

10 Feet to Happiness

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So last week I talked about the Eightfold Path with an emphasis that the Buddha was focused on how we live our lives, not leaving our lives behind, but the manner in which we live our lives fully, completely, in a healthy way. And so he had these things called the eightfold path. The word that we translated as fold, which is kind of, for me, evocative metaphor in English, is not loud enough. Are you able to turn it up a little bit louder? Let's see how that goes. So let's see, is that better, everyone?

Okay. There is hearing assistant devices we have. So if anybody needs those, so the word for fold in the ancient language literally means limb, *aṅga*, and has a biological reference point. Like we have, I guess humans have four limbs, we sometimes say. But the eightfold path has eight limbs, so eight. And what I love about this also, the way I like words, is that the word for mindfulness in Pāli also means to remember.

And in English, to remember... is one way of understanding it, is to put the members back together, put all the pieces back together of who we are. And it's very easy for humans to become dismembered in a way of becoming detached or disassociated from whole parts of who they are. And when we sit down to meditate, we're putting ourselves back together. Right? Gathering ourselves. And the word for *samādhī*, the Pāli word, *samādhī*, translated as concentration often, literally could mean gathering together or putting yourself together, putting all the members gathering together.

And so in the eightfold path, the fourth step is called, I call it holistic, action, right action. And there's another teachings about action. But I want to say the Buddha, he was considered back in his time a teacher of action, which sometimes you don't get that sense in the way that Buddhism is taught, where meditation seems almost like a withdrawal from being in the world and acting in the world. It's almost like a non-action action. And sometimes people

even emphasize this teaching because many people in the United States are way too busy in their mind and too many things and always trying to accomplish things and do things and be someone for someone.

It's such a relief to hear teachings, just be. Don't do. Just be. But the Buddha actually didn't really emphasize being. He emphasized doing. He was a teacher of action.

But he was teaching of action that pointed to peace, deep, profound peace, not to being exhausted, the opposite, to be refreshed and renewed, a kind of action that is generative, that gives birth to a deep generative inspiration within us, a transformation for how we live, how we act. Sometimes Buddhism is taught as a teaching for transcendence, that somehow transcend this world, to come over and leave it behind, or have transcendent experiences that have nothing to do with this world. And that's not what the Buddha taught. He taught a transformation. We get transformed somehow. And part of this transformation is this remembering, becoming whole.

So all of who we are is included. And so there's another teaching around action that I want to do today that is called the steps of wholesome action. And the word for steps is *pada*. And *pada* is a wonderful, interesting way that Indo-European languages have the same origin. They began all the same place. *Pada* means foot also and footstep.

And when we say use the word pedestrian, we're using that pod word as it kind of came down to us through pedagogical. Central Asia or someplace where these languages originated and spread out from there. So *pada* means foot. And there's a way that the consonants have changed over time that the P became an F for foot. And so the... So it's the 10 steps or 10 feet of action. And I love this because it's how we walk in this life.

It's not about how we just sit around. It's how we walk, how we step. These are the steps. These are the walk. This is the walk to walk. Again, an action.

And so he gives a list of 10 feet. Okay. There's eight limbs and ten feet, ten steps we can take. So this biological reference point that I keep on to say is this remembering, bringing all together who we are. And that meditating, as I said, mindfulness is really to become not only embodied, but even more embodied than embodied, where all of who we are, in heartened, in minded, all of it gets included, inhumanned. Like we really bring in everything who we are, so that we have a phenomenally sensitive intelligence or sensitive antenna within us that we can really feel and sense when we're off.

We really see, feel and sense the deeper messages that our whole system can offer us about what is healthy to do and what is unhealthy to do. When things are off and when things are

right on. When something doesn't feel right here. When we feel like we're somehow harming our own integrity, our own authenticity, limiting ourselves in some unnecessary way, how we're adding stress and suffering to it. And there's a kind of an acute sensitivity to the slightest movements of stress. So it doesn't sneak up on us until we have a migraine, because we just barrel ahead with, you know, the stressful ways that's so easy for some of us to live in this kind of modern world.

So we're cultivating this acute sensitivity that involves this transformation of where the information comes for knowing what is healthy and not healthy. Right? So he has this teaching called the five, usually in English it's called the five, the ten courses of wholesome action. Courses, you know, it's a nice, take a course, is the word *pada*. So the ten steps, the ten feet for healthy action, for wholesome action, for, and the word wholesome is... Some people are inspired to have this word wholesome and unwholesome being used rather than right and wrong or good and bad, because it doesn't have quite the same moralistic tenor, like you're supposed to just be very moralistic and puritanical or something.

But here, the word wholesome is almost like synonym to the word healthy. And so the ten steps of healthy action in the world, how do you live? So the Buddha used this word wholesome a lot. And I'd like to use, now that I just said that, to make a point, I'd like to use the word good. And hopefully let me get away with it. So I'll say it the two ways, but to say we're starting with good just for pedagogical reasons.

The Buddha said, if you were not capable of doing what is good, I wouldn't teach you. I wouldn't instruct you to do what's good. But you can do what's good. Therefore, I teach you, I instruct you, do what's good." I mean, that's like a pretty clear teaching on action. And so then the other way of saying it, if you cannot do what is wholesome, I wouldn't instruct you in doing what is wholesome.

But you can do what's wholesome. And therefore, I instruct you, do what is wholesome. That's quite a strong statement that he makes. And it's a statement of a lot of confidence of what we're capable of doing. And what it's worthwhile to do. It's worthwhile being sensitive and confident. And discerning about what we actually do in our life, so that what we do in our life nourishes us, supports us, is healthy for us, is wholesome, is beneficial, goes in a good direction for us, has good consequences for us.

And this is like what the Buddha kept focusing on over and over again, not action that just makes us busy and stressed. Too many, you have enough to do on your to-do list. And now the Buddha gives you more. Luckily, it's not one more additional thing to do in a sense. A lot of it has to do with how you do what you're doing. And so it's a guide that applies to all

you're doing in your life.

How, look at, to understand what you're doing, and how do you do it. So that it can be wholesome, so it can be enlivening, so it can be refreshing, so it can be nurturing for you. And, of course, it takes a lot of attention, a lot of being in the present moment and tracking this. And some of us have such important things to do that we don't have time to pay attention to ourselves. We don't have time to notice how we're feeling and what's happening because, you know... There's a long list to do. There's a lot of important things to be done.

And, you know, and you're feeling, if you're stressed or not, that can't be that important. You can live without stress. If you couldn't, I wouldn't tell you. Okay. It's possible. And so it becomes second nature after a while, with this remembering, coming together, gathering yourself together for this deeper sensitivity. After a while, it becomes second nature.

And so then we come to these ten steps, these ten ways of having wholesome action. And becoming really accomplished in these ten steps, really. The word accomplished is kind of a rich word in ancient language because the word that it translates also means happy, also means successful, also means a blessing, enjoyment. So it points to that this attainment in a sense, as accomplishment, which is a kind of a, you know, difficult word to accomplish something. But it's accomplish what? Something that really brings happiness and delight and joy to your life.

So these becoming accomplished in these ten skillful actions is not meant to just become busy or... But a transformation into becoming a happy person. If you can't be happy, I wouldn't teach you to be happy. But you can be happy. It is possible. Of course, you have so many important things to do that are more important than being happy. And, you know, and happiness is overrated and, you know, and making more money is perfect. That's well-rated. Whatever it is, it's all kinds of things we chase.

But to have this deep settling into oneself and becoming gathered and whole and kind of a natural upwelling of well-being is, a well-being that is not dependent on what's happening around you, or what you acquire, or the experiences that you pay for, or don't pay for. It's a deep sense of well-being. So ten of these kind of actions, the point being not that we're... The point here and the teaching of them is not to do these actions... but rather consider when you're doing these kinds of things, do them with this deep sensitivity so that you become accomplished. The other word that's related to this word accomplished is the word endowed. Become endowed. Endowed is, I think, a really wonderful word. And the fact that this is used for this practice, become endowed means to be filled, kind of like to be it, in a sense. Right? And he would have used the word filled a lot. Be filled with these things, with happiness and

well-being.

So 10 steps. So I'm going to go through the 10. I'll just list them. There's explanations associated with them. But five of them, most of them have kind of are defined by what you don't do, which is kind of very interesting. But five of them have these positive corollaries, what you do do, and here you get some of the flavor of the values or the possibilities that these actions have for us.

So this list is for the Buddha is much more important than the list of the five precepts. The five precepts seemingly are not that important for the Buddha, at least in terms of how often he taught them. But a comparable list is this list here. Four of these things are the four or the five precepts. But the context of them are very different because we're talking about these wholesome actions, these things that bring happiness and well-being.

So the first is, a wholesome thing to do is to abandon, to let go, stop something. Oh no, these Buddhists. One more time. They're like these party pooping religion. Don't do that. Oh, let go of that. Abandon that. So I apologize. But when you hear what it is you're supposed to abandon, you'd probably, maybe, don't tell me, kill you, you shouldn't have apologized. Abandoning the killing of living beings. So if you're doing that, cut it out. It's not wholesome. It's not happiness producing. It doesn't make yourself complete and a feeling of abundance within if you're killing your neighbors, killing if people live in your land, if you're killing people anywhere in the world. It doesn't work. So the Buddha says, abandon it. Abandon taking what is not given. Abandon stealing. I'm sorry for this, you know, for those of you who are stealing that... Actually, the Buddha says don't let go of that. And in our sophisticated, complicated economic world that we live in, what is stealing? What is taking what is not given here? Abandoning misconduct in sensual pleasures. But the word here is misconduct in sensual. It's mostly meant to be sexual pleasures, the way that's explained. But... So what goes undefined is what is appropriate conduct with our sexuality. Abandoning false speech, abandoning malicious speech, abandoning harsh speech, abandoning gossip. Abandoning gossip. And then, those are the things to abandon. And then the next is, no longer says abandon, abandon. But here it says, it just describes how to be. So I don't know why the switch is here. But with abandon, all those are actions that we can see and hear. It's what we do with our body. Killing is usually you do it physically. Right. and what we do with our speech, which you can hear and you move your tongue. And one way of understanding that these are like coarser actions that are coarser than the mind. And maybe it's easier to track and be careful with what you actually do and say than what your mind thinks and intends. And so here there has to be some different kind of transformation that's more than just abandoning, not doing

something. But here, the way to be this wholesome action with the mind, but the mind also, the activity of the mind, are actions as well. This is part of the brilliance, or something of the Buddha. Action is not only what we do physically and verbally, but it's also the activity of the mind that we can also track and take some responsibility for. So the eighth, these... wholesome actions, says, one is not covetous, covetous, which means one does not covet the wealth and property of others in this way. Oh, may what belongs to others be mine. The ninth one is, one's mind will be without ill will. So no ill will. And the final one is... The same as one of the factors of the Eightfold Path, the first one. Here's the last one, right view, right perspective, right understanding. So those are the ten, but they're not just negative. So here, five of them include the positive.

And so first one, abandoning the killing of living beings. One abstains from killing living beings with sticks and weapons, and one abandons the killing of living beings, with sticks and weapons laid aside. I guess those are the common weapons that kill people with in the old days. With sticks and weapons laid aside, gentle and kindly, one abides with care for all living beings. When abides with care. This is a capacity to... want others to be well, want others to thrive, wants others to become healthy and healed.

The sense of, we're not supposed to use the word empathy anymore. I don't know if you know this, but you're not supposed to use it anymore. So we have to find another language or care. Oh, you don't know this about empathy? Empathy? Oh, yeah. Oh. Oh. Wow. You see, empathy is a weakness of human beings that prevents them from treating others harshly and getting them out of our country. Can you believe it? So be careful with empathy. So we have to be careful with our words now. Thank you. Can you believe it, that empathy is no longer a, it's like a four-letter word in some circles? So care. But the core care is a four-letter word. And I'll say it proudly. So to care. And one of the ways, primary ways we care in Buddhism is not to cause harm. Radically, completely. There's nothing more fundamental in Buddhism. Don't deliberately harm anyone, including yourself. Human beings are precious, valuable, dignified, important. There's nothing in Buddhism that diminishes the value, the inherent worth of a human being. The whole premise of Buddhism is that each person is invaluable and your well-being is being supported and guided. When the Buddha says, you can do the good, you can do the wholesome, he's not saying that because you're supposed to behave right, but he's saying that because it's what brings happiness and well-being and joy. It is possible to feel happy and peaceful. So this idea of care and not harming is at the heart of all of these ten skillful, wholesome actions.

And then the one on malicious speech, one abstains from malicious speech. What does not

repeat elsewhere, what one has heard in order to divide people from each other. Imagine that malicious speech divides people. Don't speak in ways that divide people. Actually, let me put on my glasses so I can read better. Thus one is one that reunites those who are divided, a promoter of friendships, who enjoys concord, rejoices in concord, delights in concord, a speaker of words that promote concord. So that, so here we have a value that not only... gathering ourselves together in a nice way. We actually gather our fellow humans together in harmony, in unity, in some way, through how we speak. To speak maliciously, to speak in ways to divide, that creates an enemy, that creates an other who is wrong. Rather, we want to find a way to be inclusive. Even when someone has done something we might say wrong, there is a way of speaking with that person that invites them back in. There's a restorative justice movement. It's a phenomenally wonderful movement that if you've witnessed or know anything about how it works, to watch a community come together around restorative justice and become whole again, that it won't happen if someone is sent automatically to prison first and foremost. Communities are not healed. Individuals are not healed. So how do we unite? How do we come together with family, friends, everyone? How do we avoid perpetuating the divides?

Then abandoning harsh speech. When speaks such words as are gentle, pleasing to the ear and lovable, as go to the heart, are courteous, desired by many, and agreeable to many. Well... I really like that. My favorite expression here is pleasing to the ear. Go to the heart. So isn't that nice? So not just, you know, what you say, but how you say it. The tone of voice in which you say it.

And then this abandoning gossip. One speaks at the right time. Speaks what is true. Speaks about what is good. Speaks on the *dhmma*. When speaks at the right time, such words as are worth recording, reasonable, moderate, and beneficial. That is how there are four kinds of verbal conduct, verbal action, in accordance with the *Dhamma*.

So one of the joys I have about being in my role as a teacher sometimes is... People will start practicing this practice of mindfulness and start noticing more what's happening to themselves and around them and see. And they'll come to me with a problem. And I love this problem. It's a social problem. But still I love it, even though I don't have really good answers. But they're at work. It's at work. The currency around the water cooler, the coffee machine, we used to talk, is gossip. And I don't want to do it anymore. But that's how we connect. What am I supposed to do? Isn't that a great... I mean, I sympathize. I have empathy for the problem. But I love it that someone has come to a transformation, a change, where they don't want to speak in ways that are divided, harsh, that are somehow problematic, talking

behind people's backs. But rather, they talk about what's beneficial, what's good, and what's helpful. Right? Imagine that when someone says, oh, all these people are talking about behind your back. And you say, oh, that's great, because you trust them that they're just talking good things. They're speaking well. That's what they're about.

And then... So one's mind is without ill will. Rather, one has these wishes... May others be free of enmity, affliction and anxiety. May they live happily. So one of the healthy actions, wholesome actions that's good for us, brings happiness, sense of well-being, sense of joy, endowed with a healthy attitude, is to wish others well. But wish other people well, not because it's a should, but because then they're just adding something to our life. But to find to be so gathered together, so centered, so present here for ourselves, that you recognize it. Welling up from inside is the wish for the well-being of others. Some people will have that naturally in certain settings. If someone hands you a newborn baby, it's hard not to wish them well. Some people have to resort to their puppies to have that feeling. Yeah. To wish them well, just kind of welling up of something beautiful.

So these values of care, unification, goodwill, speaking, things that are good for the heart to hear. The idea is to live in ways that are good for ourselves and good for the world, that are wholesome. The Buddha was a teacher of action, action that comes from having... remembered, brought together all of who we are into a wonderful whole. All of us included, no parts left out, so that we have the sensitivity to recognize a natural place within that drives or inspires this kind of wholesome action. It's not about a rule that you're supposed to follow. It's about discovering something that's a beautiful, profound thing, which here the word is represented by the word wholesome, represented by the word happy, represented by the word care. We have it within us, these capacities. And so the transformation of Buddhism is not really a transformation to become someone different than who you are. In a conventional kind, maybe conventionally you can say that, you're different, but rather becoming who you're meant to be when you're whole, to be able to drop the ways that we live divided in ourselves, disassociated from ourselves, caught in motivations, caught in desires, caught in fears, caught in resentments that are not good for ourselves or others, to really find this other way of being. And it's more of a path of transformation Buddhism than a path of transcendence.

And what I love about this idea of steps, these are the ten steps, the ten actions, is that you have to walk them. And it's not like a means to an end. It's a means that accomplishes the end. Each time you don't lie, you accomplish. Each time you don't kill, you accomplish. Each time you don't steal, you accomplish. So chances are all of you are very accomplished. Because

you're probably, since you woke up this morning, you're probably having killed or stolen, engaged in sexual misconduct or lied. Chances are that celebrate that, appreciate that. Don't be really wise about the mind streams, the ruminations you have in your mind that are the opposite of celebrating and appreciating. That somehow the mind streams that maybe there's resentment or fear or criticism or feelings of inadequacy, all of them represent ways in which we are experiencing knots opening up to the whole of who we are. May you become whole and recognize how there are activities you do, can do that are part of this whole, the whole sum. So those are my thoughts this morning.

So we have five minutes before the end. If you have any questions, comments to this that you'd like to say, or testimonials, please. So there's a... I saw a handout there, was the first one I heard. Is there a mic on the stage there? Hello. I have a question about how to interact with someone who, let's just say, I mean, could be you have a neighbor or something like this. And there's been some acrimony or some kind of... discontent, right? And you know, you understand that they are acting in a way which is, quote-unquote, unfair to you, goes against things you already agreed to or various things. And you have to continue interacting with this neighbor. And you want to feel like you're doing something good or right by them. But it also is not fair to you if you continue agreeing to accept their ways of behaving, which are not in your interest. How does one reconcile this and then, and let's just say they're not interested in hearing, let's say they're not interested in hearing your point of view or coming to some kind of resolution. Yeah. How does one... then conduct oneself to feel like we are being fair to ourselves and yet, like, try to keep some peace. How does one do that?

Yeah, so these kinds of real-life situations like that are, you know, so contextual that, you know, I have to hear all the details to really understand what's best. So I apologize if what I'm about to say doesn't quite fit what you're talking about. But, yeah, there are times when people behave in ways that... or, you know, that harm us even, you know, or wrong or stressful, but they're not available at all to process it, to talk about it. And I mean, sometimes with neighbors, you call in neighborhood mediation. Different cities have mediation services where they come and offer to help with things like that, with neighbors that are so hard. But let's say that there's no way of communicating, no bridge to the person.

And so then the first thing for a practitioner like us is to really sit with the feelings, the emotions, be with it all. And be with, and really be present in a kind way to yourself, caring way for yourself. Be present for all the difficult feelings that come up, the hurt, the way it triggers maybe old wounds, the way that it brings up fear. To really kind of practice with it, breathe with it, know it, and see if you can both find a wise way of being with that so it doesn't limit

you. It might still be there, but you're not going to be hindered by it. Or in a way that heals it enough. And it heals enough so you can do the next step that Buddhism has emphasized.

And that is, can you cultivate goodwill for this person? Is there some way of understanding them, seeing them, sensing them? It doesn't condone what they've done. You're not turning your... You're being careful with them. Now you're cautious with them. But you're not carrying resentment. You're not carrying anger. That you're actually underneath it all. You really want the best for them. But you probably want to do that privately because, you know. So that's the second. And it's good for you to do that. And that's a finding the goodwill, the *mettā*, is a way of helping to heal the way that some of these difficulties kind of work on our hearts. And some people who I don't, they don't deserve my *mettā*. You deserve to be kind. It's really good for you. Don't sacrifice yourself. Don't harm yourself. Right? Then you're adding second arrow. Then you're helping your enemy, if you're harming yourself too. So clean it up if you can. And then the third thing is figure out a way to be generous to the person. Maybe just say, how are you? Or hi. Even if they don't talk to you, even if they don't say, just smile, say hi, nice to see you, nice weather. Just kind of have a open, kind way. And if you can, give them a gift. Give them a season's greeting card. Or just kind of begins to do small things. And sometimes that begins to melt people. Okay. And they began to see your humanity. Some people are only unkind and taking care of themselves only and discounting everyone else because they're afraid or they feel the scarcity or they have their own challenges. And to feel someone being kind, it can make a difference. And if it doesn't help at all, at least you've done a good thing for yourself. Yeah. Is that okay? Yeah.

So maybe one more, and then she was first. It's really related to the last, the previous question, which is about harsh speech being pleasing to the ear and heart. There are sometimes you have to discuss things, not just people, but out in the world, that it seems like the choice is... is either saying nothing or lying or harsh speech if you're trying to be pleasing to the ear. I'm confused about how you can be truthful and pleasing to the ear when you're talking about, say, difficulties in the world.

Yeah, but that's why we have to a lot of work on ourselves. So we're not caught in our anger or our hurt or our frustrations or our fear. That's not an easy place to come to, but we have to really have done our own inner work really deeply. Because if not, then it's really hard. We're acting on impulse. We're acting with all this pressure. Of our reactivity. So there's a lot of inner work that has to happen, deep inner work, so that you can, if you absolutely have to speak, you learn the art, you learn the skill that you become talented in how you speak.

So there was a neighbor here on this street who we were doing renovations here in the build-

ing. And so there's a lot of people, you know, sound when there's renovations banging and stuff. And, you know, there's all kinds of sounds in the urban environment. So that's not so unusual. You expect it, right? But the neighbor was furious at all the sound coming from here with a banging. And skill saws and stuff. So came over and came up to my office upstairs. Yeah. And it was just letting me have it. It was this intense anger. So I just listened and listened. It took a while. And maybe I'm kind of a tall guy, so maybe it's easier for me not to be afraid, but I wasn't particularly afraid. There was another person watching too, an IMC person. And so I just listened till somehow there was a pause. And I said to this person, I think in a kind way, I wasn't afraid, I wasn't harsh, I wasn't attacking the person. I wouldn't say, this is crazy what you're doing. No, we have to do our work here. Get off our property. I said, you know, when you talk this way to me, I get afraid. As soon as I said that, he just relaxed. You could see his muscles, his tension, his shoulders, everything dropped. And he apologized and left. He apologized. That was a great response. I said it in a way that was, I don't know if it was good for the heart or pleasing, but it certainly was not harsh and difficult. And I just matter-of-factly said, you know, I set up with the effect it had on me. Oh, this makes me afraid. And so I wasn't attacking him, I wasn't being harsh to him, I wasn't trying to force him to stop, you know, and my big, big voice you can have. I said, no, this made me afraid. And there was something about him seeing his impact and realizing what he was doing that changed it. We can learn over time how to speak wisely so it can be done in kind ways, even when it involves a really big no. No, you can't do that.

I was thinking more of the deportations, how to discuss the deportations in a way that's pleasing to the ear. Discuss it with other people being deported or discussing it with the ICE officers who are deporting you. There you go. Just talking to a friend. Who has different point of view. Who even has the same point of view. With using non-harsh... So a few things we do in this practice. Yeah. One is it's really helpful to understand what are you trying to accomplish? What are you trying to do with how you speak? So if you're speaking harshly, angrily, what's the purpose of that? What benefit are you trying to get from that? Is that really going to be helpful? We should be talking about things like this. Is there a better way to talk about it? Is there a more useful way for you, for your heart, for the world? Because harsh speech divides. And maybe your friends, and one of the sad things is when people bond over gossip. They bond over having a shared enemy. You know, it's a shared anger. That's really sad. Let's bond over what's best in our hearts. Let's find commonality in ways that support the growth of a good society, not a divided one. So I think that you have right there in your conversation with your friend the answer to all of our problems. Thank you.

So one more. Well, I think we're over now at time. So I'm happy to talk to you if you want to come to me now, but I don't want people to be a captive audience. So thank you all very much.