

# Satipaṭṭhāna (65) Fourth Noble Truth

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Eightfold Path, peace, practice, expression, cessation, inner transformation, ethical, suffering, transformed, seeds, right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration

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Today's topic is the Fourth Noble Truth. How we understand it depends a bit on how we understand the Second Noble Truth.

If the Second Noble truth is the cause of suffering, we may or may not be able to let go of the suffering, but we understand the cause. Knowing some attachment, clinging, or unhealthy belief is the cause, we look for a practice that helps us to become free of that, to loosen the grip. The Fourth Noble Truth is that practice.

We start cultivating a way of being in the world that creates the conditions for us to let go of the cause of suffering. We practice right view, ethical life, and meditation so that we can experience or attain the degree of settledness, non-agitation, and integrity that allows our system – the mind, the heart – to begin to soften and release our attachments.

If we know the cause of suffering is craving or attachment, and we have a very clear release of that craving – a dramatic cessation – then we know: “Oh, this is the way forward. The Eightfold Path can be the way to let go again. This is the way to develop and grow. These are the practices that put me in a better position to let go even more and not cling again.”

If the Second Noble Truth is the arising of suffering, and the Third Noble Truth is the cessation of suffering, we can see all the different shapes and forms of our suffering and stress both coming and going. We see, in the arising and passing, the beginning of freedom. Then the Eightfold Path can be seen as a path you can do to support that deep seeing.

If the cessation of suffering, the Third Noble Truth, is a definitive, clear dropping away – the bottom drops away in some wonderful, inspiring way – we realize: “Oh, this is freedom. This is peace. This is the profound sense of well-being that's possible. I had no idea.” Then the Eightfold Path becomes a practice to move into the experience of peace more and more and to manifest that peace.

In the teachings of the Buddha, we often find that the Eightfold Path – eight ways of being in the world – is more an expression of peace than practices to attain peace (or what we understand we should practice if we want to deepen our peace.)

I do not know if this is a good example, but an open hand can feel easeful, and the expression of the open hand is ease and openness – its sensitivity available to the world. The expression of an open hand is not creating a fist to hit someone. It is just an open hand.

When the letting go is deep and full enough, it can become a reference point and a source from which we can live our life. Then the Eightfold Path is not a prescription for how to practice further (so we can deepen our practice or experience more liberation), but rather, the Eightfold Path is an expression of how we start living.

At some point, if we have a clear sense that it is good to be at ease, at peace, and to have a sense of well-being, then when we have forces within us that want to go in a different direction, we might decide, “Why give up something good and useful for something that is not so good?” It is not a matter of practicing the Eightfold Path, but rather, it is a matter of not doing those things that take us away from the Eightfold Path.

Someone who is deeply practiced *becomes* the Eightfold Path – they do not practice the Eightfold Path. Becoming it, they do not allow themselves to do things that detract from or cause them to lose touch with the home of who they are.

At some point in this Four Noble Truths practice, the Eightfold Path becomes more interesting. Either we understand, “It is useful to do all eight of these practices to create the conditions to transform who I am (my feelings, sense of being, attitudes, how I am in the world), so it becomes easier to let go more and more.” Or there has been a transformation from a deep letting go, and now it is a matter of growing that transformation, letting it spread and become bigger. Then the Eightfold Path is both the fulfillment of the goal and the means to the goal.

The Eightfold Path is eight ways of being when they are understood as an expression of our awakening. When they are understood as a means to liberation, they are called practices. These are right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

The middle ones (right speech, right action, and right livelihood) are ethical. They involve how we behave in the world, how we relate to other people, and how our actions affect others. There is an orientation to an ethical transformation. This is not about following rules but about following these ways of being that are ethical guidelines so that we begin to be transformed. We become people who have such a sense of integrity and peace that, of course, we would not do unethical things that would obscure or harm that.

With right concentration, we are also talking about a transformation. Concentration is not just having a laser focus of the mind. It is having a unified sense of peace and calm from having let go a lot and from practicing stability and steadiness. Concentration is one of the primary ways in the Buddhist tradition to prepare ourselves for the deepest kinds of letting go we can do. We are becoming softer, more malleable, more resilient, and less distractible. In that state, we are ready to put down something that we have been carrying for a long time.

So an inner transformation happens. Part of that inner transformation is an experience of peace. At some point, that peace becomes a reference point. It becomes a seed that we can water and grow – a plant that blossoms within us. The Eightfold Path represents that blossoming, that fulfillment of it all.

If you are not familiar with the Eightfold Path, the practices are marvelous things to learn. Once you study them enough so you understand the basic idea of each, then you can start sensing and understanding how these eight ways of being are not only practices, they are also inner wellsprings of being at home – inner expressions of being settled and at peace with oneself.

This peace does not have to be dramatic. There might be little hints of what that is like. As we orient around that peace, it can grow. It is possible to have very small degrees of peace in this life that we overlook. The mind is so concerned with its preoccupations that we continually think about them. When one preoccupation is finished, we jump to the next one and the next one, and there is no space.

In this practice, we learn to create a little more space and attentiveness to the subtler places of well-being and peace that begin to surface through the practice. Then we touch into that well-being periodically throughout the day. Find the little seeds of peace. Recognize peace and water it with attention. Let peace be a reference point. Let it be a guide. Let it be there to support you as you go through your life.

Today, you might read about the Noble Eightfold Path. You also might look for the seeds of peace, the little hints of peace or ease that might be more available than you allow yourself to feel. Pause, stop, take a break. Check in with yourself. See if you find, anywhere within you, some modicum, even the smallest degree of peace and well-being. If you stay close to that for a little while and breathe with it, what happens to you? What do you learn about peace being an expression and not a practice?

We will have one more talk on the Four Noble Truths tomorrow. We are almost done with the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. Thank you.