

Right View

Gil Fronsdal

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Hello, and now last week I started a series of talks which I'll give for the Mondays that I'm here for the next eight weeks or so on the Eightfold Path. And so it's a teaching that comes from the Buddha and now it's come down through the ages as one of the core presentations of the path of practice that he taught. He taught a path of practice, a path that would take a person from their suffering, from their despair or fear or tension and troubles that they have along a path that would end up with freedom from that suffering. And down through the ages, many people have walked that path, and it's a remarkable path in the freedom and the peace, the happiness that it could provide the heart. So today, what I'm going to do is talk about—last week I gave a kind of introduction to it, and after another introduction today, a short one, I'm going to talk some about the first step in that eightfold path. The first fold was called right view.

And so I like to begin by telling a story that the Buddha told, that kind of used as a kind of simile or analogy for this path that he was teaching. He said that I talked about a woodsman who went into the woods, and the jungle, and I guess maybe lived there for a long time, worked there for a long time, and then one day discovered faint traces of an ancient road that had long ago been overgrown. And so he cut a clear little bit that the traces the road, and he started following the hints of this, and he followed it deeper and deeper into the woods and ended up at the overgrown, not exactly ruins, but the overgrown remains of a castle, of a palace, or a capital, an old capital, long ago. And so then the woodsman came back out of the wild. The woodsman came back out, and he went to the king and queen of the land and said, I have found this ancient road. And this ancient road leads to an ancient palace, an ancient capital, deep in the woods.

And so the king and queen came to the edge of the woods and saw in fact the traces of this road, and arranged for the road to be cleared. And they cleared it all the way to this palace

capital. And they cleared the vegetation from that, and then found this beautiful place. Then they inhabited it as the capital. So with that as the kind of analogy, the Buddha said, like the woodsman, I also have found, I found the traces of an ancient road, an ancient path, and I followed those traces and cleared them. And at the end of that I found the possibility of a profound form of peace and well-being and free spiritual freedom.

And then he doesn't say this, but I kind of like to believe this is part of the analogy: the Buddha found the path, he found this palace, and then he came back to tell the king and the queen about what he found. And the king and queen is you and I. It's all of us. And he's come back, and he'll told us there's this path that you can find. There's a trace of it. And I love this idea that he'd come back and tell the king and queen, and it's us, because in Buddhism, there's a recognition of a tremendous dignity and value in the human being.

And the Buddha kind of swept away the caste, sweep it away. But he kind of didn't focus, kind of ignored the caste system of his time, and championed equality among everyone who is there. Or a certain kind of quality that came when people lived ethically. People had an inner virtue and purity. Then they were kind of royalty. So also the road, this ancient path that's overgrown, is meant to be in you. It's not external.

And so there is something within us that we can find, and then we can clear the vegetation that blocks the way. The analogy of a cleared path, a cleared road, is one that's unobstructed for us to walk. And so the idea is that it's possible to create an unobstructed path for us to walk our life. And many people find their lives quite obstructed, and generally it is obstructed by many things that we grapple with. We struggle with our attachments or fears. One of the powerful things about a meditation practice, especially if you do it fairly seriously and make it a regular, committed part of your life, is that sooner or later you have to grapple with all your inner struggles.

A meditation practice is not an alternative to facing yourself and seeing what's really here for you. And some people have a lot of overgrown, a lot of a kind of vines and trees and bushes that have overgrown their path. And so part of meditation practice is to meet these things and then begin to do the work of clearing and clearing until we have an unobstructed path to freedom. And if we avoid the jungle, we avoid the forest, and avoid obstructions, then we can't do the work of clearing the path. So the first step of this eightfold path is right view. And when I first heard about right view, I was a little bit of a turn off for me.

I had the notion of it many years ago, because right view in my mind meant, Oh, there's a right belief that I'm supposed to now believe. But there's kind of two errors with that view. One is the word right, and was not meant to be, you know, a kind of more, you know, puritanically

right or doctrinally right or something like that. But it means, if we use the English word right, it means appropriate. You want the appropriate tool to do a job. So if you want, the right tool for the job.

And so this is the right tool for the job of becoming free, of finding the path. The other deal of right meaning of *sammā* means in harmony. So it's the harmonious view. It's the view that brings you into harmony, in accord with some kind of harmony. So in the view part, it doesn't mean a creed or a belief in a kind of the abstract. But literally, in the ancient language, the word *diṭṭhi*, and *diṭṭhi* has the same meaning as the English word view.

It means both to see something, and it means a, you know, a point of view that we have, an orientation, a kind of a belief. But a point of view. So right view is a point of view, a perspective that we can adopt for the purpose of finding the path. If you get to walk on a path, you have to first find it, and so this is a perspective that allows you to see it. If you're not interested in the path, you don't need that perspective. But if you want to walk the path, the Buddha taught a certain perspective is needed, an orientation is needed, and so this is called right view.

And the right view begins with the view, which might sound quite silly or not silly but simplistic, that the actions that you undertake, the things that you do, have consequences. Most of us understand that if you, you know, drive your car for a long time without refilling it with gas and you're driving out in the desert, there'll be consequences for you. But if you fill the gas, then you know, you probably make your way. So that's all you know. All kinds of things. You go to the store and the consequence of going buying food, the store is your car.

You have bags of food to bring into your car and drive home with. There's many, many. So there's consequences. We live on consequences all the time. The Buddhists stress the importance of this because in its spiritual life, the life in Buddhism, to become free of suffering, we have to really appreciate those actions which bring us suffering, understand what they are, and understand those actions that bring us happiness and freedom, peace. And we have to have confidence that there's something in our actions that are bringing us suffering, something about our actions, what we can do that can bring us freedom.

Because if there's nothing that we can do, if we have no role whatsoever, then you know it's just going to be business as usual. You know, how are things going to shift and change for you? And so if you're suffering—and plenty of people suffer—most people say that for some people their suffering is a mystery to them. They don't understand why it's there. Some people will spend years in therapy to try to understand the root of their suffering, why they're suffering, what's going on there. And in the business of life and the business of an active mind, it's

sometimes very hard to get us still enough, focused enough to really see deeply enough to see what we're doing that causes their suffering.

One of the things that people will often do is look in the wrong places for the causes of their suffering. One of the wrong places is to blame other people. Other people can be responsible for all kinds of harm that's done to us, but it's the wrong place to look for what we can do to become free or to understand what we do that causes their suffering. So the Buddha said that the beginning of right view is to really appreciate that our actions have consequences. And without that appreciation, then there can't be the confidence and the interest to do the next step. And the next step of right view is to look at the world of action and consequence, a particular area of our life.

And that is the area having to do with suffering. And so a right view begins by being interested in your suffering. And so, as someone made a bumper sticker here some years ago, Charles here as someone, we had a bump on the counter there in the archer. Did anybody put it on their car? You can see the edge. I tried again.

The bumper sticker was "I brake for suffering," so "I stop for suffering." So the idea is to take suffering seriously enough to take a second look, a third look, and look more deeply, which also is somehow kind of, for some people, counterintuitive. Some people want to avoid it, some people want to run away from it, some people want a quick fix. Some years ago, a friend of mine was teaching a mindfulness-based stress reduction for people who had chronic pain. A tough retired police officer took the class for extremely bad back pain, and he'd been to doctors. He'd done everything that medicine could do apparently back then, and he still had intense pain.

And so he came to this final last resort. He came to this mindfulness-based stress reduction course class. And one of the first days of the class, my friend told the people in the class, told him, "Bring your attention and focus on your pain." And he got furious. "That's not what I came here for. I came to have that go away, not to feel it, not to be with it."

So the idea is, the beginning of it is to take enough, give enough attention and care, to get to know our suffering. And just that movement itself is very powerful. If the usual tendency is to avoid it, or attack it, or get angry, or put your head in the sand like an ostrich or something. To really, in an adult, mature way, to sit upright, stand on your own two feet, in a sense, and turn around and look at your suffering in an honest and direct way. And to learn to do that. And you stand on your own two feet upright, look at it without succumbing to despair, upset, anger, blame, all the kind of things that kind of self-pity, all the things that can kind of, you know, not be—not get in the way of really looking at it.

Here I am, suffering. This is what's going on. Let me look at it. And then the idea is not just, not so you can just suffer better, you know. That's not the goal of Buddhism. You know, these Buddhists are just a party pooper. They tell me to look at my suffering, and I'd rather do a spiritual practice that has me dancing and singing. You know, that's really, you know, that's fun, and it's much more spiritual. I feel so enlivened afterwards, and it's great. But you have to be a little patient. Wait, that's—this is only the entry point.

So then we look at it long enough so that we can see that action, the thing that we're doing that's bringing about the suffering. And what the Buddha said was this: the action is an attachment or clinging. And this is one of the big challenges in what the Buddha had to teach. And it's a worthy challenge for you to take up, you know, debate with or look at. Mostly you don't debate it abstractly. You can really look at yourself and see if it's true.

Can you find in yourself the attachment or the clinging that is there? That's the condition for you to be suffering, and you won't find it again if you look for the suffering for the cause outside. But what are you doing? How are you tightening up? What kind of compulsions are you living under? What drivenness, what contraction do you have that seems to be the source of the suffering that you have?

And then seeing that. Then the next step is to see, at least see, or having vision for the possibility, then, of ceasing from that action, of somehow letting go of that attachment, that clinging, that contraction that's giving rise to that suffering. So that's kind of the good news of Buddhism. So, you know, you stay with your suffering to see the cause. You, at least, you see the cause, or have a sense of it, to have a vision of the possibility of happiness and well-being at the other side. Even with that vision of happiness and peace at the other side of it, it's not so easy to let go.

You discover our clinging really well and know, understanding well enough to let go of it. And this is why we have the eightfold path in order to help us with that process of letting go in a deep way. So that's the core kind of idea of right view. And it's to use the perspective, orientation, to pay attention to our suffering, our distress, our unease, the ways we get uncomfortable, to take it seriously. Now, this is a notion, this is a kind of core. Some people say, the heart of Buddhism. It's called the Four Noble Truths, so to use the perspective of the Four Noble Truths.

So since Buddhism is a world religion, it has a kind of a kind of lofty status, and we say, "This is a core essential teaching of Buddhism, the Four Noble Truths." It puts it up on a pedestal that seems really lofty and great. And then, because it's a religion, you might think, I don't know. You know, now if I won't get too close to this, you're already really intimate with it. You

are already doing it. The Four Noble Truths are not uniquely Buddhist, but they're uniquely human.

You're all practising it. I suspect every day you do it many, many times a day practising the Four Noble Truths. You don't call it that, but the movement that it entails is something we all do all the time, I would suggest. I think I maybe gave these examples last time, but those of you who weren't here, I kind of rest—those of you who were here, maybe I would come up with a better example, a different example than I used to. Many years ago, I liked to read the newspaper in the morning, and that went quite well. I had breakfast and the newspaper until I had children, and it kind of went OK until my children were ready for school.

And when they were starting to go to school, they had to be in school on time. And by the time the whole morning routine, you know, was, you know, it didn't work so well anymore to read the newspaper in the morning. And so at some point, I started noticing that I was suffering, and how I was suffering was I would feel really harried and uncomfortable, and getting out the door, and getting the last things done, and getting the kids up to the car. And if you ever tried to get a five-year-old to a car in the morning—I mean, the problem with a five-year-old is that they're too much in the present moment, you know. I teach you all to be in the present moment. That's what my job is.

But that's all these five-year-olds, you know, it's—they're, I mean, my kid, when a kid would go out the house, and he'd see the flower, and stop and look at it, and enjoy the flowers, and, you know, and he's really there for it, is fully present, and you know, it's like—there was a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon many years ago where Calvin and Hobbes are climbing on a branch of a tree, and Calvin says something like, "You know, oh, just to be completely in the present moment is so wonderful. This is great. Everyone should practice being in the present moment and how wonderful it is." And Hobbes says, "Yes, but you're supposed to be in school right now." So here I am, you know, impatient, trying to be late, trying to get this kid. So it took me a little while to realize I was living under a certain kind of stress.

And so by looking at that, I pretty quickly recognized that the thing, the one thing that I was holding on to in the morning that I was kind of stuck on was reading the newspaper, and that was kind of a lynchpin for this particular suffering that I have. If you're not really willing to give it up, and so I had to face my demons and, you know, not to be so attached to my newspaper, and then it became much easier to get the kids out. So I hope that example points to the idea that it's something you already do. You probably have things like that you do, you know. Even the example I gave last week, I think, was the idea of coming to a red light, and, you know, you feel impatient. A red light, it's uncomfortable.

You feel yourself. You can't blame anybody else for that discomfort. You realize that you're holding on and pushing, and so you relax. And that's precisely the first three of the Four Noble Truths; the fourth noble truth maybe is not so common, because that's the path of practice that we have. So that view of the Four Noble Truths, or the three noble truths, your suffering, that gives us a—shows us where the path is, that shows us where the work is, that shows us what needs to be addressed if you want to follow the Buddhist path to freedom. And it's an alternative to many other places people look for relief, for a release from their suffering.

The argument in Buddhism is that this is the direct way, that you're much more—it's much more direct to become rid of suffering, to look at your suffering and be honest about it and try to address it, than it is to try to—you know, there are many other things, worthwhile things you can do, nice things you can do, but they're not really addressing the issue directly. And so some people in the spiritual circles, in the time of the Buddha, they did a lot of things the Buddha thought was not very efficacious. So for example, in ancient India, they would bathe in the rivers, Ganges, in order to become pure. And the Buddha said that this wasn't, you know—he didn't stand behind that. This is not an effective way to become free of suffering. The people would do all kinds of rituals to the gods, and so they are trying to find their happiness by getting the gods to kind of do nice things for them.

But they don't make offerings. The people would do ascetic practices, and they would, you know, do all kinds of things, you know, to starve themselves, and all kinds of things, you know, to suffer a lot. And the Buddha: That's not, that's not going to address the issue either, just going to make it worse. If you want to address the issue, you need to kind of look at it right in its face, be really honest about it. And that's the direct path to where you find the direct path. So right view.

So right view is not a belief, but it's a perspective or orientation or a frame of reference we use to look at this human life of ours, and there's our life as complicated as many things you can pay attention to. But if what you want is real freedom from suffering and want that happiness that comes from that release, then the Buddhist path is to take an honest and mature look at your own suffering. And that's the beginning of the path. If you can go a bit further, and begin at least appreciating or look for or understand your contribution to that, the way that we cling, get attached, crave, get contracted, are compulsive, addicted—you know, so many different words we have in English to represent the idea of being caught up. So begin to understand that, and then begin the process of loosening that up. Dissolving the knots that we're in, thinning out the attachments that we have, until finally one day the knots, the attachments, the thread of the rope of attachment that keeps us bound to itself has worn out.

And that's a beautiful thing to come to. A time when the heart is free, the mind is released, then it's freedom. So that's our right view, the first step. So we have some time now if you would like to ask any questions about that. If you, please use the mike.

So my question is, and could it be sometimes that you are looking at your pain for too long? Cause I imagine you look at it and somehow you'll get over that, or it goes away, or it diminishes. But because, I mean, at least with me, sometimes I just think I'm looking at my pain a lot, or maybe I'm not really looking at it and just obsessing about it. Yes, yes. So the way that this mindfulness of the Four Noble Truths works is that we're looking at the consequences of what happens, that now the action and consequences are very important. So you might be suffering, but then if you look at it, if you're paying attention, and you look at it the wrong way, then hopefully you notice that you're suffering about suffering.

And one of the ways to suffer about suffering is to hate your suffering, or to run away from it, or close down, or attack it, or get afraid. There's many reactions we can have. And so the idea is to be mindful of the reactions we have, the relationship we have to it, because sometimes if you focus only on the suffering, you might miss, you might not be paying attention to the much more important thing at the moment, which is your relationship to the suffering. So by being sensitive, opening up in a sense, and being mindful and noticing, start being sense-wise about noticing where you're uncomfortable, where you're stressed out, where you're tense. Then you might see how the issue is not the suffering right now. The issue is how I'm relating to it, and then seeing the consequences.

And if you find, if you notice by doing that, noticing that you're suffering more and more, then you might want to pull away. For example, people can have panic attacks. People look at their fear, and there's an unconscious reaction with a fear that the person just gets more and more afraid, and that's not useful. So then there can be strategic approaches to avoiding the suffering. Strategic—what I mean is that sometimes it's counter-indicated to go right in and be present for suffering. But you have to begin that process of doing that to know that it's not useful, and then knowing it's not useful given the causes and conditions of your life.

Then you say, What is useful? How do I approach it? Why is there another way of doing this? Do I have to do something else first? So, for example, one that people who have a lot of self-hate or a lot of anxiety, sometimes it's just not—it is counterproductive to go into it too much until the person has quieted down, settled down, become calmer, perhaps become more open-hearted. And so the person could do just breath meditation for a while to make themselves calmer.

Another possibility that we've—instructions we give people sometimes is to do loving-

kindness meditation, that, not only to calm people down, but creates a container or attitude of much more goodwill, and then with a calmer mind, more goodwill sometimes, and it's easier at that point to turn towards anxiety or the self-hate they ever might be. So you have to prepare yourself for that task sometimes. And that's counted at what happens with the Eightfold Path as well. As you know, as we'll see, as we go along here, the three middle steps of the Eightfold Path have to do with cleaning up our life, our ethical life. So we have a high degree of ethical integrity. And having ethical integrity is a wonderful support, a refuge, support, or gives strength and support or confidence for our ability to turn and look at ourselves, because when we know, at least I'm ethical, and that counts for a lot.

So I might have a lot of anxiety, but I don't have to worry about that. You know, I'm blameless that way. That makes some sense. It's over. What's the relationship between a right wise view and emptiness? I, for some reason, I thought a view of emptiness was in there. I don't know. The view of emptiness—you know, there's a—the core teachings here start this way. Tibetan Buddhism puts a tremendous emphasis on the teachings of emptiness, and there's many different aspects of emptiness teaching. But the Dalai Lama has said that it's more important to understand karma than it is to understand emptiness. And karma is based on the same thing as what I have taught today, that actions have consequences, and the core action to understand, appreciate, is suffering and the causes of suffering.

That's the core. Some people would say the teachings of emptiness are—there's a bit different teachings of emptiness. It depends, you know, the whole list of them. But one of the ways people make the connection between Right View and Emptiness is that because nothing is absolutely—everything is in flux, everything comes together because of causes and conditions, nothing is permanently, essentially—there is a permanent essence to it. Everything is malleable, everything can change. And so, because everything is changeable, because everything comes together, causes and conditions, that's the good news, because that means that the things that trouble you the most, like your own suffering, that can change. You're not stuck with it. Suffering is not permanent.

So is that more in Mahāyāna Buddhism? Is *sīla*? Is that so? Is that part of the teaching more in the Eightfold Path? When Mahāyāna Buddhist teachers, that, yet its emphasis on emptiness is an emptiness philosophy you are teaching? Is really prominent in Mahāyāna, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Zen Buddhism and all that. And they kind of make it like the one, you know, if they talk about some of the most important teachings, they'll talk about emptiness, and the Theravāda tradition that we come out of. Emptiness is considered to be one of the—there's two things about emptiness. It's many things, but emptiness is generally

seen to be not something—a philosophy or a teaching that you learn. And often in Tibetan Buddhism, they'll give you a logic and explain why logically everything is empty. In Theravāda Buddhism, it's understood to be a very deep level of insight that happens from deep practice. So it something comes as you go along. Because the emphasis, Theravādins, is always to turn and look and see what's actually here for you.

And emptiness gets revealed, becomes—someone gets revealed as practice gets deeper and deeper. And it's not meant to be the kind of the entry point teaching for practice. So the teachings, the practised understanding of emptiness, is there in Theravāda but it's not the entry point. Generally, you know, the Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path is the entry point. Ficseshul's gone up here with Helen. And what do you think of the alternate translation, perfect vision? Of what—perfect vision, perfect vision, perfect vision? I like vision for—yet I don't think I care so much for that perfect vision. So I'll, I think, as I think, as I hear it, a couple of things that I think in the beginning it begins by a view, and under a kind of understanding we take, we give the benefit of the doubt to. So this, you know, these Buddhists say that it's useful to patent suffering, to look at the cause and so I think I must start using that as a framework to understand my life, to look later when practice went. When we've understood and the insight is really deep, then it becomes a vision. It's something we actually see, and that's the direction the Eightfold Path is going in. It's become a vision when we see it. And at some point, it becomes perfect enough to do the task it's set for.

So when the Eightfold Path is said at some point to be transformed into the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Noble Eightfold Path is the same path, but that which is realized by the people who have taken the path all the way. And when you take it all the way, then it's no longer an orientation, but then it's a vision. You actually see the world this way. It's a kind of second nature to see it this way, and it's perfect. It's perfect enough for freedom. But to set it up that way, you know, the Buddha did—I don't think the Buddha set it up that way, because it's the entry point to it. And for people who are beginning or who don't have that vision, you can't call it a vision, and you can't call it perfect. Now, anyone, there's enough people, especially in America, who tie knots around being perfect. So it's bad enough that it's right.

So over here, you talked about being open-hearted. What do you feel is the best practice for becoming open-hearted? I don't know for you. I don't know for other people without talking to them and getting to know them, because there are enough differences in people that there are different practices that work best for some people more than others. For that open-hearted thing, I don't know who was the best one for me. But the two practices that opened my heart the most in my first, you know, ten years of practice or so, fifteen years of

practice, were—it was, I had to do with meditation practice and the Zen practice I did, it was through that that I really started to open my heart and I discovered a level of compassion was born.

And this practice here, the mindfulness practice, that gave—that opened my heart in a different way, so that it became characterized by loving-kindness, *mettā*. So for me, that was about—and it was, you know, one of the great treasures of my life was to have this happen through the practice. And it wasn't intentional. It wasn't like I was trying to open my heart. It was, but I didn't even know it was an issue. I did know I needed to, and so. But then it was a kind of surprise that this was the result of what happened. And a lot of it happened because I sat with my suffering, especially during my Zen time. I had a lot of suffering. And the teaching in Zen, they didn't teach the Four Noble Truths, and didn't teach them and teach a lot at all. What they taught was just sit upright and be still in the midst of what's going on.

And so I did that for hours and hours, days and months, you know, just sit there upright in the middle of what's going on. And for me, there was a lot of suffering, and so I didn't—I wasn't that smart or something. It didn't occur to me. I was trying to get rid of it. Even I was just doing the practice. They told me to do and the consequences. Something began to melt inside of me, something changing, and had to do with that confrontation and willingness to stay there in the midst of the fire for a long period of time. Clear enough.

So next week, then, I will cover the second step of the eightfold path, which is right intention. And intention is one of the really, you know, it is another aspect which is really central to Buddhism. Buddhism puts a tremendous importance on what your intention is and the intentions you live our life on, and finding your deepest intention and caring for your intentional life. Intention is so important in Buddhism that sometimes, a little bit tongue in cheek, I've thought that if anything qualifies as yourself in Buddhism, it's your intention, that it shapes and colours and characterizes what a person is more than anything else. So right intention is the intention that supports this endeavour, this powerful practice, of the path to freedom. So that'll be next week. Thank you.