

## Overview Of The Eightfold Path

**Gil Fronsdal**

**February 11, 2013**

**Keywords:** Eightfold Path, tenfold path, right knowledge, right deliverance, dukkha, letting go, mindfulness, nibbāna, nirodha, Simile of the Cloth

---

Last week I gave a talk on the eighth factor of the Eightfold Path, and having given a series of talks over many Mondays on each of the steps of the Eightfold Path, I thought this evening could be the final talk in this series, because the Eightfold Path is the most famous and most common description of Buddhist practice, the reference point, one of the primary reference points for Buddhist practice. There is also a tenfold path, and it's interesting to look at this tenfold path because of the continuation of the Eightfold Path, the tenfold path. The ninth step is called right knowledge, and the tenth is right deliverance, or right liberation. So the Eightfold Path, again, is the most standard depiction of Buddhist practice, and it is divided into three different areas, which I like to just lightly refer to as the head, the body, and the heart. So Buddhist practice involves an integrated approach to spirituality that includes all of who we are, all the aspects of who we are.

The idea in the Eightfold Path is to create a broad, integrated foundation, or broad, integrated approach to a particular path, for a particular goal. The first area, the head, has to do with our cognitive function or understanding or thinking. How do we understand what we're doing? How do we understand the way forward in this life, how to live a life? Because most of us are not going to be sitting on the couch watching TV all day. We're going to be engaged in the world in some kind of hopefully meaningful way.

Some people are looking for a meaningful way of being in the world. One of the approaches that some people take is to try to deal with some of the deepest existential, deepest human issues, struggles, problems that humans can have. So what are those issues? And what is the resolution of those issues? What's the way through these issues? How do we deal with those issues?

The Buddha, in his answer to that question, looked at the cause or the root source for what he called suffering. The word is *dukkha*, which is many things that cause us distress, cause

us difficulties, cause us tension, despair, depression, discouragement, fear, anger—all kinds of emotional difficulties and challenges that we have. It's remarkable for me in this role I have as a Buddhist teacher to encounter so many people who are struggling with some of the greatest struggles that human beings have to struggle with. One of the things that I try to reassure them with or try to offer is that the practice that we teach in Buddhism—the practice of meditation, of mindfulness, the Eightfold Path—wasn't originally designed for stress reduction. It wasn't originally designed to just fit into your society in a nice way and get along with things, but was really designed as a very radical form of therapy to deal with some of the deepest, the deepest existential challenges that a human being has.

The beginning of the path involves understanding that, understanding how it works, that it's a particular approach, how to find this path that Buddhism offers, and so on. It's understanding something about suffering and how to address our suffering. This is the first step of the Eightfold Path, and then also understanding that if you are going to walk on this path, a particular attitude is very helpful. We want to try to cultivate an attitude or cultivate an approach that is conducive for walking a path to become free of suffering. If what you want to do is become free of suffering, it doesn't work to be cruel. It doesn't work to have a lot of ill will. It doesn't work to be really greedy, attached to things.

If you want to find a path to peace and freedom, to liberation, to peace, there has to be some attitude that you get, the attitude that's the opposite of those—an attitude of attempting at least or directing oneself towards compassion, directing oneself towards good will, and directing oneself to an ability to let go. Renunciation, some renunciation, because if you hold on tight, nothing's going to work. Recently I met with a woman who has a debilitating health condition that might not be curable and is progressively getting worse and worse, and her capacity to take care of herself is decreasing. She was talking to me—she chose to talk to me, meaning a Buddhist teacher at a Buddhist centre. I cannot take that lightly. When someone comes to talk about some of the big challenges like this, like losing her physical abilities, being able to take care of herself, no longer being able to walk, that's quite a serious challenge someone has, and it gives birth to a lot of fear, anxiety, probably sometimes anger, despair.

She comes to a Buddhist center to talk to a Buddhist teacher, and so I feel like I have permission. I feel like I'm called upon. It's almost my responsibility to offer the radical therapy that the Buddha had to offer in those kinds of circumstances. I wasn't going to offer her a cure. That wasn't what I was doing. She chose to come to me right then. In her situation, I told her that one of the core aspects of this practice is to let go, and that's what she needed to

do at this point. If there was no cure, she should try to get a cure. She shouldn't give up the attempt to do that. But she should learn to let go, let go of her abilities, let go of control, let go of taking care of herself, and let go as deeply as possible, because if she didn't let go, it was going to be torn out of her hands, and that's only going to be more painful.

I told her letting go is—she only knows if she's let go if she feels lighter because of it, if she feels sometimes some joy or some lightness or ease in the letting go. If she lets go and feels neutral, she hasn't really let go. Her task now was to learn how to let go. I went through a whole period of time with her, exploring how someone will let go in a realistic way, in a meaningful way. I didn't want to give her—now, sometimes it can be very naïve and simplistic: "So just let go. You won't have any problems." That can do someone a disservice. But with her, it felt like she was so up against this usually dramatic difficulty and challenge. It seemed like what was really to do was to support her and help her and guide her in what she had to let go of—the beliefs, the identities, the ideas, the feelings that stood in the way, that weighed her down, that made the whole experience of this debilitating illness much worse than it needs to be.

So let go. This is a very important part of this attitude: letting go, a willingness to let go, if what you want is the radical peace that the Buddha had to teach. Understanding these things is the first part, necessity with the mind. Then the body has to do with our behaviour. What do we do with our speech? What do we do with our body?

We do things with our behaviour which are in harmony, aligned with being peaceful, with creating the conditions of freedom from suffering and harm. The last of the Eightfold Path, I like to say, is of the heart, because it has to do with some of the deepest aspects of our inner life that we begin ending. We know, we cultivate, we develop, we care for, we care for the quality of our heart, of our deep inner life. This is what a big part of the path of meditation is about. Mindfulness has to do, in part, with cultivating a high quality of an inner life—not just being mindful of what is, but in the process of being mindful for what is, cultivating a heart which is settled, which is peaceful, which is relaxed, which is open, has some experience of peace. The final step of the Eightfold Path, Right Concentration, is also creating the steadiness and strength of the mind, which then is able to see deeply, deeply to the very bottom of the heart, to what's really there.

The head, the body, the heart—the Eightfold Path as it does its integrated approach—but the point of following that path is not just to follow the path for its own sake, but rather to create the conditions that bring us a lasting peace, the conditions that help us to see in a deep way. The ninth step, when the tenfold path is mentioned, is called right knowledge. The idea of knowledge and seeing is really crucial, really central to the whole enterprise of Buddhist

practice. What this means is knowledge and seeing. Knowing and seeing is, at some point, I hope, whole. The Buddhist practice involves knowing and seeing something for yourself.

It's not taking a book, which I am going to read from maybe in a few minutes, and then nesting, "Now, I understand what's going on." Understanding is only a preliminary, an aspect of the Buddhist path. The path is supposed to lead to a deep, direct knowing that you know for yourself something, and a deep. The words knowing and seeing—those kinds of terms are used for the state of direct seeing, direct knowing that you have for yourself. So then the question is, what is it you directly know? What is right knowing? What's the right knowledge?

Right knowledge sounds a bit frightening to you, if you're uninitiated to this. Is it not supposed to go to Imagination Buddhism to understand all this knowledge of Buddhism? So it's not knowledge in the abstract, but it's knowing something directly and personally for yourself. Here I want to read a—I think it's quite a remarkable passage. It's from the discourse called The Simile of the Cloth, from the Middle Length Discourses.

And suppose a cloth was stained and a dyer dipped it with some dye—blue, yellow, red, or pink. It would look poorly dyed and impure in color. Why is that? Because of the stain in the cloth. So too, when the mind is stained, unhappy results come about. Suppose a cloth were pure and bright, and a dyer dipped it in some dye—whether blue, yellow, red, or pink—it would look well dyed and pure in color. Why is that? Because of the purity of the cloth. So too, when the mind is undefiled, good results are expected. What, monks, are the imperfections that stain the mind? Covetousness and greed are imperfections that stain the mind. Ill will, anger, resentment, contempt, insolence, envy, avarice, deceit, fraud, conceit, arrogance, vanity are all defilements that stain the mind.

So here what you're saying is that if you have a mind that has these kinds of activities in the mind, it's kind of like a stained cloth. You can't really dye it well. It's not useful for the dyer. So in the same way, a mind that's inflamed with these things, caught up in these things, doesn't see clearly, doesn't understand very well, is not able to get settled, stays agitated. It's not a mind that's useful for the purposes of finding peace and happiness. So then it goes on.

Knowing that covetousness and greed are imperfections that stain the mind, a monastic abandons it. Knowing ill will stains the mind, one abandons it. Knowing that anger, resentment, contempt, and all these things stain the mind, one abandons it, lets go of it. Easier said than done, but one lets go of it. When a monastic has known that these are stains, are imperfections that defile the mind, and has abandoned it, then the person has confidence in the

Buddha, one has confidence in the Saṅgha, and one has confidence in the Dhamma. So the idea here is that to know something for yourself, to know what it's like to have, for example, ill will or hate in your mind, to know the heat and the tension that brings, the discomfort that brings, to know how it stains and colours your vision of the world.

If you go around with ill will and then let go of it and know what the mind is like once it's let go of that ill will, to know the absence of that agitation, absence of that biased way of seeing, absence of that agitation that's there with that, is something we can know directly. You can know when the mind is tense, and you can know when the mind is relaxed. You can know when the mind is agitated and you can know when the mind is at peace. You can know when the mind is filled with fear and you can know what it's like when the fear is abated. These are things—the inner psychological state, the quality of your mind, your heart—is something you can know. When things are troublesome for the heart, you can know the troublesome nature of it, the feeling of it, and you can know what it's like when it's gone or there, when it's past, when it's abandoned and you've got peace.

This is the nature of the kind of thing the Buddha talks about when he talks about knowing something directly. I don't know how you know—maybe it doesn't seem so remarkable to hear this, but the language of Buddhism sometimes is quite lofty. Enlightenment is a quite lofty term. Who knows what it means? A lot of people use a term without knowing what it means, and have associations with a grand world religion like Buddhism, and people become highly attained—they must know something really mystical and mysterious and marvelous and profound that certainly is something that you don't know about. But here it's pointing to something I would suggest is relatively mundane, relatively simple, something that most people have, I hope, had some experience with.

Knowing the difference between a time in your life when you've been caught up in something like some of these stains, some of these challenges—here it's called imperfections, some of these struggles of the heart and the mind—and then to have the experience of it no longer being there, and feeling and seeing directly the palpable difference between these two states. This can be known. Some people just have emotions come and go. Sometimes they stay for a long time, certain states, and then they go. People can experience the presence of certain things and the absence of certain things, but most people have no sense of any mastery over that, any role in that. So the idea of letting go is the Middle Way. This is the approach of Buddhism: to learn a technique, learn a way to train the mind.

When you are caught in something, you learn to uncaught. When you're tight in the grip of something, you learn to release the grip. That's what the whole training is about—learning

to do that so that it isn't simply the presence of a stain in the mind and the absence, but you know how it's abandoned, how you let go of it. You have the ability to do it, have the flexibility, the strength of mind to be able to do that. So it's not offering some mystical teaching. It's not offering some supernatural teachings. It's not offering tale-telling, as we have to believe in something that cannot be really proved, which a fair number of religions in the world offer—a lot of teachings which are hard to believe if you don't really grow up in that religion.

But here it's offering something which, in modern terms, here in the West at least, could be called psychological—in the sense that it's something accessible to our own inner life or mind through our own ability to see something directly. You see the proof of it for yourself. You don't have to be convinced once you see that this works. Once you see what's here called a stain, and you see that you can let go of it, and you see the relief, the peace that comes from it, that gives—that's when a person has a realistic confidence in the Buddha. The term here in this text that Bhikkhu Bodhi translates, he translates as "perfect confidence in the Buddha." But I'm not sure—I doubt that that's the best translation. It might be acceptable, but not the best, because the word that he translates as "perfect" could also mean "based on knowledge," based on knowing. So it's confidence based on knowing something. You know for yourself this movement of the mind, and then you extrapolate from that one: if this is a little foretaste of it that I have, then the Buddha represents someone who must have done it to a much greater degree. He represents a possibility of really radically removing the stains from the heart and mind, radically letting go, so there can be some peace.

The Eightfold Path creates the foundation so that we have a fair chance of looking deeply into our mind to learn how to let go in a deep way. For this to happen, there has to be a fair amount of peace or ease or stillness. The Eightfold Path is creating a mind or heart which is not agitated. The behavior part—the middle sections of the Eightfold Path—have a lot to do with behaving in such a way that we're not going to continue to be agitated, stir ourselves up. It's very hard to be peaceful if we are unethical. Very hard to be peaceful if our life is harming other people or harming ourselves.

Buddhism offers, suggests, a very high standard of ethical behavior, so that the heart can feel at ease, so we can really not feel troubled by anything. When we sit down to meditate, we're not troubled by what we've done, and we don't feel remorse and regret and, you know, turning away with those things. The function of this mindfulness and concentration and meditation practice is also to begin softening and relaxing the mind so that it can be here in the present moment in a stable, relaxed, soft way. This is why we say that you should be very careful in meditation, that you are not striving too hard, trying to get somewhere too much,

because usually, especially here in the West, a lot of people strive and push, try to get someplace, and usually stir themselves up even more. Meditation has a lot to do with relaxing, letting go, settling into the present moment—not because the present moment in and of itself is a place to be, but by settling in and relaxing into the present moment, it gives us a vantage point then to go deeper, to see the psychology of where the clinging is, what's going on.

At some point we begin letting go. The mind lets go. At first, maybe it's in small ways, and then with time it becomes in bigger ways. Some of you have had experiences of letting go that are so mundane and simple. It means letting go of your impatience at the red light driving your car. You can feel some subtle tension, and you feel, "This is not any point. I can't, you know, make the light turn green faster because I'm tense." So you can let go perhaps in that moment a little bit. That's a little bit—you see the difference. You can know, if you pay attention, you can know the difference between what it feels like to be tense and what it feels like to let go.

That's a small, mundane thing, I think. But then the practice is to begin applying that same principle to more and more areas of our life. Some of the deepest things we hold on to are our identity, our desire to be, you know, to present ourselves a certain way, our security—all the things, all the kind of deep and important things that people want, that are reasonable maybe to want, but we cling to and depend. Our happiness, well-being, depends on it, or, say in a different way, we get agitated when we don't get it, or we get agitated when things we don't want remain. So what do we have to let go of? What are we to let go of so that we can know for ourselves the value of letting go? So we can know for ourselves the difference between an agitated mind and a peaceful mind, so that this is the ninth step of the Eightfold Path—to begin to cultivate and develop that knowledge, to see and understand that, and to cultivate that knowledge.

I think one of the things that's very helpful is to start appreciating what it feels like when you are no longer in the grip of what you were in the grip of. So if you are in the grip of anger, in the grip of greed, or in the grip of fear, you might be relieved to have it no longer there, but then you are busy with life and you're on to the next thing. You hardly notice any more, just think, "No." But to actually spend some time acknowledging, appreciating the difference between the inner state that's caught and the inner state that's free, can provide you with a direct knowledge that Buddhism says is right knowledge, that Buddhism says is really the art, the art of what the whole enterprise is about. If you can start seeing that distinction between being caught and being free, and appreciating it in small and big ways in your life, it begins

to strengthen the mind's or the heart's appreciation for freedom. It starts to strengthen appreciating the state of being peaceful and at ease.

It's very easy to overlook the value and the nourishment that can come from peaceful states, from no longer being caught, from being settled, being at ease. So a part of this practice of right knowledge is partly a result of letting go—the result of the path, and letting go in a deep way, and then knowing the results of that. If you start appreciating that and appreciating, you kind of extrapolate, you know, this thing about the red light—you know, I can see, you know, to my benefit, to let go of the tension, impatience at the red light, because, you know, it's not going to help me to get anywhere faster. So at least for these three seconds, I can settle back and breathe, and I feel better. Then take something as mundane and simple like that, and maybe extrapolate or imagine what would this be like if the same movement was done in some of the deepest existential issues in our life.

What would it be like to let go in such a deep way, or to discover ease in such a deep way, that in all the endeavours that you do as you go through your life—at work and relationships, in health and lack of health—that there's such a deep sense of ease in the heart that you're not liable to pick something up, to agitate it again. So there's one thing: to let go and experience peace. The other thing is to know that peace well enough and thoroughly enough that you come upon an opportunity to cling to something, to grab on to something, to get caught up in something, and you say, "No, thank you. I think this peace I have is valuable. I think it's more valuable and more important than the reasons I have for getting agitated, the reasons I have for clinging or resisting or getting upset."

Again, this right knowledge is very important because it provides a reference point that helps us to begin the debate with ourselves about what we're doing in our mind. One of the great debates from the vantage point of peace, some sense of ease and peace: Is it worth clinging to what you're about to cling to? Is what you're afraid about really worth being afraid about? Is what you're greedy about really worth being greedy about? If the cost of those states is you lose that peace, you'll probably have lots of reasons to argue it's okay to lose your peace, but you know. Part of the function of right knowledge is to give you a different vantage point, to have that discussion with yourself. The question is, is it really necessary to worry? Is it really necessary to want this so much, to expect this so much, to define my life by this way? Does it matter so much what people think about me, that if someone thinks poorly about me, that it's worth getting all worked up, to try to talk to them and hammer into them that I'm different? What causes, you know? Is it possible to keep the ease in the heart?

This is one of the possibilities that comes from this ninth step of the path, because we know



something for ourselves. We can then use that as a reference point. If you continue this process of letting go, of practising and going deeper and deeper into the mind and letting go more thoroughly, then at some point you have an experience of greater and greater liberation. Bhikkhu Bodhi, in this translation, translates as "deliverance," and one sense of freedom and ease becomes greater and greater, and this experience of freedom, the culmination of the Eightfold Path, is described this way in the text. I'll read you Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation, the standard way of translating this, and then I'll offer you a different translation that the Pāli words allow for.

This Eightfold Path leads to complete disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, and to nibbāna.

That's nice, right? So, "disenchantment leads to complete disenchantment." Rather than translating this as "disenchantment," I would translate this as "leads to breaking the spell, breaking the enchantment." Does that sound better? Some of you are in a spell. So, "leads to the complete breaking of the spell." Instead of "dispassion," to "fading of lust." This is "cessation." The word *nirodha* could also mean "destruction." Some of you know about Noah Levine and Against the Stream and the Dharma Punx, and they have sweatshirts that say, you know, "Meditate and destroy." You know, it kind of makes us baby boomers look twice. Peace and love, meditate and destroy what? But this word *nirodha*, it means—don't mean—usually translate "cessation," but it also means "to destroy." Isn't it great? So, "break the spell, fading of lust, destroy, to peace." I leave that word alone. I like that word in English. Then to "direct knowledge." So here is it. Leave that alone, too. They do have "direct knowledge." Direct knowledge means personal knowledge, knowing and seeing for yourself. To "enlightenment"—I don't know. The English word "enlightenment," I don't know if it's a useful word to keep using over and over again. I myself prefer the word "awakening" for a variety of reasons. And then to *nibbāna*. The etymology of the word *nibbāna* lends itself to also being translated as "release," to be released rather than being in bondage, to be released, to let go, no longer be holding on.

This is the goal of the Eightfold Path—to do these things. As the Eightfold Path becomes mature, then it gives rise to right knowledge, which is a direct knowing and seeing for yourself this process of clinging and letting go, and appreciating that, being nourished by that, beginning to use it. Use that as a greater and greater reference point, so you are less inclined to pick up your clinging, and more inclined to let go of what remains until, at some point, there's a much more radical and thoroughgoing letting go, which the tradition calls deliverance, or freedom, or liberation. This then gives birth to what's called an unshakable peace,

unshakeable deliverance of the mind.

The Eightfold Path that I've been talking about for these last couple of months is an extremely practical series of practices and tools and approaches and understandings that are beneficial for anybody's life. You don't have to be interested in liberation. This whole step here is that you don't have to be interested in right knowledge and right deliverance and freedom. It can just help in the ordinary activities of our life to live a better life, but also the way it was designed, which was designed for a very radical transformation of the person who walks the path. That radical transformation has been called by the tradition a path, a transformation that ennobles the person who gets transformed. A person gets ennobled or becomes more worthy, or becomes—there's a dignity in that freedom, in that peace. I think it's one of the great goals of human life—to give a lot of meaning to our path in our life, the idea that there is a path to this kind of freedom, there is a path to this kind of resolution of suffering. It's not a path that's esoteric and mystical, but rather it's built on very practical things we can do, and very practical insights and knowledges in what we can see in our own psychology. But to do it thoroughly and completely is one of the great and valuable tasks. Someone should do it, and a lot of people should do some of it, and every step along the way is worthwhile. No amount of practice is ever wasted. So, tenfold path, right knowledge, and right deliverance.

So we have a few minutes. If you'd like to ask any questions about any of this, you're welcome to do it. So, when we are in the heat of the passions, how do you remember the Eightfold Path? What do you do to recall it? Your consolation? I think if you're lost, it's hopeless and I don't see how you unite it. Either you're here or not. If you're not, then there's no hope. But unless you plan ahead, if you know you have a tendency in the heat of passion to lose your mindfulness and presence, then, you know, I don't think you can do anything, but then you can. Happens often enough. Then plan ahead and have things that remind you, you know. So I don't know what you want to do to remind you, but have big signs in your house. And the bigger problem you have, the bigger the sign should be, you know. Paint your whole door going in, "Pay attention to..." So that's one approach.

But if what you are asking is that you feel yourself in the heat of passion and stuff, and you understand it, you see that it's happening, but it has the upper hand and you have the under hand, what do you do? One of the really important practices that the Buddha taught was the practice of restraint. One of the really, I think, really important trainings and ways to develop inner strength is to know how to restrain yourself from making mistakes. If you know you're in the grip of heat and passion and anger, don't say anything. Go for a walk. Go to bed, take a shower, go for a run, do anything but act on the anger or speak it. Then, when you've cooled

down, maybe then you can bring mindfulness to it and explore what "cooled down enough" does mean—go away. But then you can sit quietly and look at it more deeply, understand what's going on, and be more wise. Once you've cooled down and become wise, then you might talk to someone about it, what's going on. But restraint, the practice of restraint, is—I think it's a really important practice. Hold your tongue. Sometimes it can be the most challenging thing you can do. Gods, the impulses are so strong. But to have a commitment to not act goes a little bit against, maybe, the grain of what some people here in the West—where you're supposed to express your emotions and act on them and stuff. There is really a lot of wisdom sometimes to restraining. Not repressing is not healthy.

Someone else: Yes, please, if you can use the mike that's on the stage—there's a mike. No, there it is, should have a green light on it. Lahore: The mike, I think. So yes, keep it close to your mouth. Oh, you're saying about knowing something fully for knowledge, right? So what if you completely know something right within yourself, but someone else knows something else as well, but it's in complete opposite to what you feel you know. What they know has direct impact to what happens in your life, but yet you feel like you should be somewhere else. So, like, you're seeing about letting go, right? So what's the difference between letting go versus rolling over and letting something happen that you feel shouldn't?

That's a good question, and I don't know if I'm up to the task of answering your question. So I'll do my best and see. Then maybe it's helpful to distinguish between two domains of life for the purpose of answering the question. Two domains: there's the domain of our heart, and there's the domain of our actions in the world. When we talk about actions in the world, and how to get along with people, and how to work in this complicated social world and differences people have, it takes a lot of street smarts, takes a lot of life experience. It takes a lot of intelligence. It takes a lot to sort that out, and you might need to know a lot about all kinds of issues to do that well. That person might have grown up in a very different culture than you. They have a whole different set of assumptions about what it means to be a human being, and there's just so much going on. There's no difference between you that unless you understand where they came from and how they were trained, you just miss each other. So it needs a lot of, you know, something. That's the domain of the action in the world.

But the domain of your heart—that's a different kind of knowing. Now, and it is a particular aspect of your heart that Buddhism focuses, I believe, focuses on most. That is, you really understand how your heart, in your own heart, and your own heart in yourself, what it's like for you to cling, and what it's like to not cling. You know when you're caught by something, and you know when you're not. You know when you're compassionate, and you know when

you're angry. You know when you're generous, and you know when you're miserly. You know these qualities of your heart. This you know directly, and because it's your heart, no one else—you know, that's something you know for sure, and there's no argument about that. If they want to argue with you, you could get riled up and upset that they disagree with what you think is in your heart. Or you can just shrug your shoulders and say, "I know. I know. I know what's there."

So in the situation with someone who knows something different than you about the world and what's important, what needs to happen—as in Buddhist practice, what you do in that conversation is, you would track what's going on in your heart so you could know for yourself whether you are getting riled up, whether you're getting caught, whether you're getting resistant, whether you're getting angry or not. Are you staying peaceful? That's the domain of direct knowledge that Buddhism is most concerned about. Is that distinction useful for your question, or did I miss you? That was at least addressing your concern.

It's an important one, because to use the word "to know something for oneself" is sometimes hard to say. It's sometimes used too casually or too sloppily—what it means. Sometimes people say, "I know something because I think it," whatever you know, and so their opinion becomes a knowing. One of the things I think that's been a little bit overdone here in California in the last years is the expression, "I have my truth," you know. "You know my truth, and you have your truth, and I have my truth," you know. It's basically saying, "I have my opinion, and you have your opinion," but it's couched in this very kind of, you know, ultimate language, and you can't say anything any more. "Your truth," you know? I mean, sometimes it's true, that kind of language, but sometimes it's overdone, I think, when it's opinion.

Also, in Buddhism—not enough for this evening—but Buddhism down through the centuries has had a very careful analysis of what you can directly know, and what is inference, what are interpretations of events, what are conjectures, and so you can stay close to what you can directly know. A story I like to tell of a study I read long ago—it was the 1980s, the study of children in New York City who had near-death experiences. Sure enough, they had some of the classic experiences that people have in near-death experiences—kind of white light tunnel, and seeing some great figure at the end of the tunnel. So it must be true, right? When you see Buddha at the end of the tunnel, at your near-death experience, the Buddha must really exist, right? That's the proof of it, you know, the time. So now you know the Buddha is there because you've seen it at the end of the tunnel. So with this kid, there's a high percentage of these kids in New York City, you know, young kids who had near-death experiences—they saw the Ninja Turtles. So do the Ninja Turtles really exist? So maybe Buddha really exists

some place in heaven. But that kind of study raises a question mark when someone says, "I know the Buddha is true because I saw him in my whatever," you know. The fact that you see something is not necessarily a symptom that it's true.

One of the humorous episodes in this text here, ancient Buddhist text, is when the Buddha describes how the great god Brahmā is not like the great god of the Indian pantheon, and how he thought he was almighty, and how he thought he created the universe. The Buddha describes it as a misunderstanding, and he jumped to conclusions that weren't valid. So this idea of being very careful about seeing something and jumping to conclusions is something Buddhism is very concerned about. There's a lot of care on this issue of what we know and what we can know, but the essential issue is not what we know about heavens and hells, but rather what we know about our own heart. We don't want to get—in Buddhism, I think there's a care to not get sidetracked or distracted from caring for your own heart by all these other opinions and ideas and interpretations of life that some people take as being very important. So you know your own heart, and to know a particular thing about your heart, to know about what helps your heart be at peace.

Ga: I hope this was interesting, useful, and may you all walk a tenfold path.