01The Noble Eightfold Path: An Overview September 6, 2018
The Noble Eightfold Path. The Middle Way. The Way to End All Suffering.
When we address the teaching of the Noble Eightfold Path, we are addressing a foundational teaching of Buddhism.

Inherent in the teaching of the Eightfold Path is the core teaching of the Four Noble Truths:

Suffering – dikkha – exists, and the range of suffering
 “Suffering” encompasses the range from extraordinary
 trauma to un-nameable dissatisfaction

 Suffering has a cause. It is not something that is something unchanging and
 irrevocable. Because it has a cause, it has an end

 Suffering’s cause is grasping, attachment, holding on, not seeing clearly
 It is what happens when we don’t see clearly, when we insist

 on ignoring the Three Characteristics: dukkha, anicca, anatta

 The way to lessen our hold on things is the Noble Eightfold Path –
 the Middle Way

Let me repeat this fundamental definition: The Noble Eightfold Path is the way to lessen our holding onto our fears, hatreds, judgments, expectations – on that highest of delusions, the self.

Our practice is the practice of “…going, going, going on…” so it is not a surprise that the initial description of Buddhist practice was *The Middle Way* or *The Path*.

Why “noble”?
The Pali term *ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo* is typically translated in English as "Noble Eightfold Path". The phrase does not mean the path is noble, rather that the path is of the noble people ([Pali](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pali_language): *arya* meaning 'enlightened, noble, precious people'). “Noble” is like our monastic names. It is both that which defines who we are AND how we are constantly practicing to bring the Buddha’s Teaching to life. We ARE the Buddha Nature, or as Rev. Master Jiyu would say, “…we are are not God, and there is nothing in us that is not of God.” And as we keep the Precepts “…we vow to try to restrain ourselves from…”. Or to put it another way, “…you are fine just as you are and you could always improve…”

Interestingly, when we come to the actual list of the eight elements of the Path, they all begin with the word *sammā* (Pāli) which means "right, proper, as it ought to be, best".

The Buddha himself spoke of the importance of the Noble Eightfold Path. He says

“…I followed that path.
Following it, I came to direct knowledge of aging & death,
direct knowledge of the origination of aging & death,
direct knowledge of the cessation of aging & death,
direct knowledge of the path leading to the cessation of aging & death.
I followed that path.
Following it, I came to direct knowledge of birth...
of becoming...
of clinging...
of craving...
of feeling...
of contact...
of the six sense media...
of name-&-form...
of consciousness,
of direct knowledge of the origination of consciousness,
of direct knowledge of the cessation of consciousness,
of direct knowledge of the path leading to the cessation of consciousness.
I followed that path. — *The Buddha, Nagara Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya ii.124, Translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu*

And how did he come to know “through direct knowledge?” By living, by walking, the Eightfold Path, built as it is on the Three Foundations. These foundations are the basics of Buddhist practice into which the Noble 8-fold Path is divided – and they remind us that **we** **practice in ALL conditions**, whether easy, gentle, traumatic, non-traumatic.

The Three Foundations include ***Samadhi***, ***Sila***, ***Prajna

Prajna*** –***Wisdom*** and our expression of “Right Dharma”

 Right View
 Right Resolve (Right Intention)

***Samadhi*** – ***Meditation*** and how we express the “Right Mind of Meditation”

 Right Effort
 Right Mindfulness
 Right Concentration

***Sila*** –***the Precepts***, ethics and our expression of “Right Living”

 Right Speech
 Right Action

 Right Livelihood

The Eightfold Path is our roadmap through this human realm, the realm of samsara.

You can get in I-5 anywhere in Washington, Oregon and California and get to your destination. You can get on the Eightfold Path at any of “the Rights”. But there is a certain logic or flow to them.

The steps that are rooted in ethics, morality and the Precepts (*sīla*) include right speech, right action and right livelihood. The word *śīla* translated by English writers as "morals or ethics", states Bhikkhu Bodhi, is in ancient Buddhist commentaries closer to the concept of “discipline and disposition” that "leads to harmony at several levels – social, psychological, karmic and contemplative".
Such harmony creates an environment to pursue the meditative steps in the Noble Eightfold Path by reducing social disorder, preventing inner conflict that result from transgressions, favoring future karma-triggered movement through better rebirths, and purifying the mind.

The meditation group (*samadhi*) of the path progresses from moral restraints to training the mind.  The goal in this group of the Noble Eightfold Path is to develop clarity and insight into the nature of reality – [*dukkha*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dukkha), [*anicca*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anicca) and [*anatta*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anatta), discard negative states and dispel [greed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avidy%C4%81_%28Buddhism%29), ultimately attaining [nirvana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nirvana).

The wisdom group (*prajna)*  is presented as the culmination of the path, AND as its end point. The path starts with correct knowledge or insight, which is needed to understand why this path should be followed in the first place.

Choosing to follow the Eightfold Path is an expression of Buddha Nature, whether we know it or not, whether we trust it or not, are able to be in “right relationship” with it.

And thought I’ll say more about this throughout our sessions – and in our last session in particular – our practice is about Right Relationship. And I suggest that Right Relationship is an additional, important and essential step on The Path, maybe The Wheel itself.

In Buddhist symbolism, the Noble Eightfold Path is often represented by means of the [dharma wheel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharma_wheel) (dharmachakra), in which its eight spokes represent the eight elements of the path.

May we turn the Wheel of the Dharma in our every thought, word, and deed.