

# 2020-11-12 Eightfold Path-Right Action (3 of 3)

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

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So today we come to the third part of right action. The first two being not killing and not taking what is not given. And the third is worded, not engaging in sexual misconduct. Or not engaging in wrong conduct in relationship to the senses. And it's understood that it's a very general way of saying to avoid sexual misconduct. Not just of any sense sensual contact, but that which is sexual. And by implication, there is then right sexual activity, right conduct with the senses. And we could talk about right sexuality in Buddhism. Maybe even because sexuality for some people, such an important and central part of their lives. Maybe if the Buddha had been making up the Eightfold Path for us modern lay people, maybe he would have done a nine fold path, right sexuality would have had its own category.

I don't think it's very common for Buddhist teachers to give talks about right sexuality. And so it's often an area of life, which is left kind of not really addressed directly as a domain of practice, domain of mindfulness. It's almost like you don't talk about it, you leave that kind of aside. And it's rather unfortunate, because sexuality is a huge part of people's lives, many people's lives. Some people it's a big thing, people think about, and concerned with. We get a small sense of that from entertainment, movies and books. That some of the drama and excitement of movies and books has to do with sexual relationships that are happening or should shouldn't be happening, but are happening and all kinds of things that go on. And there are people who have many different forms of sexuality. There are asexual people, there are monastics who are non sexual. But it's still a way of being sexual. It is a way of relating that it's good to be mindful of and clear and find our peace with.

And so right sexuality. What's interesting around this is that we could take the Eightfold Path, and each factor of the Eightfold Path. And use that as a lens to look upon our sexual lives, our sexual thoughts, our sexual feelings that we might have. And use that all the all these different steps, right view, right consideration, right speech, right action, right livelihood –we'll talk about that tomorrow – right effort,

right mindfulness, and right concentration. And see how the lens of each of these factors affects our understanding, our engagement, our practice, of our sexual life. In other words, to put our sexuality right in the middle of our practice and not to keep it aside. But see it here too is an activity where we can find our freedom. Sexuality is probably one of the most complicated activities that human beings do. It's deeply physiological, biological, it's deeply emotional, it's deeply social. And so much of our life comes into play around sexuality. We're here as human beings because of sex. And a lot of human suffering arises because of sexuality. Growing up can be hard, go through puberty and early experiences, and some people are wounded for, deeply wounded, sometimes as children, sometimes as adults, by how their experiences around sexuality, how they've been treated. And it's a domain where it's possible to have a tremendous amount of harm caused. And it's also a domain of life, where there can be a tremendous amount of good done, beneficial, and really be healing and supportive for people. And so to find our way in this deep form of communication that we have, deep form of kind of engagement with pleasure and all kinds of things. That it's good to take a good look at it and put it right in the middle of practice.

So if we begin looking at sexuality from the vantage point of right view, then understand the basic thrust of all the Eightfold Path, and Buddhism as a whole, is the avoidance of suffering. To become free of suffering. And to become free of causing harm. And so to be attuned to these two things, suffering for oneself, and not to cause suffering for oneself. And harm for others, not to cause harm for other people. And so right view is to begin turning towards our sexual lives through that vantage point. How do I avoid hurting myself? How do I avoid hurting others with my sexuality? My sexual thoughts, my sexual desires, my sexual projections onto people, fantasies, all kinds of things. And so, what is wholesome? What is a wholesome, healthy, what's beneficial way of being involved in a sexual life? Either with both with someone else and just alone by oneself. And what's an unhealthy way? And that's what right view is looking at and supporting. And, as I've said, the primary concern in Buddhism has to do with something pragmatic. And something which is experiential, at least for oneself, and something by which we can really empathize with other people. And that has to do with suffering. Suffering and harm. Suffering and hurt.

And the primary principle that underlies right sexuality in Buddhism, would be to avoid sexuality that causes harm. And that's kind of like the basic approach. So Buddhism generally doesn't have anything to say about forms of sexuality and kind of partners you have for a sexual life. And all kinds of the details of what we do sexually, that is varied and multifaceted and creative in all kinds of ways. But always in Buddhism the concern is not to cause harm, not to suffer. And here the consequences are really important. Rather than looking at the intention, it's actually a little bit dangerous to look only at the intention for sexual activity, because then we might be blind to the consequences our sexual activity has. We might have no intention to harm anyone. So our intention seems very good. But if we don't know our partner well, then we don't know their trauma, their suffering, their tenderness, their sensitivity. And what's being touched in this very deep thing of sexual life. It's a very deep, intimate, tender place with people many times. And so we might have no intention to cause harm, but because

we don't know them well enough, it turns out that how we behave and how we are, is deeply troublesome and hurtful for them. And so the consequences are painful. Or perhaps, we know we really love someone and care for them and have a lot of tenderness and warmth and desire to be affectionate with them. And just all the intention seems quite good, except the person is married. And so is it okay to have an affair? The consequences of that can be hugely destructive for this person's spouse, this person's children and ripples out there. So the consequences can be big. And very much in Buddhism, consequences are really important part of right view and right consideration. So what are the consequences we're doing here? To be mindful of that and look at it.

Sexuality, sexual drives can be so strong and feel so right, that we might feel that no matter what, you know, this feels good to do and right to do. And to override the consequences and not take time to look at it, probably is an indication of a lack of freedom. Giving into compulsion and strength of desire. And freedom, real freedom in Buddhism, which is kind of part of right view as well, is a freedom to not act on desires. Not because it's punitive or restrictive, but because freedom is discovered to be so much more wonderful. It's such a great joy and pleasure. Clean, open. Freedom feels better than fulfilling a desire. Doesn't mean that we can't pursue our desires. But we don't do it compulsively. We're not pushed by it. We have choice always. We might choose as lay people to go along with a desire. But it's a clear choice, that done in the freedom that we have.

And then right consideration, the second factor of eightfold path, often called called right intention, is to consider and be wise and considerate about our sexuality. And to ask ourselves, is it addictive? Is there ill will involved? Is there cruelty involved? And I think most people would say No. Not that. But there is definitely some people who are engaged in sexual activity, where it's cruel. And where there's hate. Rape sometimes is an expression of hate. And so it can be there, sometimes in the whole, the whole thing. But more importantly, are the opposites present? Is there a simplicity and a lack of addiction? Is there kindness and goodwill and care for the other person? And is there compassion and love present? That to allow sexuality to be an expression of our affection, of our love, of our friendliness, our kindness or loving kindness. It is a vehicle for deep expression of something, deep care for people, that wouldn't be there if there was a addictive pursuit of pleasure. Or somehow there's some hostility or dominance or assertiveness. Or it's my way, an insistence for sex when another person doesn't really interested or doesn't want it at that time. And then pushing ourselves on someone. There is, I don't know, if it's ill will or cruelty with that. But there is an aggressiveness that I think would be considered wrong consideration in this eightfold path schema.

And then there's a right speech. And the primary one is truth. In our sexual lives, are we always prepared to speak the truth? Both to our partner, or partners. Or are we also willing to speak the truth to others about our sexual lives? And a lot of wrong sexuality, harmful sexuality, that causes harm, is situations where we want to do it in secret. And we don't want to tell anyone. And this idea of secrecy and not telling people is something we have to have a lot of care with and attention with. Because to start lying about our sexual lives goes against the grain of this movement to mindfulness, movements

to freedom, movements to cultivating wholesome and healthy inner states. So not to be involved in sexuality that one feels ashamed of, or shy, and not willing to talk to people about. And I think that the idea of right sexuality and really encompassing it in the Eightfold Path, and really holding it in the Eightfold Path, can hopefully lead to us to have a sexuality where or sexual life that we're very happy about. And maybe not actively public about, but something we're happy to talk about and nothing to hide about it. And nothing to be ashamed about it. But rather something to be really content about and satisfied about the sexual life we have.

And one of the primary supports for this kind of right sexuality is in fact a deep inner contentment. So that sexuality is not trying to fill a hole, or a longing or loneliness, or a sense of powerlessness. All kinds of things that are trying to feel inside of us. Because it doesn't feel because we're already full, we're already content. And so we can go into a sexual life with that kind of fullness and clarity and not clinging and needing and wanting, but rather as a vehicle for our deep care, appreciation, and contact with other people.

So right sexuality and maybe some of the words that I spoke today about it are not a good match for you. And you have other ideas. That's fine. However what I'm trying to say here is right sexuality is a considered sexuality. One in which we engage the factors of the Eightfold Path and makes it right according to eightfold path. That's the opportunity we have here to bring sexuality under the guidance and under the support of this wonderful path of liberation that we have, the Eightfold Path. And so our sexual life is part and parcel of the movement towards greater and greater freedom.

So, thank you and whether you are actively sexual or not, right sexuality is important. There's right sexuality for people who are asexual. Also involves a delight maybe and contentment. So, thank you and we'll continue with right livelihood tomorrow.