The Noble Eightfold Path: Right Relationship

November 29, 2018

The Noble Eightfold Path in its entirety points us to the ninth Right. May I suggest it is ***Right Relationship:*** ***How are we*** ***in relation to our world***?

Each of the steps on the Path clarifies this relationship. Through the *Prajna* steps of Right View/Understanding, Right Resolve/Intention/Thought to the *Sila* steps of Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood to the *Samadhi* steps of Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration –wherever we “start” on the Path we are drawn nautilus like into the center which is practice.   
  
Wherever we start on the Eightfold Path we are drawn upward as if on a circular staircase from whence we can see more clearly.

Let me go back to the Four Noble Truths – which are the ground of the Eightfold Path. This is the heart of the Buddha’s teaching and it is in this ground that the steps of the Path are set. Think of them, simple as they are – and ask the key question: how am I in relationship to …  
  
1. Suffering exists:

*Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the*[*five aggregates*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skandha)*subject to clinging are suffering.*  
How am I in relationship to my suffering? Do I know I’m suffering? Do I see the choices I’m making around my suffering? Do I choose to hold on to my suffering?  
Am I resolved to do things differently in regard to my suffering?  
2. Suffering’s cause is *tanha* - attachment or craving:  
*Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving [*[*taṇhā*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ta%E1%B9%87h%C4%81)*, "thirst"] which*[*leads to re-becoming*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelve_Nid%C4%81nas)*, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for becoming, craving for disbecoming.*How am I in relationship to my cravings? Do I know I’m craving? Do I see the choices I’m making around my craving? Do I choose to hold on to my craving?  
Am I resolved to do things differently in regard to my craving?  
  
3. There is a cessation of suffering:  
*Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: it is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it.*How am I in relationship to my cessation of suffering? Do I know cessation of suffering is possible? Do I see the choices I’m making around cessation of suffering? Do I choose to hold on to my suffering rather than do what needs to be done to cause it to cease? Am I resolved to do things differently in regard to cessation of suffering?

4. The cessation of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path  
*Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: it is this noble eightfold path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.*How am I in relationship to the Eightfold Path? Do I know I can be on the Eightfold Path? Do I see the choices I’m making around the Eightfold Path? Do I choose to hold on to my suffering rather than take the Eightfold Path? Am I resolved to do things differently in regard to the Eightfold Path?

We speak “rightly” because we want to bring about the cessation of suffering. We act “rightly” because we want to bring about the cessation of suffering.  
  
So if this is what we want, how do we live?

Dogen described the correct ordering of daily life as the foundation of Buddhist practice. That *correct ordering* includes centering meditation at the heart of our lives.   
  
Another way of saying this is *living from the mind of meditation,* or, as we spoke about on Sunday, *living from the magnanimous mind.* This is **Right Relationship**, and it holds for ANY step on the Eightfold Path.

Doegn speaks to that *magnanimous mind* In ***Zazenshin*** (*The Accupucture Needle* *of Zen*) where he says of that *magnanimous mind*:

*…when a bird is flying, the sky is also flying. The bird is a part of the sky and the sky is the part of the bird. The entire sky is the wings of the bird. This is not true only in meditation. When a fish is swimming, the whole water is swimming. When a bird is flying, the entire sky is flying.* ***When we live, the entire universe is living******with us. Fish and water, bird and sky, all living beings and the universe are completely one.***  
  
When we meditate and let go of our discriminative thoughts, we are completely one with the universe. However, when we “stand up from our cushion”, whether physically or when we step away from “the temple of our own hearts” by getting caught up in our thoughts, distinctions, evaluations, and judgements, we are out of *Right Relationship* with the universe and certainly out of *Right Relationship* with our own life. We are caught up in the Three poisons. We hold the Precepts at least loosely, if not at arms length.

*When a fish swims, no matter how far it goes, it doesn't reach the end of the water. When a bird flies, no matter how high it flies, it cannot reach the end of the sky. Only, when their need is great, their range is large. When their need is small, their range is small. In this way, each fish and each bird uses the whole space and vigorously acts in every place.*

*However, if a bird departs from the sky, or a fish leaves the water, they immediately die. We should know that, [for a fish] water is life, [for a bird] sky is life. A bird is life; a fish is life. Life is a bird; life is a fish. And we should go beyond this. There is practice/enlightenment-- this is the way of living beings.*

We live in the human realm. We live in the world of *samsara*. We don’t – and cannot - live separated from this world. It’s our life. Since we are one with the world and supported by all things as a part of the net of interdependent origination, we have to take care of the world and the self and others. What a **magnanimous** view! But how can we get through the day with such a **magnanimous** view of the self, others and the world? This is where the Eightfold Path comes in.

*Therefore, if there are fish who want to swim or birds who want to fly only after they investigate the entire sky or all the water, they will find neither path nor place.****When we make this very place our own, our practice becomes manifestation of reality (genjo-koan).******When we make this path our own, our activity naturally becomes actualized reality (genjo-koan).*** *This path or this place is neither big nor small, neither self nor others. It has not existed before this moment nor has it come into existence now. Therefore, [the reality of all things] is thus. In the same way, when a person does practice (and lives in enlightened action) in the buddha way, as the person realizes one dharma, the person permeates that dharma; as the person encounters one practice, the person [fully] practices that practice. [For this] there is a place and a path.****The boundary of the known is not clear; this is because the known [which appears limited] is born and practiced simultaneously with the complete penetration of the buddha dharma.*** *We should not think that what we have attained is conceived by ourselves and known by our discriminating mind. Although complete enlightenment is immediately actualized, its intimacy is such that it does not necessarily form as a view. [In fact] viewing is not something fixed.*  
*Right Relationship* is individual. We need to find it for ourselves. We need to find our own meaning. This is at the heart of “proving it true for oneself”. Shohaku Okamura has said: *Meaning is created when we find our own place and path and we begin to do something. Until that moment there is no ready-made meaning or purpose to our lives.*  What is meaningful and precious to you? What is your path?   
  
Dogen point us to the path of daily life in the genjo-koan. And may I suggest that the Eightfold Path is our path when we are living from the *mind of* *meditation* – when we are living the *magnanimous mind* of the **Tenzo Kyokan**

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Note how Dogen echoes his definition of “magnanimous”: *neither big nor small, neither self nor others…*

The mind of meditation is the mind of doing one thing at a time. This is how we study the characteristics of all things. One thing at a time. When we practice sincerely, we penetrate that thing. When we make a mistake, we penetrate that mistake and learn from the mistake. Then a mistake is a great teacher for us. Nothing is meaningless when we have our own place and path to walk. Actually this place and path is not something outside us. The place and path are nothing other than ourselves. “*Our training is our Path. Our gratitude The Way*.”

And that way – the Buddha Way, the Noble Eightfold Path - is endless. And it’s important to remembers that there is no way to measure where we are now. No matter how long and how hard we have been practicing, within the infinite length of the Buddha Way, the distance we have walked is the same as zero.

When faced with this truth, what we can do is try to be mindful in each moment, and practice one thing wholeheartedly in the way that we can penetrate that one thing.

The Eightfold Path is fundamentally the practice of meditation manifested in our own lives moment by moment without evaluation. The Noble Eightfold Path is a means we have of reinforcing the mind of meditation, the magnanimous mind.

Walking the Eightfold Path is our practice. And, as we know, “…training and enlightenment are one…”