**The Noble Eightfold Path: Right Understanding (Right View)**

September 13, 2018

**Right Understanding** is sometimes called **Right View**. I’d like to make the case that it could also be called **Right Seeing**. **Right Seeing** is what Dogen was talking about when he said (in the Shobogenzo chapter ***Yobutso Yubutsu***): *the willingness to see things clearly, as they truly are, without expectation or judgement, results in the emergence of True Practice.*

*Seeing things clearly* is embodying – realizing (making real!) the truths of the Three Characteristics: Dukkha, Anicca, Anatta. Buddhism is quite revolutionary and these Three Characteristics are a significant part of the “why”.

The English word “understanding” means, literally, ‘to stand under’, to be very close to something so as to see the inner workings, to get to know it well. However, the Pali word “ditthi” (as in “Sammi ditthi”) literally means ‘vision’.  And “view” has two relevant meanings:

-the ability to see something or to be seen from a particular place

-a particular way of considering or regarding something; and attitude or opinion.

Right Understanding is the context in which we live. As Dogen’s ***Rules for Meditation*** say *“…if you become utterly free* (if you develop this view or understanding) *you will be as the water wherein the dragon dwells or the mountain whereon the tiger roams.”*The purpose of **right** view is to clear one's path from confusion, misunderstanding, and deluded thinking. The ***Autobiography in Five Chapters*** is relevant here. How do we see the potholes in a way that keeps us from falling into them? How do we come to make the choices that keep us on “solid ground”. Though I use that term advisedly because our practice and the Three Characteristics constantly call on us to take the step off *the 100* *foot pole* or recognize that we live “…*as a feather on the breath of God*…” to quote Hildegard of Bingen.

We don’t generally start on the Path without a certain acquaintance with suffering – dukkha. So it makes sense that we start the Path with Right Understanding. This is why the heavenly realms are such a challenge. Unless there is some degree of awareness of suffering, there is no reason for us to seek what this suffering points us to. Unless there is an awareness of the reality of change, why would we change our point of view (and our lives) to undertake Buddhist training. Unless we are even dimly aware of the ways we “comfortably” separate ourselves, why would we explore what Anatta – no separate self - really means.

Right Understanding – Right View – Right Seeing underscores Anicca – Impermanence – Change. Everything is always changing -the externals and the internals – and in knowing the truth of this we come to know one of what Rev Master Jiyu called the Five Laws of the Universe: *The world is not answerable to my personal will.* When we see this, we see a whole other way of being: we could accept what is, and become at home with the flow of change itself.

Right Understanding – Right View – Right Seeing underscores Anatta – Impermanence – No Separate Self. If everything is changing, who am “I”? As Rev. Master Daizui has said: “*Our sense of “me” is that of something stable which goes through life doing things and having things happen to it. That is good: it allows us to cross streets without getting hit by a bus! But at the level we are speaking of here, it isn’t entirely accurate. If both body and mind are always changing, where is this stable thing we call “me”? If you consider this for a while, you will see that “me” is simply an idea. As ideas go, it’s a very useful one, because it simplifies how we see life and makes it easy to get the basics done. But as a statement of how things really are, it just doesn’t happen to be true. The only thing that is “really there” is an awareness of the flow of change itself. Realizing this makes it much easier to give up clinging and grasping after things, because “I” am the one that wants them for “myself”.*

Right Understanding – Right View – Right Seeing underscores Acceptance. Accceptance of the consequences of our choices. Accceptance of the consequences
of our actions. Our actions have consequences – whether we know them or not.
Our actions have consequences – whether we accept them or not. Understanding
**and accepting** our karma is fundamental to right understanding. Understanding
**and accepting** our karma we see the weight and force of our habits and our habitual attachments. And its essential to rememberwhat Rev. Master Daizui tells us:  *Acceptance is not something which one has to “find” or “make happen****”: it is simply
the natural consequence of understanding****.* ***Acceptance is essential to the Buddhist
life. If we cannot take things as they really are, what chance do we have of actually doing something about our lives?***
When we “think” of “understanding”, we generally “think” of research, reading, study, don’t we? But while thought can be an entrance to understanding, it needs to be clear and honest for it to do any good.

Indeed, much of what holds us back on the Path (and in our lives in general) are the little lies, fantasies, and deceptions we repeat to ourselves inside our heads all day long.

There are two ways of approaching these untrue thoughts. One is to break the habit of chattering to ourselves all the time. That is one of the benefits of practicing mindfulness and meditation, two other aspects of the Eightfold Path. The other is to honestly question the things we tell ourselves. This is the role of “constructive doubt” in Buddhist training and underscores the value of questions in our daily practice: *What’s going on right now? Where am I right now? Who is speaking right now?* Or any of the others we’ve talked about.

One of the unique aspects of Buddhism as a religion is its willingness, even insistence, upon allowing honest questions to arise regarding everything it teaches. Buddhism is a religion of questions. There is a role for faith, to be sure, but it is what Rev. Master
Jiyu-Kennett called “true faith”, rather than the “blind faith” of forced belief. True
faith is a trust and conviction borne of experience and the willingness to be open to
all possibilities. True faith is what the Buddha is pointing to when he says *“…don’t believe this just because I’ve told you. Prove it True for yourself…”*So Right Understanding – Right View – Right Seeing is **a process** rather than a fixed idea, belief or opinion. It is the willingness to ask questions. It is a willingness to say *“I* *could be wrong!”* It is the deliberate choice to embrace “Beginners’ Mind” – making space for all possibilities!

When we stop filling our minds with our habitual, delusive thoughts, an interesting thing happens: other thoughts which have always been present but have rarely had a chance to be heard come to the forefront: thoughts of selfless generosity, compassion, love, and empathy. And these are aspects of enlightenment itself.

I read recently about something called The Seven Minutes of Red experiment. For a specific period of time – 7, 10, 30 minutes or three days, even – observe and right down everything in your environment that’s red. The result is a shift in what AND how you see.

In summary, Right Understanding – Right View – Right Seeing is developed by - AND IS - cultivating the qualities of mind which will allow one to have a complete and realistic apprehension of things, or as the [Buddha](https://dhammawiki.com/index.php/Buddha) put it, ‘*a knowledge and vision of things as they really are*’ (S.III,59).

This *knowledge and vision of things as they really are* does not come easily or quickly. But by starting to look at our relationship to dukkha, anicca, and anatta – by looking at our relationship to our karma, to our habitual attachments, to how we see our world -
as we walk the Eightfold Path*,* we come to a clearer view of our relationship to our world through our practice - find ourselves at the step of Right Understanding yet again…

PS Steps that can help in developing Right Understanding – Right View – Right Seeing include:

-make a conscious choice to be willing “…*to see things clearly, as they truly are, without expectation or judgement…”*-make a conscious choice to mediate regularly

-make a conscious choice to live by the Precepts

-try to get a your own direct experience of something rather than relying on the opinions of others – as we discussed in class, it’s important to ask “***Is it live? Or is it Memorex?***”

-remember Rev. Master Jiyu’s saying: “***I could be wrong***.” - being ready to change your opinion when presented with facts that contradict it

-examine and check the reality of your preconceived ideas

-choose not to be reactive; don’t jump to conclusions

-appreciate and cultivate “***beginner’s mind***”; be open to different explanations,

-see the fullest picture of things; take time to draw conclusions; know that “***all is resolved*** ***in Unborn***”.