

Dharmette: Eightfold Path (2 of 10) Wholistic View

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So hello and welcome to this series on the Eightfold Path. Thank you. And yesterday was the introduction, and today I'm going to start with the first fold, the first limb of the Eightfold Path, which is usually called right view. And the word for view is, in Pāli, *diṭṭhi*, which has the same meaning as the view in English. It's both a view that you can see with your eyes, and it's also a view which is an understanding, an insight we have about something. In some ways what it represents is that it's how we see our experience, whether it's literally with the eyes or metaphorically with the mind's eye.

And maybe a right view can maybe be the overview that we have of our experience. So I would like to, based on yesterday's talk, not use the word right to translate the Pāli word, S-A-M-M-A, but to call it holistic. It's the holistic view, view of the whole. It's the orientation, the perspective that's holistic. And so to give you a kind of a metaphor for how I want to introduce it, I've been in somewhat shallow rivers, maybe that the river was up to my mid-thigh, and I could lay down flat on the surface of the river, and it had a nice current that carried me beautifully down the river.

And it was kind of fun and nice to be floating along. And that's all very nice. But, and you feel like you're one with a river, one with the environment. It feels really nice until you realize that the river is going right over a waterfall, a big waterfall. So then it's not so nice anymore. And so... you know, you turn around, try to swim upstream, but your, you know, it's the river is pulling you down the stream faster than you can swim up.

The waterfall is coming, you can hear the roar. And so all you have to do, though, is stand up in the river. Because it's shallow, it's just, you know, it's just courage, it's only up to your mid-thigh. And if you stand there, then the current of the river continues. It flows right by you. But you're still.

You're not separated from the current, but now you're free of the current because you have the stability, the strength of standing there, and you're far from any danger of going over the waterfall. It's relatively easy now to walk to the shore or walk up river. And so we get swept away sometimes by our thoughts, swept away by our emotions, swept away by the world and concerns that are going on. And we don't realize how much we're being carried along, swept away by the current of this momentum of thoughts, momentum of desires, momentum of aversion. We don't even see the waterfalls that's going to take us over sometimes. But what mindfulness teaches us is that we could always have the ability to stand up in the current and kind of wake up and kind of be stable and strong.

Be grounded in a sense, stand up, be straight, open, upright in the situation that we're in, so that we have the overview. Remember, if you stand up in the river, you're much taller than the river. So you can have the overview of the whole lay of the land that you can't have if you're kind of flat, floating along. And the currents are still there, currents of our life, currents of desires and thoughts and preoccupations, fear. But now we can feel the current, feel the momentum, but part of us is not caught in it.

Part of us is actually we feel free. We have agency, we're not being pushed by it, we're not necessarily having to believe it. We have now an overview and we say, oh, there's a lot of fear here. But the part of you that says there's fear, that has the overview of it, and sees that together with the fear, we are not afraid. The whole idea of identifying with fear and assuming that I am the person completely saturated with fear is being floating in the current, being pulled around. There is this place when mindfulness gets strong... that it's kind of like we're standing there and we can know, there is fear.

We're not denying it. That could be strong. But there's also what is not afraid. There's also this freedom of the fear. There's also this sense of overview, holistic view, that yes, there's fear, and at the same time, there's freedom from fear. Yes, there's attachment, and there's freedom from attachment.

Right? And sometimes we can see ourselves kind of on that kind of teeter-totter where we can see we're leaning into becoming the fear, becoming the attachment, becoming our pre-occupation, you know, getting pulled into it and staying free. And the idea was stronger the mindfulness, the stronger we have the overview, the holistic view of it all, we see all of it. We see where there's attachment. We see there's lack of attachment. See where there's suffering and see where there's not suffering.

See where there's stress and see where there's not stress. Because of having this grounded, clear, open sense of awareness. Some metaphor I like for being really mindful in the moment

would be, literally sometimes, but metaphorically, kind of like standing firmly on both feet, standing up tall and straight, opening the arms wide and say, here I am, this, I'm going to be here with this. And there's so much agency, so much confidence, so much strength, so much warmth, being bigger than the situation, that something shifts inside. We're not so strongly identified with what's happening. We're more identified with the one who stands tall and straight to, okay, this is what's happening.

We're not collapsing or giving in. We're not being carried by the current over the waterfall. So holistic view. Holistic view. The first stage of the first step or first fold of the Eightfold Path is to have a holistic view, which the Buddha describes as sometimes the primary way he describes it, is to know our suffering, to know our distress, our stress, to know whether we're caught, you know, to see how we're caught, to see the suffering there, in such a way that we also see the freedom from suffering right there. And right there we see that this practice that we do, the practice of mindfulness, the practice of concentration, the practice of honesty, that the practices we do... That's how to stay standing tall in the river.

That's how to maintain this stability that lets us have the holistic view. So the holistic view that supports the whole Eightfold Path is not easy to come by, and in a sense, those of you who have been here all year, it's the kind of the culmination of this *samādhi* and insight that we spent, what, seven months or so going through the beginning of the year, that it creates a very strong, skillful way of using our ability to be present fully. And have confidence in it that we step into awareness, we step into this holistic view that's not caught in any one thing. And then we see there is desire, strong desire, and here the desire arises, it's coming. And right here at the same time, there's freedom from desire. There's a mind with desire. It's not a desiring mind. It's not a desiring person. It's a person with desire, a mind with desire. And we see it clearly, and we see that we have confidence, we see the practices, the practice that allows us to be free, to stand tall in the current.

So right view is to have the overview, the holistic view, where we see at the same time, where we're caught and the freedom from being caught. And this is not necessarily an easy thing to come to. That's why we have this practice that sometimes needs to build and become stronger, that we begin to feel and sense this bigger view of what's happening so that we're not limited by the small part of the whole that we see. Right? If we only see fear, if we only see desire, if we only see our belief systems and our preoccupations and our interpretations, our judgments, then that becomes the whole world. But to be bigger than that, to have a view that's more wider, broader, so that we see simultaneously... and this is the language of the Buddha, simultaneously suffering, the arising of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and

the practice that leads to that cessation of suffering.

And so this holistic view, because it shows us freedom, it shows us non-clinging, it shows us this healthy way of living, even while we're clinging, this then becomes a guide for the next seven steps of the Eightfold Path. Because now we know for ourselves something about what it's like not to cling, not to grasp, not to be caught, not to be limited. And so it gives us now a chance to now have a holistic view of these other factors of the Eightfold Path. So tomorrow... what's usually called the right intention, I'm going to call a holistic orientation. So we can be oriented to the whole river, the whole situation. We know there's a waterfall, we know there's a current on the river, know where the shore is, and we know that we're safe because we can stand there in the knee-high water and hold our ground.

And with that, we can now have a different orientation of how to be in the river than we could be if we didn't have that holistic view. So the whole Eightfold Path begins with a view, an overview of our... Some people call it the frame of reference for our experience. And... With that view, in the Buddhist tradition, it is not something to believe. It's not something to now take in and live as if you have now an opinion or a philosophy that you have to live by. But rather, it's a way of seeing that we cultivate, we grow, we develop. And it becomes obvious we have the overview, we have the holistic view, and now we don't have to be convinced that this is what we're supposed to believe. We know that we just know for ourselves that standing tall in the river, having the overview of the situation, this gives us freedom, this gives us agency. Now we don't have to be afraid of the waterfall because... We know how to take care of ourselves. We know how to walk to the shore. We're not in the, trapped by the current of the river.

So, a holistic view. And may you today, as you go about your day, stop enough, pause enough, and see if you can metaphorically stand grounded and upright and metaphorically with the eyes open, here, what's happening? Can you have the overview of the situation you're in, including an overview of how you are? And in that overview, can you find yourself, can you find freedom right next to the ways in which you're not so free? Can you find peace right next to where you're agitated? Can you find clarity right next to where you're confused? See if you can cultivate this overview and see what difference that makes. And that might set the stage for you to appreciate these other folds of the Eightfold Path. So, thank you.