

Right Effort

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So what I'm doing in these Monday evenings is giving a series of talks on the Eightfold Path, and today the topic will be Right Effort and Two. The Eightfold Path are a brilliant collection of eight practices that are supportive for the path deliberation to freedom. It's also a brilliant path to any kind of mature maturation. It doesn't have to be about liberation. It doesn't have to be about even Buddhism. But these are eight kinds of things that are very helpful to mature and to develop and to be concerned with as we find our way in our life and The Eightfold Path can be applied of or be suggestive of many different things, part of the brilliance of them.

And I like to suggest a few things here today. First, the Eightfold Path are sometimes divided into three different categories, three different parts, as eight. The first two are called the wisdom factors, so that more having to do with understanding a wise understanding for our lives. With that wise understanding, we have the next three, and they are called the ethics category. So they have to do with ethics and behaviour, how we relate to the world around us. And the last category, which we're starting today, has to do with inner development, developing yourself, caring for your own mind, your own heart and the heart.

So this idea of caring for yourself, the quality of your mind, quality of your heart, is a very important one in Buddhism. And there's three whole factors of the Eight Full Path that have to do with this kind of self care. To cultivate and care for the quality of our hearts or our minds, it's important to recognize that this part of the path. The last three occur after the middle three, which has to do with ethics or behavior, has to do with cultivating healthy relationships with the world around us, has to do with a query clearly with our interface with the world. And we want to have healthy relationships. We want to live in the world in a healthy way, the idea of going off and caring for yourself and your own inner life independent of how you live in the world. It doesn't really work very well in Buddhism.

You can, if you're, you know, just obnoxious at work, and then you sit down to meditate something you know and get peaceful. Something not quite right there has to be some harmony or some integration or some correspondence between how we live our lives and how we do with what we do with our inner life. So the inner factors of the path have a lot to do with building on how we behave in the world. So we care for how we speak. We care for how we act in the world in terms of ethical precepts. We don't kill and steal and lie. And it builds on care about our livelihood.

We live our livelihood where we spend much of our days is a livelihood that doesn't harm, that supports a clean conscience, and supports creating a good world that we live in. So that's part of the foundation for the next three factors. Another part of the foundation I think it's useful to think about is that it's very important for people to have their basic needs met. So we have to have enough food, we have to have enough shelter, we have to have enough clothes to be warm or whatever we need, and we have enough medicine. And these are to call the four requisites, the Buddha thought, are considered very important for his followers to have. Some Buddhist monastics, even though from maybe our stern modern point of view lay people live lives that seem somewhat ascetic, they are not meant to be ascetic. They're meant to be lives that provide people with the bare necessity of what they really need to feel safe and comfortable and healthy in their lives.

So it's important to have these things. And for all of us, it's important to have that. Some people in our society don't have enough food, don't have enough safety. If they don't have enough shelter, it's important those are there. But an interesting question arises: When you have those basic needs satisfied, what is important to do next? What do you think is important to do next? If you have a basic shelter and house, it's important to get a bigger one.

If you have, in our society, some people have, you know, a car that gets them around, it's important then to get a bigger car, a faster car. Some people have the basic, you know, neat food and shelter and basic needs they have. What then recreation opportunities? People have good paying jobs. Is that good enough? What's next? A better paying job, acquiring more wealth.

Or maybe we know wealth is not so important, but status is important, and so you want, you know, so to move on to that. What's what? What do we what do we build our life on? What do we dedicate our lives to do after we have the basic needs taken care of and satisfied? is things a very interesting question and to consider. What are your basic needs? You don't have to be, as you know, as simple as a Buddhist monastic, but my guess is that most of you here have the most basic needs of your life satisfied well enough.

Some people don't. But you know, you know, what exactly does it do we need? What do we? What do we consider important after those basic needs are satisfied? In that, the suggestion I have is that on what I feel very strongly is that there's two things that are next. One is caring for other people, and the other is caring for yourself. And so the middle factors of the Eightfold Path have a lot to do with caring for our world, you know, the ethical things.

Living a Life of Compassion and Care the next, but the next three have a lot to do with caring for ourselves and caring for ourselves, not by winning the lottery. That's now really big. That's what wouldn't be necessarily caring for yourself. It wouldn't be about having, you know, better food, you know, go out to more expensive restaurants, or bigger bank accounts, or bigger houses, or bigger cars, or bigger status, or whatever it might be. But rather, it's the something much more important, much more what Buddhism considers to be a form of wealth more valuable than conventional wealth. And that has to do with the quality of your heart, the quality of your inner life, the quality of your mind, if you prefer that word.

But the quality of the heart, that the heart is not in conflict, the heart is not agitated, the heart is not weighed down or burdened, that the conscience is clean, that the heart is inspired, that it has a sense of being settled on itself, is at peace. There's inspiration. There's beauty in the heart that shines forth. I believe that one of the most probably, I believe, the most beautiful thing in the universe that you're ever, you'll ever see is a purified heart. No art, no thing in nature. Nothing is as beautiful as a pure heart. It's one of the most beautiful things that all of you have.

Everyone has. Do we care for that? It's very easy not to care for the quality of our inner life because we think that other things are more important and we can be focused on externals, getting things in the world, and in the process of doing that, they agitate and stay in some certain way disconnected, as if all these other things we could pursue are more meaningful than the profound sense of happiness and well being that we can feel inside. This profound sense of well being is not meant to be done in isolation, separate from our care for the world around us. And I think that's part of the brilliance of the Eightfold path: that the caring for our inner life occurs after we've established healthy relationships in the world around us. They go hand in hand, these things caring for others and caring for ourselves.

But we have to care for ourselves. We don't have to, but I think that I shouldn't have said we have to, but we can. And it's interesting to consider the beliefs that we some of us have, some of you have that says that this doesn't count, that it's not important to look and care for one's inner life, that it's selfish to do that, or there's nothing there that's valuable, or the beliefs we have that other things are much more important, and so we pursue different things than

pursuing a high quality of inner life. One of the limits, one of the hindrances to cultivating a good inner life for some people, is the idea that it's selfish, that I shouldn't be doing focusing myself and being happy. myself because all the other people are suffering, and I have to kind of do something for them. And then the question is, how can you best help other people? You best help them when you are at peace, or best help them when you're agitated.

And I hope that the answer is the first that a being knows. How can you best help help someone who is upset. You best help them by worrying with them. Some people want you to do that, but is that really the best gift you can give them? Or can you offer your compassion, your care, your support while being at peace yourself, calm yourself? When my wife, when were kids, were young, she felt that one of the important qualities of being a parent for her was not to be alarmed.

And so, you know, you know, if you have been around little kids, there's no shortage of things that new parents can get alarmed about. But, you know, then you pass on to the kids, you know, this conditioning of being alarmed. And the world's a frightening place. So how do you know, condition your kids in the most healthy way. We're spending a lot of time worrying around the kids. Teach a kid something very powerful. And you might think you're caring for them, but you might be undermining them.

So how to care and teach and be responsible parents or anything? But to in the kind of the mother's milk or the parents milk, the father's milk, whatever his metaphor is. You know, what are we passing on in how we are? And I think that how we are is very, very significant. And so our inner life is important for how we support and care for the world around us. So this next step of the eight full path, a sixth one, is called right effort. And it has to do with being a caretaker for our inner life and being able to recognize the difference between well, you know, good quality states of mind and poor qualities.

And the way that the tradition usually translates this is that he of the wholesome quality and unwholesome qualities. Wholesome qualities are those which are good and helpful, skillful, that we recognize as being beautiful or meaningful. The unwholesome ones are things that cause suffering, distress. They either cause suffering to ourselves or cause suffering to others. So things like hate is considered to be an unwholesome state to have. It's not wholesome, you know. If you spend a lot of time being angry, you probably get sick.

There's a I remember some years ago I read a story about a doctor in England in seventeen, eighteen hundreds who had an anger problem, and he apparently said, The next person who gets me really angry is going to kill me. And now he died of a heart attack being angry. So he kind of knew what was coming. So there are unwholesome are unhealthy. So do you

know what's healthy for the inner life? That we know what's unhealthy for the inner life, that distinction is very important in this factor of the right effort. If we have some sense of that difference, then there are four tasks to be done in caring for our inner life, and they're kind of pared down.

The first is to be preventative. Preventative medicine is very helpful as a lot cheaper. And so are not only true for medicine, but it's also true for the spiritual life, the inner life, to know what it takes to prevent unwholesome, unskillful, unhealthy states of mind to arise. The opposite of that is called cultivate, to evoke, to develop, to bring forth healthy states of mind, wholesome states of mind. The next two are also con v paired. When unhelpful or unwholesome states of mind have arisen, abandon them. That's the word they use. Abandon, and if healthy, wholesome states of mind have arisen, maintain them. Keep them going.

So prevent and maintain, abandon. No prevent and cultivate. Abandon and maintain is knocking over, said me not, said me with me. I apologize. I don't know. What can you see? I can't see this. Is it? What's it doing? Am I breathing in arah? So it's a very simple thing, you know. And I think that in conventional life we do this all the time, right? And we prevent things we know that are cause problems. We fix things which are problematic. We bring forth, we create good conditions, and then we maintain those good conditions. Some of you do it. Those things may be with your car, you know. You try to prevent problems with your car by having the oil changed regularly. You try to If you have a problem in your car, you fix it. You know. And then I don't know what you do about evoking good states in your car, but I guess make sure you have good tires, good breaks, and then you keep them good going.

So in terms of so the this, so wholesome and unwholesome, or healthy and unhealthy in the inner states, be able to recognize those, to have a visceral felt sense, different feeling. Not a moralistic idea, not concepts of what's healthy and not healthy, but rather to really feel in your heart or your inner life what it feels to be different, been contracted and open, agitated and peaceful, a constricted or relaxed and flowing and calm. There's a whole range of things that are considered healthy in a whole range of things which are considered unhealthy. The difference between feeling a heart that feels love and one that feels hate generosity verses one that feels miserly, one that feels wise verses one that's filled with doubt. So there's all these different qualities, and how do we relate to them? What do we do about them? How do we live with them is the question, Oh, all I think we all have all of this, you know?

I like to think that to all human beings are basically the inner life is basically the same, and we have a wide range of emotions that come and go. We all have wholesome and healthy states of mind that arise. We all have unhealthy and unwholesome ones that occur from time to

time, and it's not a personal failing to have it one way or the other. I think it helps to see it is the human condition to have these things come through. But then how do we work with them? What do we do with them when they're there? If you're filled with rage, what do you do do you that? Great. I can't wait to go and bash someone. This is really fun. You know, you know, in these Buddhists who say you should abandon and rage, they don't know what we're talking about. I'll show them and you know that that's not really a good way of living. I don't think it makes sense to live that way.

I think most of us monitor ourselves well enough that there are certain states of mind that we're very careful when those states our minds are there, that we don't act on those states, that we kind of do something with them. And so the first one is to prevent. So if you monitor yourself, pay attention to cause and effect in your life. Are there certain things that are triggers for you to create unwholesome, unhealthy states of mind that you'd rather not have ones that debilitate you, ones that depress you, ones that irritate you, to have ones that kind of trouble you, to have the troublesome states. And you recognize those triggers are for those states and us. And I think becoming wise about those triggers helps you then to be preventative, to think ahead. So, for example, if you have some kind of addiction, say you have a real trouble with alcohol as a preventative measure, it's probably not a good idea. It's probably best to avoid having alcohol, and your refrigerator, your home, is just part you now. It's probably a good idea. Some people go further, they probably it's probably a good idea not to go to places where people are drinking. It's just a good prevention. And some people, I think, because they've seen the challenges they have of their indicative behaviour, no, they'd better not do this.

I've known a lot of people. Lasi seems to me like in the last five years, dramatic escalation of people who come somewhat distressed about some one addiction, want some addiction or other, having to do with computers in the Internet, and even people who what they're watching on the Internet. Maybe it's not necessarily unwholesome, but it's the amount of time they spend which is the problem they get hooked in, and the quality of their mind decreases, they feel lousy. Just kind of feel it has a certain kind of Madonna. The drain or the serotonin or something, you know, makes them feel good maybe in a moment, but they just kind of get wiped out, and it doesn't feel good. As I've watched my mind stay in the computer, I'm convinced that spending a lot of time looking at screens changes the quality of the mind in a dramatic way for the worse. And it's kind of kind of obeys in my mind. I kind of hypes it up, kind of increases agitation or the speed or the It's kind of like a more superficial level of how my mind is operating. That's kind of like operating like on caffeine. and I don't think

that that place to operate from, for me, is a very good quality place to be.

It's kind of like I'm pulled out of the place of rest in my heart, that where I feel much more settled and peaceful and at ease. And I don't know what it is. Maybe other people don't have that issue. Maybe the minds were brains work differently, or depends what people do. But I have to be careful with how much time I spend in the computer, because the way I engage in the computer, after a while I just don't feel good about it, so I don't up the people or some heavy editions to that. So preventative is limit how much time you're on TV. or on the computer or whatever if it's not healthy for you to do it. I get enough sleep. Some people, getting not getting enough sleep is a huge condition. I'm for having all kinds of unwholesome states of mind arise.

So I can go on and on, but the it is. The important thing is for each of you. If you're interested in this whole approach is to be able to recognize and to know what are the triggers, what are the conditions that are to be careful for, and how to do preventive maintenance of yourself. Not look at things that pull you into their world. Not talk to the people that pull you into worlds that are emotional states, which are not healthy. for you to be in. Or if you know there are triggers, know the things that cause problems for you and you have to engage in them, prepare yourself ahead.

If you're going to be talking to someone who is always complaining and always being angry, and you tend to get pulled into their world, and you tend to start complaining and angry, as well. And it doesn't feel good to do that. Maybe you have to kind of not just show up without thinking about it. But maybe before you meet with that person, you have to spend time preparing yourself. Come down, meditate, or at least set your intention, and remind yourself, I'm talking to someone who pulls me into this negative universe. Let me try to stay mindful so I don't get pulled in. That's preventative. It's a whole series of things you can do and then.

But if an unhealthy, unwholesome state of mind has arisen, then the task is to If you don't want to live that way, the task is how to have a course correction, how to abandon the unwholesome states of mind. the unwholesome activities of the mind, unwholesome ways of thinking that are going on. And one of the most useful things that many people find in our tradition that helps this is to be mindful, to be attentive, to be aware of what's going on. And one of the reasons why this is so important for many people that I know is that there's a common center that when we notice things about ourselves we don't like, things that are uncomfortable or troubling, is to get more troubled by it. So, you know, perhaps we get angry, and then get angry with ourselves for being angry, seeing that we have some kind of

addiction issue, and then feel shame or feel bad about ourselves because we have an addiction issue. The beauty about mindfulness is it doesn't in of itself judge what we're mindful of, and it helps us to disengage from taking things in a negative way. Personally, negative personal identification with something so we can feel weighed down by it and troubled by it, and can sometimes spin out because we just get in the spiral of just feeling worse and worse about how we are.

So one of the first steps of abandoning is not to abandon, but rather, in a metaphorical way, step back and just be mindful of it. Don't be caught in it as much. Practice mindfulness to help you step out of its orbit, out of its gravitational pull what's going on. And it's quite a remarkable thing to have the capacity, slowly gained, learned the capacity to have a negative state of mind, negative qualities going on, and to be able to watch it or be present for it with a mind that is not it, that's free of it. Sometimes identification with negative states is so strong that we feel we are it. But mindfulness, as it gets stronger and stronger, shows us that there's a part of us, a part of our mind, a part of who we are that is not immeshed in what's going on. And it's actually, oddly enough, perhaps there can be a joy, a kind of delight, even, in bringing mindfulness to unhealthy states of mind, troubling states of mind, because of the strength of the mindfulness. A This is fun. I hardly believe in it. So that's one of the first things.

And then abandoning also is to learn what it takes to no longer be caught in these things in a deeper way. It lets go of them. The Buddhist tradition offers a lot of tools, a lot of techniques for this. Mindfulness is the forefront. Get to know it well not just learn to observe it with some kind of equanimity, but to study it more carefully. I understand what's going on. And sometimes by understanding it more deeply, we can learn what we, what we believe that we were holding on to, that's a trigger for it, and we may be let go of something. So the idea of studying something, getting to know it better is really important. A technique that the tradition offers is sometimes it's useful to ignore something and to select something else, to pay attention, to turn your attention to something else. So for example, if the issue is there's too many alcohol bottles in your refrigerator and you're really tempted, maybe you turn your attention to something else, like go visit your neighbour who doesn't have any alcohol in her in our house, you know?

And perhaps, you know, spending time there, can you know, make it easier for you kind of to calm down and to kind of not be caught? And then you kind of settle out, and you may be forget about what's in your refrigerator, and then you send your neighbour. Can you go there and throw that out? You know it, idiots. So sometimes there's healthy and selective ways to ignore what the issues step aside and focus on something else to help you disentangle

the situation. And I think it's often intuitive to do that. Sometimes we pull ourselves out of challenging situations so we can cool down, and then perhaps go back and deal with it later, the situation after we've cooled down. There's a beautiful atoms, beautiful. But in the ancient tradition of the Buddha, I think he appreciates that this is really hard. Sometimes it's really hard to get to kind of just to get pulled out of the grip of very strong negative or unwholesome, unhealthy, troubling states of mind or impulses that we have. And so when he gives a series of techniques of what you can do, the last technique he gives is to bear down and grind your teeth and not give in.

And you know, I usually don't hear that kind of advice from a Buddhist teacher, but I think it's realistic. Occasionally the tremendous for some people the tremendous power and force of desire and hate and the way that grips us and propels us. It might be the best thing a person can do is to just grit their teeth, sit still, hold on tight, and not give in. It can be the wisest thing to do. Occasionally, if nothing else has worked, I rather been making a big mess. So then there's evoking or cultivating, bringing forth wholesome or healthful states of mind. And when I was a new Buddhist student, I strongly mistrusted this kind of idea. The idea that you would create good states of mind seems very artificial to me and insincere. It took me a long time and a lot of practice to come to appreciate that it's a beautiful thing to do, and it's a fine thing to do, and it doesn't have to be artificial. It doesn't have to be sacred, and doesn't have to be pretending something.

There's a lot of ways in which to evoke or bring forth healthy states of mind, or healthy qualities, or healthy attitudes. And some of them you have to do with your simple choices. Is the glass half full or half empty? What do you focus on? I don't know this is a good example, but if your friend has a really beautiful sweater on but a kind of plain little bit, kind of ugly pants on, are you up? Which one are you obligated to mention? Totto: mention. There's no obligation to mention any of them. You can talk about the weather, but as you know, you know, where do you go? Si, I can't believe these pants you are wearing. Is that really the best use of your time and your voice and your focus of your attention? Your attention is an important thing. What you pay attention to and what you bring other people's attention to. Its very meaningful as well. Maybe it's important if they're going to some important meeting where having better pants is important. Maybe you can gently say to them, You know, you might think of other pants, but other. But it's a world of difference between saying those pants are ugly, verses saying that sweater is beautiful, that a bet sweater looks really nice on you. Is one insincere and one more sincere? Its ugly, panting more sincere. Then saying, That's a beautiful sweater. It I think Im suggesting here. It's a matter of choice. You sometimes you

can choose what you focus on.

And there's a lot of beauty in this world, and there's a lot of beauty in you. There's probably more beautiful qualities and states of mind than you in yourself, and you realize. But if we're fixated on the negative, or fixated on particular things, or what troubles us the most, we might have noticed that it's a beautiful day. We might not notice that. You know that there are things that're really going well in our life. I have a little pet philosophy that I'll consider. I don't know how well it works, but I'll give it to you anyway, that by the time a person is fifty years old, they can be assured that something has gone really well. Something has really worked well. It's not easy to get to fifty. Something worked really well.

And I've seen people who you know, get to eighty, and they think they're still. They think they're a mess, and there, you know, still nothing works. But you know, just know, if those of you reached fifty congratulations, something has worked really well. And take that in, appreciate that. What is it you can appreciate about yourself? So one of the one of the important practices that the tradition offers is the idea of reflecting on your good qualities and reflecting on the good things that you've done in order to help you evoke healthy, good states of mind, something you feel good about and happy about what you've done. And one of the reasons to do good things, be helpful to other people, is so you can feel good about yourself.

Some people find this goes against the grain of how their mind works. There's the momentum in their mind is so strong that nothing they do counts, that the only thing that counts is all the things that they did bad and wrong and you know you don't. There are people like me when I was younger where I didn't have to do anything wrong to be guilty. I mean, it wasn't simply that I was, you know, guilty and guilty until proved innocent. I was guilty before I did anything. Even before I even thought about doing anything, I can't do anything to feel guilty. It was like being a general short for guilt, you know. It's quite remarkable that capacity of the mind to get into these negative mind states, you know? And so what are the beliefs? What are the operating systems you have? Are very important to understand this idea of noticing and monitoring yourself, noticing how your mind works, noticing the patterns of how it works, so you can start questioning them, so you put a question mark behind them. do I need to be guilty of? Why do I give my guilt so much authority?

Why do you give your anger so much authority? Why do you give your desires so much thought? Why do you give your negative self image so much authority? Where does the authority come from? That is, you know, put a question mark. What happens? But to spend some time reflecting and thinking and considering the things about yourself that can bring you joy, things about your life, the things about what you've done, the qualities you have.

Even if you know maybe you are one of those people who ninety five per cent of who you are is pretty rotten, maybe you think of self that way at least the way you can. But how about spending more time appreciating the five per cent that's really good? If you do, I would. I'm pretty confident that if you do, if you appreciate the five per cent that's really good about yourself, you'll shift the percentages, and then more of you will be good, more of you'll be healthy and wholesome, you'll water those seeds, you'll cultivate and develop those qualities more. They appreciate healthy and wholesome mental states that we have. When they're appreciated, they have a chance to grow. When they're ignored, they don't grow.

If you spend a lot of time appreciating in a negative sense the term your unwholesome states of mind, it has a way of conditioning them and making them stronger. So be very careful. So part of the tradition says, Cultivate the wholesome. Cultivate the healthy. Actively do it. It's a good thing. The last thing is, when you have some good qualities going, when they enter your inner life, the quality of your heart is good. Care for it, maintain it, keep it going. Don't cling to it. Don't kind of insist on it. But perhaps there are simple ways of keeping it going, not kind of rushing into the next thing.

So say that you have helped a neighbor. Maybe you took those alcohol bottles and threw them away, and it was helpful, and you kind saw it made a huge difference in your neighbor's life, and while you did it you felt good and you felt good to know that at least for this night your neighbor is going to sleep safe. There's no danger for your neighbor. It's been struggling, and it feels good to have that done that. It's yes, good to have a better situation with your neighbor. So you could just kind of linger with that and kind of appreciate that before you a rush off to do your internet diction and can really forget that. But what are the good things, good qualities the love, the generosity, the calm, the peace that you are capable of experiencing? And are there ways that you give it up too quickly, ways in which you abandon it too quickly because you rush off to do the next thing in a way that doesn't kind of let you register and stay and linger in a good way, or to be informed by or be supported by or be motivated by the beauty in your hearts, the good qualities of who you are. Don't overlook these things.

So the last thing I'll say is, you're all beautiful people. You're all really beautiful people. And those of you who are not yet fifty, you're really beautiful. Something's really working well. And it's really good to take that in, and to appreciate that, and be nourished by that, and live as if that's true. Let that come forth. Let that be who you are. Appreciate that, and appreciate people's beautiful tones and their selfishness. There is really nice some of them. So please take good care of yourself, cherish yourself, be the caretakers, custodians of your own

beauty, your own inner life. And perhaps as you go to sleep tonight, as you put your head on the pillow, spend a little bit of time considering your good qualities, the good things you've done, and considering that whatever percentage you have one per cent, half per cent. I don't care what percentage. That's really beautiful and wholesome and good about yourself. And I appreciate that. Thank you.