This evening is this to continue the Eightfold Path series that I've been doing. And today's topic is right livelihood. And right livelihood is the issue of livelihood independent of being right is hugely big topic for some people. And some people it's a big challenge in their lives and finding livelihood, finding what the right livelihood is for them is some people spend years sometimes, you know, trying different things, trying to figure out not being able to find something and then having it available. Many years ago, I was conference kind of participated in a small contract conference with some Buddhist teachers on the issue of ethics. And you still Ananda, who was a wonderful Burmese monk, who lived in the Bay Area for many years. He was at this conference. And part of that at some point, there was a panel discussion where the teachers who are they were asked the question what is a bit biggest ethical challenge you've ever had ever as as a teacher, something like that maybe was not ever but what's your big what's a big challenge? You have ethical challenge? And you usually Ananda immediately said that his biggest ethical challenge is that he you know, he's a he was known as the a monk, but he was also kind of like the parish priest for large Burmese community in the Bay Area. And they would come for him for consultation for advice. And back then, especially in 1990, the what he said, peep the Burmese immigrants who come to this country sometimes have a hard time finding work, and they have a family take care of support. And some of them find work down in San Jose area and in industries that have to do with making weapons. I believe back then there was a company down down He I think he gave impression there's a company down there that makes tanks. So true still true. Bradley tanks or something in San Jose said right? What? united defense. So anyway so anyway, so they so some of the Burmese get jobs at places like that he said and they come to him and ask is this right livelihood and his biggest ethical challenge is what to tell them. Because as a Buddhist who's the steeped in the Buddhist kind of traditional teachings, he's very clear that's wrong livelihood to be making weapons involving manufacturer of weapons, but he knows how hard it is to find work and, and have family support. So he doesn't quite, you know, he doesn't want to tell them that it's wrong livelihood because that causes a whole bunch of suffering as well. So that was interesting to know that the issue of livelihood was, you know, for him was one of the difficult areas of being a teacher. And the and there was another friend of mine, who worked for a machinist shop I was down in San Jose area. And the machine shop, I guess, made specialty kind of machine work that they made or something. And there was a foreign government who needed a special part for fighter jets. And that they were going to make, you know, and make on how they make it there. They're gonna make in this specialty machine shop. And it came, it came the order came by him. And so he went to his boss, and he said, I can't do this. And his boss said, okay, you don't have to. So that was nice. The machine shop still made it but he wasn't involved in doing it. So, you know, examples of people who are dealing with the ethical aspect of right livelihood, and generally in Buddhism when they talk about right livelihood. That's what the emphasis is on the ethical aspect of it. And there's some very clear teachings. If you think that Buddhism or Buddhist teachers like me, some times are kind of, it's all relative and it's looked at from
different sides. It's like this and that and it's all okay or something. It's an equivocal about what the Buddha said about right livelihood or what's wrong livelihood. So he said, wrong livelihood. So he said, don't do these things. Don't be involved in manufacturer of weapons. Don't be involved in the trade of living beings, which means prostitution and animals for slaughter. Don't be involved in the trade of intoxicants. Don't be involved in the trade of poisons. I think he meant poisons for human beings, I don't know what and number five so

so weapons, oh, anything involved in in killing, killing, killing any beings at all. So it was kind of clear you don't do these things. But then it's also Buddhist teachers in the west to try to then to apply them we'll talk about this very quick to say, well, it gets complicated, because there's companies we work for do all kinds of things, and places we invest in, and you know, it's kind of mixed, mixed what they do. And so how do you know? And where do you draw the line of when it seems unethical, and when it's not? And so one of the ways I like to look at it is, do we do work that is good for conscience. We have a conscience hopefully, to care for. And if we look at if we rely on the conscience, if we're sensitive to our ethical sensitivity, then and really take in what we're doing in that field of ethical sensitivity, do we feel good about it? And if we don't feel good about it, then perhaps it's time to consider something. And then there's famous story I've told many times, now a little story of, of a man who came to If I was sitting in on interviews, I was a teacher in training. So I was learning how to be a teacher by watching a teacher in action. And this man came in and said, in my field of business, I'm expected to lie. And so the in the end, he asked the teacher expected to be told how to do this. Now, how can I do my job in light, same time? And the teacher said, You can't. Now I always said, How can I be a good Buddhist and lie at the same time? And, and then the Buddha that Buddhist teacher was quite unequivocal says you can't. And this is this teacher who said it was one of the most critical Christopher titmus, who is one of the absolutely most liberal Buddhist teachers in the RC and that I know, most permissive and but he was very clear, no, you can't be a Buddhist or a good Buddhist. And if you're involved in a profession that involves lying, so that you know too simple kind ethical guidelines that I think I like to fall back on is not particularly rules, but rather the issue of the conscience, you know, how is it for your conscience what you do? And the second is? Does it harm people? Does it cause harm? And that over and over again, that's the Buddhist ethical kind of foundation? Is does this cause harm? Then there's a little higher order that the process person can consider and that is, does it cause benefit? Is it beneficial? And I would like to believe that right livelihood is one that brings benefit to ourselves in the world around us. And so how does it bring benefit? So in terms of the world around us, you know, improves people's lives in some way or other. And so we feel like we're making a difference in the world, and that there's a tremendous range or what that can be. And it might not be have anything to do with what we do, but how we do it. I think that one of the neurosciences are that if that's the right word, but sources of suffering for people I've seen in this area is people who feel like there has to be the career. And they have to find the career that this is their career, like a thing that they're going to do. And some people do find the thing that they like to do, and it's like it fits who they are. But from what I can tell, I think that for some people, that's not in the cards, there is like duck, duck career, the thing, and it's a form of suffering to assume that there should be, it's kind of you know, and so people struggle to try to fit in to this idea that there should be and for some people, what's important is not what they do, but how they do it. And so it's how they do their work because we're the definition of right livelihood comes in, and they might do something which may be some kind of way doesn't seem to be dramatically beneficial for the world. But they do it in such a way that it makes a difference for the people they encounter. To make a difference for their co workers and make a difference for the people they encounter and makes their life better, they express their kindness or their care their friendliness or compassion or something. And some people find that how is that it becomes a really important foundation of their work. And they won't do it or maybe known people who've worked in places that have very, very little status in our kind of general culture here and low paying work, but have been extremely happy. And the way they do their
work is full of dignity and generosity and compassion for the people around them. And I've been
inspired by these people and how they do their work, and they seem very content and happy with how
they do their work, rather than what they're doing.

So is the work we're doing beneficial for the world, and is it beneficial for ourselves? And because this
right livelihood is an issue, that's part of the Eightfold Path. It's part of it, it's of interest not as an ethical
norm that thou shalt, but rather it's of interest about people who want to become liberated, become
free. And if what you want is free the heart, not have the heart constricted, tight, if you want to have the
heart not afraid, if you want to have the heart not struggle, weighed down by anything, then and you
want to be liberated, then these eight steps are ways to help you do that. And now in this topic of right
livelihood, then is a question with a request. How is it that the livelihood I have supports that movement
of liberation and freedom? And so in that sense, that becomes, you know, how is it good for my
practice? Is it good for my heart? Is it good for the liberation freedom that I have? and here also, I think
there's a two questions of what we What is done the job and how it's done? So is it a job that nourishes
you? Or is it a job that you find no nourishment at all from it, but it just gives you a paycheck that you
know, you get by. And, and I know some people who would never put up with a job that was only for a
paycheck. And I think some people for whom would rather be poor and homeless, then put up with a
job that's just makes them miserable. And other people have made because they have family to care
for. They maybe feel like they have no choice but to take a job that has very little meaning and doesn't
nourish them, but they're trying to take care of their family. But is it is there if there's a possibility to
consider finding work that's nourishing, that's meaningful, that's inspiring that brings joy and delight. I
think it's very important. It's interesting that the Buddha talked about four kinds of happiness that a lay
person can have a lay person who works. And the first is the happiness of economic security. The
second is the happiness of gaining wealth that is legally or lawfully acquired. And, and here the idea is
getting Well, it isn't just like make enough money to get by. But it's considered in the ancient world
having the Buddha quite fine and happy thing to become wealthy provided it was lawfully acquired.
Now remember, this is before Marx, so he would have had a different, a different and different analysis
of maybe, or we have a different one now. And so that was and then is it the happiness of being free
from debt is considered one of the one of the four kinds of happiness and the happiness of doing doing
work that's blameless. So there's no one no one can blame you that you don't feel any kind of remorse
or, or criticism for the kind of work you do. So those are the four kinds of happiness for a lay person
who works. natio debt, of course, isn't interesting here in America, free of debt. They didn't have
mortgages and credit cards in the Buddhist time. So, you know, their chances of work wasn't something
wasn't you know, maybe it's easy to get into debt. There were so well supported by society, twize
going to debt. There was a Ajahn Amaroa was that English Theravadan monk ordained in Thailand who
lived in the Bay Area for many years. And early when he first came to visit was visiting San Francisco
someone took him on a tour of the San Francisco financial district and was giving you some England
right so and he'd been a monk for many years and living in Thailand. And so the man was telling him
about the American economic system. And how it all works. And at some point the man said to the
monk, you're more wealthy than most people in America. And I remember I was kind of stunned to hear
that. What do you mean? I'm a renunciant. I've given away all my money, I don't have any money. I'm
not allowed to handle money in a mall to have a bowl, that once a day, the food that goes in the bowl,
my robes, and a place, you know, a roof over my head. That's all like not to have I don't have any
money. And the man said, Yes, but you're not in debt. And most people in America are in debt and
somewhere there. So the happiness of being free from debt is a nice happiness.

So why I mentioned this is that some people, there was a 10. I don't know if it's still true, but it used to
be true, especially when there were all those us hippies that came into Buddhism that There was kind
of a negative view towards money and earning money. And kind of money is evil was kind of like the
hippie, almost kind of thing. And so there's kind of a negative. And also because the monastics and the monastics we know Buddhist monastics don't handle money, it lends itself to do money, something's wrong with money. But the monastics don't handle money, never say that. It just, that's just the rule I live by. And, and, but in fact, so the Buddha actually refer to as a form of happiness, that happiness, economic security, wealth, wealth, lawfully gained, being free of debt, and doing work which is blameless. That's kind of nice. So how do we do that? How do we find that? And so what is the kind of work that nourishes us, supports us, help us It helps us in our spiritual practice. How do we or how do we do our work so it helps us in our spiritual process. One of the things I learned from working at the Zen monasteries Zen monastery is you do a lot of work as part of the spiritual practice is, I learned to do things wholeheartedly. You kind of when you do something, you're supposed to kind of put yourself completely in it. And, and so it was took a while for me to learn that I was kind of like, I didn't want to do it, or I can't believe I'm doing this. And I wish I had the other job and you know, all kinds of resistance, but you know, I would do my best to put myself into it. And I learned a certain kind of way of being wholehearted, and what I did, and what I discovered in the wholeheartedness that there were a little bit on the job I was doing, but there was a way in which doing something wholeheartedly being fully there for the job, and nothing not anywhere else in the mind that my mind got really still. And so I would end I would end my work. Feeling More still and more centered, more calm than when I started. Or in the monastery, sometimes I would go directly, you know, in terms of minutes between working like in the kitchen, wholeheartedly kitchen works very physical, and then going into meditation held to sit. And usually I would show up just to close the doors. So really literally in the last minute, and I would sit down, and my mind would be completely still and very focused. And, and there I was, because of the way I worked. And I've worked done work where I've, you know, and doubt about what I was doing. I was anxious about what I was doing, I was kind of scattered and what I was doing and all kinds of you know things and then I went to meditate and guess what? I carry that with me into the meditation. So they do kind of putting putting yourself in fully into what you're doing, I think is a beautiful thing. So how do we do it? How does it support our practice? Sometimes in the mindfulness thing that we do here, I think we put too much emphasis on mindfulness. Because sometimes it overemphasize in mindfulness sometimes it's a little bit removed and slow and kind of a little bit to kind of disconnected from what you're doing what we're doing. And so one of the blessings for benefits from the from being as Zen practitioner is where they emphasize wholeheartedness was there they emphasis was not so much being mindful, but participating fully in what you did. And so and so, in some situations, I still find to this day that that's a wonderful guide for how to practice and situation is how to participate fully. And mindfulness comes along with participation. To be really there completely.

Last thing I want to say about this live issue is I hope that this talk is not a talk about what you shouldn't shouldn't do exactly. Right. rather a talk that encourages, encourages you to reflect carefully and deeply about something as important as livelihood, whatever the livelihood is, whether whatever kind of the primary way in which you are supported and support others in terms of work that they really consider carefully. It's very important. What you do for the many hours a day is a very important thing. It's not incidental. Some people who work eight hours a day or some volunteer more hours a day, 40 hours a week, hundreds of hours a year. That's a huge chunk of our, of our, our life goes into it. And it's well worth considering how to do it in such a way that the work itself is meaningful for what we want our life to be most be about. And both how we do it and what we do. And so to do that as a reflection to think about that, and to wonder, you know, into kind of not not go along and here after a year, doing a job that we're not really doesn't really support us or is not meaningful, just because we're afraid to change, or just because we're lazy to change. Our life is very important. And it's important to be able to have a life that supports us and nourishes us and is meaningful, in a way for this heart of ours. So one question that some people benefit from is to ask the question around work livelihood is, if you were not afraid, what would you do? If you were not afraid, what would you do? Another interesting question is if
you won the lottery, what would you do? What kind of work would you do and this is If you say with one lottery I'd be free of work once and for all. I wouldn't work. But is that really nourishing? golf course the beach, hang out, get a yacht. Take a yoga class, or whatever, you know is that what you know what what is really meaningful and nourishing? What do you really want to do with your life? It's a wonderful life that you have. So those are my thoughts about right livelihood. And now we have about 15 minutes. So if anybody would like to ask questions or give testimonials, maybe Victor here who likes oatmeal?

The question as to what do you think the Buddha would have said about the flip side of,
of work and that would be consumption.

You work? Oh yes. Cuz how we consume? Yeah, that's a good one. I suppose nowadays, he would say that right consumption, I suppose that fits into the category of right action. Maybe write consumption usually has the side of not causing harm and how we consume how we thinks we use. And so the right action is based again with not harming us here if you move the mic in front,

the old Persian King Cyrus, and he wrote a book about him, I think, from peace. It's called the education of Cyrus. And that book is says that he, they had they were doing agriculture. They have to plant and they have to have land and
to keep the land so that they can
generate food. But they have to have to be able to defend their land. Then if you have land and you have to defend the land and let's say at that point if you make arms to defend the land, is that right? Right? Or it's not

asking me so is it right livelihood to make arms to defend your land? Is Is there a time it kind of a variation of that a more dramatic variation? is there is there a time to engage in military combat? Is there a time to get a weapon and fight to defend yourself? is a is a moral dilemma that many people have faced and I don't have it prefer not to give an answer to that. That's direct. But my preferred way of answering these questions is that is because many people are very quick to defend their right to defend themselves and to go get the arms. And I'd like to see people answer that question after they've trained themselves in how to deal with conflict without fighting. And many years ago here in Palo Alto, so a woman said to me, I have to park at night in Palo Alto sometimes, and I'm afraid so I'm thinking of getting a gun. And what do you think? And I didn't tell her what I thought, because I didn't think in my role that was my place to tell her what I thought. But what I said, Well, you know, what I would English boost what I really thought right? But what I told her was that For getting a gun, I hope that you will train yourself in non violent defense. And, and learn learn the skills of defending yourself non violently in a variety of ways. So that you least have that as support. And then you might consider whether you need a gun or how you're going to use a gun. But if your first line of defense is getting a gun, you know, then you're much more likely to get in trouble or cause trouble or cause harm. But if you learn other ways first, so are there other ways and, and to defend the nation defend, defend your land? And, and there are countries who've made that choice to do that, like Costa Rica has no military, and maybe it has no enemies so much around it, but it's quite impressive to do that. Do not have a military. And we've had beautiful examples in our world in the last hundred years or so. very significant examples of people who use non violence to fight for freedom and independence. In a sense, Gandhi who just word you know, just wore, you know, white diaper, you know, he seemed seemingly sorry. loincloth I couldn't come to the right word.
But I was trying to make a point.

You know, he didn't have much right. It was literally little guy. Yeah, this

this little guy is a thin and wirey and, you know, and you know, he brought down the English Empire.
Quite impressive. So, I don't want to answer the question directly, but please consider the other
alternatives first. Over here

I was wondering how this pertains to salespeople because I remember when salesmen telling me once
I was discussing this with him, that his job was to acquaint people with something they didn't really, they
didn't know yet that they needed. And that was his rationalization. And I'm I've never done sales, but
I've tried to try to persuade people by points of view and so forth. And I think it would be pretty hard to
be a salesperson and not do a little bit of lying. And unless you totally believe 100% in your product,
and I think most salespeople sell more than one product,

when prospects are right livelihood is also defined by it by right action, which is set before and so lying
is clearly wrong action. So it fit into wrong wrong wrong livelihood as well to be lying as part of your
career. And so that's that's the unequivocal you know, lying and but then there's a kind of a little bit of a
gray area. About about deceit, and trickery and things like that. And so, uh, generally in Buddhism,
deceit and trickery as a way of, you know, as a form of business, unless you're a musician is, you know,
is considered not appropriate gambling also considered inappropriate in Buddhism. So is fortune telling
as a career?

Well, it seems very idealistic to me to say that because there are certain personalities who are
salespeople have certain kind of personality.

I'm in sales. That's what I do. Right. And for some of you that are entertainment,

I think that's asking a lot of somebody to, if that is their love selling Yeah, even if they don't believe in
their product.

I've known people who've been salespeople who I think were impeccable and their honesty they
believed in the product they had a really good product that was useful for people they believed in it and
they believed they were contributing to the world through their product. I think it's I can think of
beautifully honorable career to be a salesperson or can be done on an honorably and it can be done
this honorably I bought a you know, I had a salesman tell me all kinds of things when I bought my cell
phone and, and, and, you know, include include a special deal I was going to get in and, and then when
I you know, he clearly lied. And then when I tried to follow up there was no follow up. There's no phone
call back or anything. You know, I mean, I don't know if he was lying. He could have just been forgetful,
but you know, it was not. It didn't feel good to me. So it does happen.

You're asked about a testimonial. I didn't get that one.

I was on the fast track of or chasing the rats and decided not to that I wasn't happy at that. So I, about
four months ago I gave away got rid of everything except for a $500 motorcycle that I bought. And I am
a balloon artist and dance instructor and I packed up my saddlebags full of balloons and stuck my
backpack in tent on the back of it and hit the road. So for the last four months I've just been traveling
around you said put yourself as making your balloons twisting balloons. Yeah, stick and one of the
things that I found is that in letting go of all this, the more stuff I get. I got the less happy I was because
I had to work to support my stuff and I I took by rent tonight divided by 30. And figured, well, I could get a pretty good hotel for that. And all I was doing was I was putting all my money into the building. And then but I wasn't there. So it was like a very expensive storage space. So now when I'm out and about, yeah, I mean, huge numbers of awesome people. Miracles seem to happen. I know. It's just like, the whole world comes together to support me in ways that are just absolutely phenomenal. And yeah, sometimes I get a little cold, but a little bit of uncomfortableness, but I don't know anybody who doesn't in some form or another. And so as far as the sales things concern, what I found I've done some sales and what I found is that if you don't If you don't believe in what you're doing what you're selling, find something that you do believe that you're in what you're selling. And because it is, as you mentioned, what would you do if you weren't afraid? And if you're staying in a business in which you're not enjoying it, and you're having to put your own ethics on the line, Why be there? And by the way, that's the end of my story that I want. I wanted to tell you that you've been my teacher for the past seven years. And that's the first time I've ever seen you through the podcasts.

It's great to have you welcome here. Thank you for your testimonial was lovely to hear and a modern day mendicant. Beautiful. renunciant.

Okay.

Well, so

You know, of all these systems, the talks I've given now and eighth pole step, suffered, I think for somehow this one I feel is the most tender. Because it's so personal. I mean, the other is a personal too. But there's something very poignant about livelihood and work and all that goes into it. And so you know, it's, it's not an easy area to explore, but it's a beautiful thing. And I hope for those people who are who work or have livelihood, that it becomes something that is deeply meaningful and nourishing for yourself in the world. And if not, because of what you do, then because of how you do it. Thank you