**The Noble Eightfold Path: Right Action**

**October 4, 2018** (This coming Sunday we will have a Renewal of Vows ceremony. The ceremony is a road for the unfolding of Right Action.)

Right Action - *samma kammanto –* follows Right Speech “…*like a box all with its* *lid*…”

The Buddha defined Right Action : “…abstaining from taking life, abstaining from stealing, abstaining from unchastity. This is called right action." [*Magga - vibhana*](https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn45/sn45.008.than.html) *Sutra: An Analisys of the Path*

Taking a step back I would like to suggest that Right Action is fundamentally about what Great Master Dogen calls “…the correct ordering of daily life…”

“…when, by the correct ordering of our daily life, we exhibit the heart of Buddhism, we are free from delusive body and mind. As this is so, the disciplined life of the trainee is the embodiment of both enlightenment and practice, pure and immaculate since before time began…”

This is what the Buddha described as “…***A life lived skillfully*…”** For lay people this means “…There is the case where a certain person, abandoning the taking of life, abstains from the taking of life. He dwells with his rod laid down, his knife laid down, scrupulous, merciful, compassionate for the welfare of all living beings. Abandoning the taking of what is not given, he abstains from taking what is not given. He does not take, in the manner of a thief, things in a village or a wilderness that belong to others and have not been given by them. Abandoning sensual misconduct, he abstains from sensual misconduct. He does not get sexually involved with those who are protected by their mothers, their fathers, their brothers, their sisters, their relatives, or their Dhamma; those with husbands, those who entail punishments, or even those crowned with flowers by another man. This is how one is made pure in three ways by bodily action." — [AN X 176](https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an10/an10.176.than.html#body)

“…his rod laid down…his knife laid down…” or perhaps more contemporaneously, “…her cellphone laid down…her drugs laid down,,,”

Right Action is the unfolding of the Genjo-koan – the koan of daily life. Dogen wrote the "Genjokoan" in 1233 for his disciple Yo-koshu. The koan of daily life is the challenges, joys, contentment and problems that are at the heart of our practice.

Suzuki Roshi in his first sesshin lecture on the Genjo-koan points out that

*“…Here you will find out how important it is to live in each moment.
To live on each moment makes everything possible - makes doing the precepts possible, makes attaining enlightenment possible, makes attaining absolute freedom from sectarianism possible. This practice makes it possible to attain perfect, complete satisfaction in our life…”*Beyond duality, beyond judgements, beyond self, beyond the “ideal and the actual.’’ – "*In spite of this, flowers fall always amid our grudging, and weeds flourish in our chagrin." Here we see that our view of reality is corrupted by our desires. "Only when you neither love nor hate does it appear in all clarity*.”

Furthermore, Dogen says that people's love for flowers and loathing for weeds is part of reality in that they are conditions of being human.

**We just do what needs to be done, seeing clearly, as far as possible.
This is what doing one’s best is. This is what Right Action is.**

The monk who sleeps when he’s tired and eats when he’s hungry.

The monk who keeps the Precepts and does what needs to be done.

Yes, the Precepts are essential in practicing Right Action. As we know these include:

**The Three Treasures Precept** The Three Refuges, shared by all Buddhists, are the first and most general precept of all.

* “I take refuge in the Buddha.” I entrust my life to the guidance of both the Buddhas who have appeared in this world and the Buddha Nature within.
* “I take refuge in the Dharma.” I go for direction to the teachings of all those who have walked this Way before me.
* “I take refuge in the Sangha.” I seek the advice and wise counsel of those who share the love of truth and commitment to the Eightfold Path.

When taken together as one ongoing precept, as one unified way of life, the Three Refuges will guide and harmonize our understanding of all of the other precepts. If any one of them is left out, our training is like a stool with only two legs: unstable and sure to fall flat.

**The Three Pure Precepts**

These offer a means of interpretation for the specific precepts to follow and guidance in situations where no specific precept seems to apply, or where precepts seem to conflict.

“I will cease from evil.” First and foremost, it is my wish to harm no living thing. I will ask in the innermost place of my heart, “Is what I am about to do a harmful thing, a thing which places any separation between a being and the Unborn? Is it a thing which is to be abstained from, a wrongful thing, an unwise thing?” In one sense, “evil” does not exist: there are only unwise actions, done in ignorance and confusion. I pray that I may not do any such thing, whether to myself, others, or the world.

“I will do only good.” It is my sincere wish to do only that which accords with the truth. I will ask in the innermost place of my heart, “Is what I am about to do fitting, suitable, a thing to be done? Does it tend towards liberation?” This is the good that goes beyond the opposites of “good” and “evil”.

“I will do good for others.” I pray that my every act will be of true benefit and that I may never inadvertently create conditions which may lead others to do harm. I will ask in the innermost place of my heart, “Is what I am about to do truly of use? Is it a fit offering? Does it accord with the purification of my heart?”

If we can honestly say that in any matter of importance we have considered carefully these Three Pure Precepts, then we can rest in the knowledge that we have done our best. And that is all which Buddhism ever asks of us. Mistakes will still be made, of course, for we are human. But they will have been made with a pure heart, and in the big perspective, that matters. There are many ways to consult the quiet, still, innermost place of the heart. Each of us must do this honestly, as best we can. There are no formulas, no easy answers. Never trivialize the Three Pure Precepts.

 **The Ten Great Precepts**

These ten are specific guidelines for the Buddhist life, as undertaken by the Zen trainee. When they become our blood and bones, we are a true child of Buddha. When we deliberately ignore any of them, we create a separation between ourselves and the family of Buddha.

“I will refrain from killing.” Since all beings are one within the Buddha Mind, how could I willingly cut off the life of any creature?

“I will refrain from stealing.” Since it is my true wish to give up all attachments, how could I willingly grasp after anything which is not freely given?

“I will refrain from abusing sexuality.” Since physical affection is a deep expression of love, and love is an aspect of the Unborn, how could I willingly debase this sacred love by merely gratifying my desires in a way which uses, harms, betrays, or abuses anyone?

“I will refrain from speaking untruthfully.” Since my heart’s desire is to be one with truth, how could I willingly deceive anyone by any means whatsoever?

“I will refrain from selling the wine of delusion. Since clear awareness is the door to enlightenment, how could I willingly hinder the Way for anyone by enticing them into partaking of substances, ideologies, false beliefs, or anything whatsoever which befuddles or intoxicates?

“I will refrain from speaking against others.” Since it is my wish to live by the compassion within my heart, how could I willingly speak hurtfully or disparagingly about anyone?

“I will refrain from being proud of myself and belittling others.” Since the false notion of self is the very thing I seek to abandon, how could I willingly inflate it with pride, much less do so through seeking to denigrate others?

“I will refrain from holding back in giving either Dharma or wealth.” Since charity is the first sign of enlightened action, how could I practice stinginess in any form whatsoever?

“I will refrain from indulging anger.” Since it is my heart’s wish to let the love within it flow forth unboundedly, how could I hold on to and nourish angers and resentments which may arise, much less act openly upon them to cause harm?

“I will refrain from defaming the Three Treasures.” Since these are my true refuge and the very Way, how could I turn from them myself, much less cause doubt about them to arise in others?

And this “…very Way…” is what the Genjo Koan is pointing to. Right Action is doing our practice, daily, consistently, no big deal.

The first four sentences of the text are often considered to represent the basic ideas of the work. The first sentence reads: "When all dharmas are the Buddha Dharma, there is illusion and enlightenment, practice, birth, death, buddhas, and sentient beings."(133) This is the basic statement of "Genjokoan". There are no dualisms; any that are conceived of are illusionary; we must be liberated from dualistic views. “

The second sentence: "When myriad dharmas are without self, there is no illusion or enlightenment, no buddhas or sentient beings, no generation or extinction." This shows that the dualism in the first sentence between enlightenment and illusion is not really a dualism. The nonduality of the two are realized "when myriad dharmas are without self."

The third: "The Buddha Way is originally beyond fullness or lack, and for this reason there is generation and extinction, illusion and enlightenment, sentient beings and buddhas." This sentence describes how Buddhist reality is beyond the affirmation and negation of distinction and sameness, respectively.

The fourth: "In spite of this, flowers fall always amid our grudging, and weeds flourish in our chagrin." Here we see that our view of reality is corrupted by our desires. "Only when you neither love nor hate does it appear in all clarity.” Furthermore, Dogen says that people's love for flowers and loathing for weeds is part of reality in that they are conditions of being human.

It is in the Genjo-Koan that Dogen describes the steps in attaining enlightenment: “*To study the Buddha Way is to study the self; to study the self is to forget the self; to forget the self is to be enlightened by all things. To be enlightened by all things is to let body and mind drop off. No trace of enlightenment remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.* This is Right Action and it’s consequence.

As long as one is aware of enlightenment as an object to be attained, it is not true enlightenment. True enlightenment is necessarily without trace or form. When one realizes true enlightenment "he is at once the Person of his original past." Enlightenment is not to be sought from without. It is always already within and need only be recognized, is not be clung to.

The notion of giving up attachment to one's self on the path to enlightenment can be intimidating, but Dogen reminds us that "enlightenment does not destroy man any more than the moon breaks a hole in the water." A lake radiates the light of the moon but is still made of water. This understanding cannot be known intellectually but only experientially.

In conclusion, please let me repeat: **Right Action is doing our practice, daily, consistently, no big deal.**