

The Eightfold Path:

Releasing from Greed, Aversion and Delusion

Dharma talk by Diana Clark

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I was thinking as I was driving over here, "Okay, I finally figured out exactly how to work the windshield wipers." It's just because I've had my car for ten years, right? But it doesn't rain so often, and I kind of forget. But now, it's been raining often enough that I figured it out and have it memorized. So, a lot of rain, which is good. I am not going to complain.

Maybe to begin this evening, I'd like you to just imagine—or maybe you don't have to imagine, maybe you can remember—a time not so long ago. Maybe you were about to send a message, an email, or a text. Or you were stuck in traffic and feeling a little bit irritated. Or maybe you were getting ready to sleep and remembering a conversation, rehearsing or rehashing it, stuck going through it.

There is a way in which we can feel that the mind isn't completely neutral. It's not relaxed and easeful about this. There might be this little pulling towards something. Maybe it's clear what this "something" is, maybe it isn't. Or maybe there's this pushing away: "I don't want that. I want it to be different." Or maybe you are just spinning a story, lost in stories, disconnected from your experience.

It is easy to forget that when the Buddha was talking about *dukkha*^[1]—this word that often gets translated as suffering—he is also pointing to this subtle pushing and pulling, or being lost, disconnected, or lost in a fog. This is also *dukkha*. Even though it just feels like, "Well, this is what it means to be a human. This is what humans do all the time."

But the Buddhist teachings point to the fact that there can be the ending of that. There can be this ease and freedom in which experiences are arising, they are known, and then they pass, and the mind stays steady and balanced. There isn't this pushing and pulling and wanting to make things be a certain way or disconnecting from our experience.

Tonight, I'd like to talk a little bit about the Eightfold Path. Perhaps because it's the beginning of the year, and some might say that this is one of the foundational teachings. I'm not going to go through all eight factors in detail. Instead, I'm going to talk about how the path as a whole helps us with the roots—what underlies this slight or obvious sense that things are not quite right, that they aren't how I want them to be, even though we keep trying and doing all the things that we do.

We could think of the Eightfold Path as a system, a course of training, a way to meet our experience which helps to pull out the roots of our suffering. I'm using this word *dukkha* and "suffering" to represent this giant range—from just this minor little sense of "not quite right" to terrible, horrifying, awful stuff.

The Eight Factors

Many of you will be familiar with the Eightfold Path. You do not have to memorize this list. I learned it as Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, and so on. We use this word "Right," but it is not moralistic, as opposed to "wrong." It's more like, if a Phillips screw needs to be put in, you get the right tool; you get a Phillips screwdriver. You don't get a fingernail file. You get the right tool. So "Right" means correct, or the one that's best for the job. Some teachers, to get around the sensitivity of the word "Right," sometimes translate it as "Wise."

So we could say: Wise View, Wise Intention, Wise Speech, Wise Action, Wise Livelihood, Wise Effort (or Energy), Wise Mindfulness, and Wise Concentration.

This list of eight is traditionally given in that particular order. I remembered it because somebody casually said something many years ago that stuck in my head: "VISALEMC." V-I-S-A-L-E-M-C. That's how I remember it: View, Intention, Speech, Action, Livelihood, Effort, Mindfulness, Concentration.

The Roots of Suffering

The Eightfold Path is supposed to help us with the roots of suffering. I'll say just a little bit about these roots. We could call them greed, aversion, and delusion.

Greed is a strong word. None of us want to feel like we have greed within us. But it's this feeling of reaching and a little clench, like, "I need this in order to be happy. I want more of this." It's the feeling that as soon as I get *that*, everything will be okay. This can be for big giant things or small things.

Aversion. Sometimes I learned it first as hatred, and I felt like greed and hatred went together—these big strong words. But often we use "aversion." You can use whichever word you like. This is the push, the "I don't want this." It's also the impulse to correct, punish, cut off, or escape. This bracing of, "No, I don't want this. I want this gone."

Delusion. We could say this is fog, not seeing clearly. There are so many things that we don't see clearly. One way of understanding this is that we see the stories the mind is making, but we believe them. That is delusion: not recognizing that the stories made up in our mind are, in fact, stories. We are convinced they are facts because, well, we're thinking them, so they must be true.

What makes greed, aversion, and delusion the roots of all *dukkha* is that they drive patterns. They carve grooves in the mind. They are like the fuel that sends us down these well-worn grooves—patterns of what we say, what we do, how we interpret things, what we chase, what we resist. Some of these are so deeply ingrained that we don't even notice that the patterns are optional.

I want to be clear: it is not a character flaw that we want things, that we don't want other things, and that we don't have clarity about everything. It's just what it means to be human. It's part of having a nervous system and developing as a human. So I don't want to say that it's hardwired, because there is freedom from them. I heard an analogy—I'm not a computer expert—but somebody described it as "firmware." It's not as easy to change as software, but it's not hardwired hardware either. It can get updated. It can get changed.

An Everyday Example

Let's look at an example. Maybe you receive a message—email, text, Slack, whatever—and someone questions a decision you made. Or maybe they misunderstood your intent. Or maybe they are saying something with a tone that doesn't feel comfortable at all.

We might say the **greed** here shows up as: "No, no, I want to be understood. I want people to really understand what I'm trying to say. I want respect. I want to be right."

Aversion is like: "Oh, this isn't fair. Why are they saying this? Why is that department not doing that?" Maybe there's some heat that arises, some contraction, this irritation like, "Oh, really? This again?"

Delusion shows up often really fast as the story: "Oh yeah, of course this person is sending this email. That department always does this. They don't value me. They're taking me for granted." Or maybe we feel threatened in some way that might not even be clear to us.

Greed, aversion, and delusion can show up in an instant. Just as soon as we open a message, all three of them might be there.

But there can be this moment where we have our fingers on the keyboard, ready to reply. Instead, we can pause. We can see if we just follow this path of greed, aversion, and delusion—push, pull, fog. Or maybe, I can do an experiment. Maybe I can do something a little bit different.

Maybe the experiment is very small. It's simply not hitting send yet. Taking ten breaths. Just seeing if something different can arise. Maybe we still feel that clench, that irritation, the wanting to be understood. Maybe that's still there while we're taking those breaths. But we just

recognize: "Here's the story that I have. I'm pretty sure this is true, but..." Just to even recognize that it's a story is the beginning of the Eightfold Path showing up in our lives.

Three Levels of Training

A training that is going to help with this apparatus—which is so fast and such a habitual way to respond to experiences—needs to meet us at different levels: deeper, more shallow, and in different aspects of our lives. A training that helps us with this "firmware" needs to be a reliable path that we can apply not just once in a while, but in many different areas.

We could say that the Eightfold Path is a training system designed to meet us at three depths of our experience to weaken and eventually end greed, aversion, and delusion.

1. **Actions:** How we show up in the world, what we do and what we say.
2. **Mental Events:** Our inner life, what's happening inside—the urges, the moods, the stories.
3. **Deep Tendencies:** Helping us see the patterns and grooves we fall into again and again.

These three levels map onto the three trainings of the Eightfold Path: *Sīla* (Ethics), *Samādhi* (Meditation/Concentration), and *Paññā* (Wisdom)^[2].

A Note on Order

I want to make a note about the order of the path elements. I got a little confused about this when I first learned it. I gave the list starting with Right View (*Paññā*). But I just talked about *Sīla*, *Samādhi*, *Paññā*—Ethics, Meditation, Wisdom.

In the texts, the list always starts with View and Intention. However, when it is taught as a path of practice, it often starts with Ethics, because it's part of a gradual training. If you have ethics first, it helps create the conditions which make meditation easier. And having meditation helps wisdom to arise.

Today, how it is usually practiced is that people start with meditation because they want to reduce stress. They find themselves meditating and then wanting to take it a little further because they start to have some insight. That opens up the idea about ethics. It fascinates me that there are three different ways we can enter this Eightfold Path. It doesn't matter where you enter. It becomes a cycle; one training helps support the others.

1. Ethics (*Sīla*)

This works at the level of our actions—what we say and what we do. This doesn't require meditation or wisdom deeply; it is a commitment to not creating more harm in the world—not for ourselves, not for others.

Greed, aversion, and delusion show up as causing harm. Maybe this harm is slight, or maybe it's really painful. You are practicing ethics when you recognize an impulse to say something that is an exaggeration to make yourself look better, or a little white lie because it's easier.

I've told this story a number of times, but it had a big impact on me. Somebody had given me some clothes. I tried them on, and another person saw me. There was this blouse that I really liked. I asked this other person, "What do you think?" The person said, "Oh, those are nice pants." I said, "No, no, the blouse, what do you think of this blouse?" "Yeah... those are nice pants."

I realized, "Oh, I get it." They didn't want to say, "Diane, that actually looks awful on you." But they didn't want to hurt my feelings either. They found a creative way to communicate. It made me smile, realizing this person cares about me; they don't want me to walk around in something they think is terrible.

You are practicing ethics when you find yourself not telling little white lies, but finding creative ways to tell the truth that are helpful. Or not taking more than is needed from the office. It's not about moral perfectionism. It's about no longer reinforcing the habits of greed, aversion, and delusion.

2. Mental Development (*Samādhi*)

This works at the level of mental states—the inner weather. It trains us to notice the push, the pull, the disconnection. Having a meditation practice helps us become more sensitive to the different states in the mind instead of always getting pushed around by them.

It helps us to notice experiences as sensations, urges, moods, and stories, and to see them arise and pass away. Often, we don't see them pass; we are immediately in a mood and doing something. Meditation helps us relate to our experiences differently so that we can feel the stress and contraction without acting on the impulses.

3. Wisdom (*Paññā*)

This works at the level of deep tendencies, the grooves, the views that we have that we often don't even know we have.

We could say wisdom is seeing repeatedly that craving doesn't bring lasting happiness. We default to thinking, "Everything will be fine as soon as I have this." With meditation, we see this craving over and over, and we learn that it doesn't stop. It just keeps happening. Wisdom is realizing: "Oh yeah, this craving isn't a way to bring lasting happiness."

Instead, we start to see that things are changing. They are unreliable. It is fruitless to expect something "out there" to make us happy if it is always changing.

Delusion starts to wear thin when we see how often we build this "me"—this self—out of these experiences. We create a self out of our roles ("I am a Dharma teacher," "I am the one who packs the car efficiently"). We build a self out of our successes, failures, moods, or thoughts, and then we spend the rest of the day defending it.

What weakens these latent tendencies towards greed, aversion, and delusion is to see these patterns again and again.

Breaking the Loop

The Eightfold Path has to work at three different levels because it has to work in our life. It's not just something that happens on a meditation cushion.

Let's say you are driving and someone cuts you off, or you are in line and someone steps ahead. There can be this urge, this heat that surges. "No, you can't do that!" The urge to blame. There is greed (wanting control), aversion (heat, irritation), and delusion (the story: "People around here drive terribly").

It is possible to just see clearly: "Oh, here is a little bit of heat arising. Some clenching. Some story." And then just notice that this all arises and passes away.

Right there, you practice **Ethics**: you didn't escalate. You practice **Meditation**: you felt the surge as just a surge and heat. You practice **Wisdom**: you saw the cost of clinging to the story. You saw that the more I cling to these stories, the less freedom and peace I have.

The Eightfold Path works at different levels, and it undermines the habit loop of *Trigger -> Craving -> Reaction*. It softens this loop from so many different angles that it allows these underlying roots to be uprooted.

What is not explicit, but is part of the experience, is that **happiness arises as greed, aversion, and delusion go down**. The more we practice, the more ease, delight, and peace there is. This appreciation for simplicity, honesty, and clarity brings more and more happiness in our lives.

My wish for all of you for 2026 is: may you experience more and more happiness, peace, and ease. May you find freedom and support for your practice and your life, so that it nourishes not only you but those you are in contact with. In this way, we can make a world in which all of us want to live.

Q&A

Question: I got a little confused about the "three levels" versus the "progression." You talked about the range of *dukkha* (suffering), and then the three levels (ethics, meditation, wisdom). Could you clarify?

Diana: The good news is that the same training works for everywhere on the range of *dukkha*, from the most awful to the most subtle. The "three levels" I mentioned refer to the depths of our experience: our actions, our mental states, and the deep grooves. These map onto *Sīla* (Ethics), *Samādhī* (Meditation), and *Paññā* (Wisdom).

Question: It helps me to hear you reiterate the idea of these "deep grooves." I've been doing this for 25 years, and I feel pretty practiced. But then I'll be in a social situation and—bang—something I didn't see coming just comes out of me, like something angry or mean. It's hard to see these deep patterns until I "lose it."

Diana: My model is a little bit different. It's not just about the big explosions. It's more like having "little sips" regularly. The frequent undoing of greed, aversion, and delusion starts to lower the level. It comes up with less ferocity because, at the same time, the sense of "me" is getting softened. We get more familiar with what it feels like: "Oh yeah, there's a little bit of greed there," and we don't act on it. Each time we don't act on it, it undermines the depth of it.

Participant: It sounds good, but I'm not sure it really grapples with those deepest, most invisible patterns.

Diana: Isn't this fantastic? The only way to find out is to try it. You don't have to believe me. You have to do the experiment. In my life, it has worked.

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1. **Dukkha:** A Pali word often translated as "suffering," "stress," or "unsatisfactoriness." ↩
 2. **Sīla, Samādhī, Paññā:** The three divisions of the Noble Eightfold Path. *Sīla* refers to ethics. *Samādhī* refers to mental development. *Paññā* refers to wisdom or insight. ↩

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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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