

Right View and Right Intention: The Lens and the Lean

Dharma talk by Diana Clark

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Last week, I spoke about the Eightfold Path^[1] as a whole—a path that helps us find freedom from suffering by ending greed, aversion, and delusion. These eight factors are grouped into three trainings: wisdom, mental development, and ethics. Tonight, I would like to focus on the training of wisdom, which is where the Eightfold Path conventionally begins. It starts with the first two factors: Right View (or Wise View) and Right Intention (or Wise Intention).

Most of us move through the world with the assumption that our experience—whatever we are seeing or feeling—is the absolute truth. We believe we are observing things with an unbiased view and seeing the clear picture. However, as we see in the news cycles of the past few years, there are many different views, and everyone is convinced that theirs is the right one. The Buddha recognized this thousands of years ago. He pointed out that we can adjust, test, and experiment with our views to see more clearly. This isn't about finding a "core truth" that everyone will agree upon, but rather about using criteria to evaluate which views are helpful for ourselves and others.

The Lens of Right View

"Right View" is not "right" in a morally judgmental sense, but "right" because it is helpful. It is the ability to recognize what leads to more trouble, distress, and agitation, and what leads to less. While this seems obvious, when we look closely at our lives, we often find that we pursue things we *think* will make us happy, but which actually cause more stress.

Right View asks us to pay attention to our own experience—not as dogmatic doctrine, but as a practical investigation. We can think of Right View as the "lens" through which we see the world. If you are wearing the wrong glasses, it isn't a character flaw; you just need to change the view.

In this practice, there are two foundational lenses within Right View:

1. **Cause and Effect:** There are consequences to what we say, what we do, and even the thoughts we have. There are no exceptions. Sometimes the effect is felt immediately in the heart or body; other times, the consequences ripple out in ways we cannot anticipate.

2. **The Four Noble Truths^[2]**: This lens acknowledges the reality of *dukkha*^[3] (suffering or unsatisfactoriness) and recognizes that it has a cause—clinging. It also acknowledges that suffering can end, and that there is a specific path leading to that ending.

You can experiment with this lens in your daily life. Try setting an intention to be generous for a day—with your time, attention, or resources. Then, spend another day being petty, cranky, or gossiping. Notice the difference in how you feel. This is the "come and see" nature of the Dharma; it is less of a belief system and more of an "if-then" statement: *If* you want to have less suffering, *then* try this.

The Lean of Right Intention

If Right View is the lens, Right Intention is the "lean" or the orientation of the heart. Once we recognize what causes suffering, we naturally want to lean away from it and toward ease and freedom.

The Buddha offered three reliable intentions that lead to less suffering:

- **Relinquishment (or Renunciation)**: Letting go of craving.
- **Goodwill**: Moving away from ill will or hostility.
- **Compassion**: Moving away from cruelty.

I want to highlight that goodwill is not merely "being nice." Being nice can sometimes be a strategy to avoid conflict or keep up appearances. True goodwill is the intention not to add hatred to a situation while still maintaining clarity. It allows you to set boundaries, speak firmly, or disagree, all while maintaining a heart of warmth and care. You are not abandoning the truth, but you are refusing to add hostility to it.

Mixed Intentions and Time Horizons

In reality, our intentions are often mixed. We might want to care for someone while also wanting to look good or feel better ourselves. We don't have to wait for "perfectly pure" intentions to practice; we simply need to recognize the intentions we have.

It is also helpful to recognize that intentions have different time horizons:

- **Overarching Intentions**: The broad direction of our lives (e.g., "I want to be a caring person").
- **Episodic Intentions**: Intentions for a specific activity (e.g., "I want to be present during this work meeting").

- **Short-term Intentions:** The intention for the very next sentence we speak or the next thing we click on.

Sometimes in the short term, we might feel agitated—perhaps when trying to get a sick family member out the door for a doctor's appointment. While we want to get them there on time (the immediate intent), we should still try to align that with our overarching intention of care. Everything has a consequence, and even minor actions contribute to the habit-patterns of our hearts.

Conclusion

Adjusting the lens (Right View) and aiming the heart (Right Intention) is a practice. It isn't something we master instantly. But when you feel stuck, start with Right View: Where is the suffering? What is causing it? Then, bring in Right Intention: Can I lean toward relinquishment, goodwill, or compassion?

May we all learn to see clearly the laws of cause and effect. May our intentions help bring greater ease, peace, and freedom to our lives, making this world a better place. It has to start somewhere—why not with us?

Reflections and Q&A

Question: Could you repeat the three elements of intention?

Diana Clark: Certainly. They are relinquishment (sometimes called renunciation), goodwill, and compassion.

Lena: I'm currently in the Eightfold Path program^[4] here, and I was surprised when we started with Right View. I realized I had an inflated sense of self, thinking I already knew what my views were. But when I looked closer, I noticed unhelpful views like "this moment is not enough." On the other hand, a helpful view I've found is that every person—and even animals—is as important and unimportant as I am. I also really liked your metaphor of the view being the map and the intention being the choice to use the map.

Diana Clark: Thank you, Lena. For those who don't know, the Eightfold Path program is a year-long study we offer here that helps bring these concepts alive.

Participant: I saw a beautiful example of compassion recently. My wife and I have been following the story of the monks walking from Texas to Washington, D.C. with their dog. Last week, we were at a dinner party where a man was going on a rant about everything wrong with the country. Before the "suffering" got too bad, my wife asked, "Have you heard about those monks?" It stopped him completely. She spoke from such a lovely place that he got curious, and

it changed the entire conversation. That peace started in a monk's heart, went through a phone, into a YouTube feed, into my wife's heart, and finally into that room.

Diana Clark: That is fantastic. It doesn't take a lot to make a difference.

Participant: Thank you for the concept of intentions having different time frames. I wonder if many disagreements happen because people aren't explicit about their intentions and time frames. I also thought about the need to "know everything," and I realized I could practice relinquishing that need for constant information.

Diana Clark: Yes, it can be fun to relinquish the chase for knowledge and instead enjoy the "not knowing"—the curiosity and the willingness to be surprised.

Bill: I liked what you said about cause and effect having no exceptions. It made me think about the shopping cart example. Is it useful to categorize effects as "major" or "minor"? Or is it hazardous because "minor" gives us an out?

Diana Clark: That is my sense. Categorizing something as minor often gives us an excuse to say, "It's okay." If we leave out the "major/minor" label and just look at whether a cause is helpful or harmful, we see things more clearly. Experiment with that and see what you find.

Thank you all for your time this evening. Wishing you a wonderful night and safe travels home.

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1. **Eightfold Path:** The foundational summary of Buddhist practices leading to the liberation from *dukkha*. It consists of Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. [↵](#)
 2. **Four Noble Truths:** The central doctrine of Buddhism: 1. The reality of suffering (*dukkha*); 2. The cause of suffering (craving/clinging); 3. The end of suffering (*nirodha*); 4. The path to the end of suffering (the Eightfold Path). [↵](#)
 3. **Dukkha:** A Pali word often translated as "suffering," "stress," "unsatisfactoriness," or "distress." It refers to the inherent insecurity and friction of conditioned existence. [↵](#)
 4. **Eightfold Path Program:** A year-long structured program offered by the Insight Meditation Center (IMC) for study and integrated practice of the Buddha's teachings. [↵](#)

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Additional transcripts and links to YouTube videos at Moonpointing.com with deep bows of appreciation to Dan Murphy.

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