughts of desire, ill will, and harmfulness, in the other thoughts of renunciation, good will, and harmlessness. Whenever he noticed thoughts of the first kind arise in him, he understood that those thoughts lead to harm for oneself and others, obstruct wisdom, and lead away from Nibbana. Reflecting in this way he expelled such thoughts from his mind and brought them to an end. But whenever thoughts of the second kind arose, he understood those thoughts to be beneficial, conducive to the growth of wisdom, aids to the attainment of Nibbana. Thus he strengthened those thoughts and brought them to completion.

## **Virtue**

The three path factors comprising *sila* or *virtue* are:

Right Speech, the avoidance of lying, slanderous or harsh speech, and gossip.

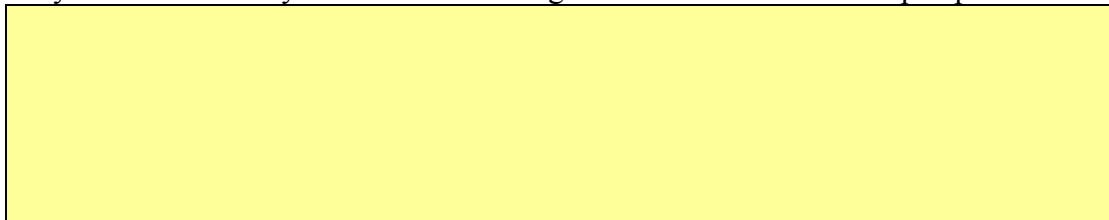
Right Action, avoiding harming living beings, avoiding taking what is not given, avoiding sexual misconduct, avoiding recreational intoxicants

Right Livelihood, avoiding livelihood which is based on wrong speech or wrong action. Specifically proscribed livelihoods include dealing in animal flesh, poisons, armaments, and slaves.

Considering different ways of earning a living can involve many different factors. We may be poor and starving and have little or no choice over our livelihood. We may work for a charity and yet the individuals we work for may encourage deception.

However, we can really only be responsible for our own actions and the motivation and intent behind them; not the actions of the whole enterprise.

Do you consider that your livelihood is a ‘good’ one from a Buddhist perspective?



## **Concentration or Collectedness**

(Aj. Chah in the ‘Path in Harmony’ chapter)

This includes Right Mindfulness (*sati*) and Right Concentration (*samādhi*).

Mindfulness is the quality of being present and noticing what is going on in the 6 sense bases. These are mind (imagination), sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell.

*Samādhi* is the level of collectedness of the mind. So a good state of *samādhi* exists where there is a calm clarity of mind without desire, agitation, doubt or sleepiness. Mindfulness and collectedness are the foundation upon which our actions and intentions are based and are key areas of training.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The Noble Eightfold path is the ‘work’ which ‘inclines’ us towards liberation. Practising virtue, collectedness and insight, develops our noble human qualities and gradually weakens spiritual ignorance. The aspiration (desire!) to walk this path is a wholesome or skilful one (*dhamma chanda*).