

# Eightfold Path (2 of 10) Holistic View

October 14, 2025

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS** *ditṭhi*, samādhī, *sammā*, current, river, waterfall, standing tall

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Hello and welcome to this series on the Eightfold Path. Yesterday was the introduction. Today I am going to start with the first fold, the first limb of the Eightfold Path. This is usually called “right view.”

The word for view in Pali is *ditṭhi*, which has the same meaning as “view” in English. It is both a view that you can see with your eyes, and it is also a view, an understanding, an insight that we have about something. In some ways it represents how we see our experience – whether that is literally with the eyes, or metaphorically with the mind's eye. Maybe “right view” can be the overview that we have of our experience.

So, based on yesterday's talk, I would like to not use the word “right” to translate the Pali word *sammā*, but call it “holistic.” It is the holistic view – a view of the whole. It is the orientation, the perspective, that is holistic.

I would like to give you a metaphor to introduce this idea. You are in a somewhat shallow river – maybe the river is up to your mid-thigh. You can lay down flat on the surface of the river. It has a nice current that carries you beautifully down the river. It is fun and nice to be floating along. You feel like you are one with the river and the environment.

It feels really nice until you realize that the river is going right over a waterfall – a big waterfall. Then it is not so nice anymore. You turn around and try to swim upstream, but the river is pulling you down the stream faster than you can swim up. The waterfall is coming. You can hear the roar.

All you have to do, though, is stand up in the river because it is shallow. The coverage is only up to your mid-thigh. If you stand there, then the current of the river continues. It flows right by you, but you are still. You are not separated from the current, but now you are free of it because you have the stability and strength of standing there. You are far from any danger of going over the waterfall. It is now relatively easy to walk to the shore or walk upriver.

We get swept away sometimes by our thoughts, our emotions, by the world and concerns that are going on. We don't realize how much we are being carried along, swept away by the current of this momentum of thoughts, momentum of desires, and momentum of aversion. We don't even see the waterfall that is going to take us over sometimes.

What mindfulness teaches us is that we could always have the ability to stand up in the current and, kind of, wake up and be stable and strong – be grounded in a sense. We can stand up and be straight, open and upright in the situation we are in so that we have the overview.

Remember, if you stand up in the river, you are much taller than the river, so you can have an overview of the whole lay of the land that you can't have if you are lying flat, floating along. The currents are still there – the currents of our life, our desires, thoughts, preoccupations, and fear. But now we can feel the current, feel the momentum, but part of us is not caught in it.

Part of us actually feels free. We have agency. We are not being pushed by it. We are not necessarily having to believe it. We now have an overview, and we say, “There is a lot of fear here.” But the part of us that says there is fear – has the overview of it – sees that together with the fear, we are not afraid.

The whole idea of identifying with fear and assuming that / am the person completely saturated with fear is like floating in the current and being pulled around.

There is a space when mindfulness gets strong that is like we are standing there and can know there is fear. We are not denying it. The fear could be strong. But there is also what is not afraid. There is also this sense of overview – holistic view. Yes, there is fear, and at the same time there is freedom from fear. Yes, there is attachment and there is freedom from attachment.

Sometimes we can see ourselves teeter-totter. We can see we are leaning into becoming the fear, becoming the attachment, becoming our preoccupation – getting pulled into it *and* staying free.

The idea is that the stronger the mindfulness – the stronger we have the overview, the holistic view of it all – then we see all of it. We see where there is attachment, but we also see there is lack of attachment. We see where there is suffering and see where there is not suffering. We see where there is stress and see where there is not stress. Because of having this grounded, clear, open sense of awareness.

A metaphor I like for being really mindful in the moment – literally sometimes but metaphorically – would be that of standing firmly on both feet, standing up tall and straight, opening the arms wide and saying: “Here I am. I’m going to be here with this.”

There is so much agency, so much confidence, so much strength, so much being bigger than the situation, that something shifts inside. We are not so strongly identified with what is happening. We are more identified with the one who stands tall and straight to say, “Okay, this is what is happening.” We are not collapsing or giving in. We are not being carried by the current over the waterfall.

So, “holistic view.” The first step, or first fold, of the Eightfold Path is to have a holistic view. The primary way the Buddha describes this is to know our suffering, to know our distress – to see how we are caught – to see the suffering there in such a way that we also see the freedom from suffering, right there.

Right there, we see this practice that we do – the practice of mindfulness, the practice of concentration, the practice of honesty – that is how to stay standing tall in the river. That is how to maintain the stability that lets us have a holistic view.

The holistic view that supports the whole Eightfold Path is not easy to come by. In a sense, for those of you who have been here all year, it is the culmination of the *samādhi* and insight that we spent seven months or so going through from the beginning of the year. This creates a very strong, skillful way of using our ability to be present, fully, and have confidence in it so we step into awareness. We step into this holistic view that is not caught in any one thing.

Then we see: there is desire, strong desire. Here the desire arises. It’s coming. Right here, at the same time, there is freedom from desire. There is a mind with desire. It is not a desiring mind. It is not a desiring person. It is a person with desire – a mind with desire. And we see it clearly and we see we have confidence. We see the practice that allows us to be free and 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 are caught and the freedom from being caught. This is not necessarily an easy thing to come to. That is why we have this practice that sometimes needs to build and become stronger. Then we begin to feel and sense this bigger view of what is happening so that we are not limited by the small part of the whole that we see.

If we only see fear, if we only see desire, if we only see our belief systems and our preoccupations and interpretations and judgments, then that becomes the whole world. But to be bigger than that, to have a view that is wider and 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.*

This holistic view – because it shows us freedom, shows us non-clinging, shows us this healthy way of living even while we are clinging – then becomes a guide for the next seven steps of the Eightfold Path. Because now we know for ourselves something about what it is like not to cling, not to grasp, not to be caught, not to be limited. This gives us a chance now to have a holistic view of the other factors of the Eightfold Path

Tomorrow, what is usually called “right intention,” I am going to call “holistic orientation.” We can be oriented to the whole river, the whole situation. We know there is a waterfall and a current on the river. We also know where the shore is, and we know that we are safe because we can stand there in the knee-high water and hold our ground. With that, we can now have a different orientation of how to be in the river than we could if we didn't have that holistic view.

The whole Eightfold Path begins with a view, an overview – some people call it the frame of reference for our experience. In the Buddhist tradition, that view it is not something to believe. It is not something to take in as if you now have an opinion or philosophy that you have to live by. Rather, it is a way of seeing that we cultivate, we grow and develop.

It becomes obvious we have the overview – the holistic view – and now we don't have to be convinced that this is what we are supposed to believe. 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 are not trapped by the current of the river.

So, holistic view. May you today, as you go about your day, stop enough, pause enough, and see if you can, metaphorically, stand grounded and upright with your eyes metaphorically open. Right here. What is happening?

Can you have the overview of the situation you are in, including an overview of how you are? In that overview, can you find yourself? Can you find freedom right next to ways in which you are not so free? Can you find peace right next to where you are agitated? Can you find clarity right next to where you are confused?

See if you can cultivate this overview and see what difference that makes. That might set the stage for you to appreciate these other folds of the Eightfold Path.

Thank you.