The Noble Eightfold Path:
Right Thought or Right Intention
or ***Right Resolve/Right Vow*** September 20, 2018

The unsurpassed, penetrating and perfect Truth is seldom met with,
 even in a hundred thousand myriad kalpas.
Now we can see and hear it.

#### We can remember and accept it.

#### *I vow to make the Buddha’s Truth one with myself.*

I start with this verse tonight because it points us to the heart of *Right Thought*, or *Right Intention*, or – if I may suggest *Right Resolve* or *Right Vow. I vow to make the Buddha’s Truth one with myself –* this is our fundamental intention. This is the next step on the Eightfold Path. The pali term is *samma sankappa*, in Pali, which is translated as "right intention."

It IS translated as *Right Thought* but with the understanding that “thought” here refers specifically to the purposive – or CONATIVE aspect of mental activity. We’re more familiar with the COGNITIVE and the AFFECTIVE parts of the mind.

We know that the cognitive part of the brain has to do with intelligence. We know that the affective deals with emotions. But how many of us are familiar with the **conative** function? This conative functions drives how we act on those thoughts and feelings. How often have we left undone that which we want to do. Or conversely done those things we’ve said we wouldn’t.

It’s important to see the way our mind works and to see the effects of emotions and preferences. Our emotional preferences influence our views, and our views determine preferences.

So, when we truly understand dukkha, anicca and anatta we begin the shift – subtle or not – towards reordering our world view. We engage the kaleidoscopic mind we talked about last week to make those subtle shifts.

The application of mind needed to make these shifts is what is meant by right intention.

Deliberate thought – our intellect - helps us understand the Three Charateristics. But this thought needs to be clear and honest for it to do any good. Indeed, much of what holds us back from progress in the Buddhist Way (and life in general) are the little lies, fantasies, and deceptions we repeat to ourselves inside our heads all day long.

Dogen, in his Instructions to the Chief Cook, says

 *“…none but the finest priests, fully awakened to, and easger for, Buddhahood, have, up to now, ever been trusted with the office of Chief Cook for, unless there is an earnest desire for Buddhahood, however great an effort the priest holding this office may make, he will not be successful therein…

…the desire for Buddhahood must forever be kept active within the mind of the Chief Cook and he must, at various times, devise such dishes as will create great pleasure for the monks who partake thereof…*” (page 145, ZEL)

Our thought itself needs to be the change we want to make. If we want to live an authentic life, we have to start with our thoughts – not just “thinking” them, but in the expression of them as “thought”. The Chief Cook must keep *the desire for Buddhahood…forever…active within (his or her) mind* and express that desire in **doing** what needs to be done where *he must, at various times, devise such dishes as will create great pleasure for the monks who partake thereof…*

Just as “realize” means to “make real”, this kind of “thought” means to “do right thought”. The word contains both intention AND action.

How do we actualize this kind of thought?

One way is to keep our intention foremost in our lives. As a monk at the Abbey we would start each day with the Kesa Verse:

*How great and wondrous are the clothes of enlightenment.
Formless and embracing every treasure,
I wish to unfold the Buddha’s teaching
That I may help all living things.*
Each day we state our intention. Each day we make the choice to keep *the desire for Buddhahood…forever…active within* (our*) mind.* How might you start your day?
Another way is to break the habit of chattering to ourselves all the time. We’ll talk more about this when we come to mindfulness and meditation, two further steps on the Eightfold Path.

Most importantly is to make the choice to see as clearly as possible what our mind is doing. On Sunday we’ll recite the Litany of Bodhidharma which starts:

*Bodhidharma’s disciple Eka asked, “if someone is committed to seeking the Buddha’s Way, what methods for thraining should be given heed to?” Bodhidharma replied, “Since meditation embraces methods and practices, I call it the essential one.”
Eka asked , “How can one single method embrace all practices?”
Bodhidharma replied, “All methods are simply products of the mind so, if you are able to thoroughly comprehend what “real mind” is, then your myriad practices will all be fully equipped.”*
In our meditation practice we the opportunity to what our mind is doing, AND TO MAKE THE CHOICE about whether we want to continue to think, or speak, or act in the way that this very thought underpins.

We not only have the opportunity to see what our mind is doing, but we also have the opportunity to honestly question the things we tell ourselves – or allow ourselves to be told. Whose voice am I really hearing?

I’ve said before that Buddhism is a religion of questions. We’ve talked about the role of questions in our practice. Rev. Master Daizui calls this “constructive doubt”. This is the process of “proving it true for ourselves”. It is the underlying role of intention at work here. This is why Right Thought is so important. It is the polar star, ‘our guide and compass” that allows us to align our thoughts and deeds. It is the step through which we take out training into our own hands and become “spiritual adults”.

Yes, 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.

When we stop filling our minds with our habitual, delusive thoughts, or silences the voices we have incorporated throughout our live experiences, 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.

The Buddha explains right intention as threefold:
the intention of renunciation
-thoughts governed by greed and fear
-right relationship with the world and all in it

the intention of good will,
-thoughts governed by anger and aversion
-right relationship with our expectations and judgments

the intention of harmlessness.
- thoughts governed by delusion
-right relationship with the three characteristics

The Buddha succinctly sums up the matter when he says that for a person who holds a wrong view, his deeds, words, plans, and purposes grounded in that view will lead to suffering, while for a person who holds right view, his deeds, words, plans, and purposes grounded in that view will lead to happiness.

Let me leave you with additional words of the Buddha on this critical step:

**Right Thought**
*All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage... If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.*

**Right Intention**
*“He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me,"— in those who harbour such thoughts hatred will never cease. "He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me," — in those who do not harbour such thoughts hatred will cease. For hatred does not cease by hatred at any time: hatred ceases by love, this is an old rule.*

**Right Resolve***His mind becomes calm. His word and deed are calm. Such is the state of tranquillity of one who has attained to deliverance through the realization of truth. (Verse 96)*

**Right Vow***Just as a fletcher straightens an arrow shaft, even so the discerning man straightens his mind — so fickle and unsteady, so difficult to guard. (Verse 33)*

*Irrigators channel waters; fletchers straighten arrows; carpenters bend wood; the wise master themselves. (Verse 80)*

**And, finally, from Rev. Master Jiyu Kennett’s Invocation, Right Thought:**

 *Right thought will lead me on
 Across life’s troubled sea.*

 *My pilot, compass, guide and chart,*

 *Right Thought will ever be.*