

The Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Truth of the Path that Leads to the Extinction of Suffering

The Two Extremes and the Middle Path

To give oneself up to indulgence in *Sensual Pleasure*, the base, common, vulgar, unholy, unprofitable; or to give oneself up to *Self-mortification*, the painful, unholy, unprofitable: both these two extremes, the Perfect One has avoided, and has found out the *Middle Path*, which makes one both to see and to know, which leads to peace, to discernment, to enlightenment, to *Nibbana*.

The Eightfold Path

It is the Noble Eightfold Path, the way that leads to the extinction of suffering, namely:

III. Wisdom (*Panna*)

1. Right Understanding (*Samma-ditthi*)
2. Right Thought (*Samma-sankappa*)

I. Morality (*Sila*)

3. Right Speech (*Samma-vaca*)
4. Right Action (*Samma-kammanta*)
5. Right Livelihood (*Samma-ajiva*)

II. Concentration (*Samadhi*)

6. Right Effort (*Samma-vayama*)
7. Right Mindfulness (*Samma-sati*)
8. Right Concentration (*Samma-samadhi*)

This is the Middle Path which the Perfect One has found out, which makes one both see and know, which leads to peace, to discernment, to enlightenment, to *Nibbana*. (From *Samyutta Nikāya*, LVI.11)

The Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya-atthangikamagga*)

The figurative expression 'Path' or 'Way' has been sometimes misunderstood as implying that the single factors of that Path have to be taken up for practice, one after the other, in the order given.

In that case, Right Understanding, i.e. the full penetration of Truth, would have to be realized first, before one could think of developing Right Thought, or of practising Right Speech, etc.

But in reality the three factors (3-5) forming the section 'Morality' (*sīla*) have to be perfected first; after that one has to give attention to the systematic training of mind by practising the three factors (6-8) forming the section 'Concentrations' (*samādhi*); only after that preparation, man's character and mind will be capable of reaching perfection in the first two factors (1-2) forming the section of 'Wisdom' (*pañña*).

An initial minimum of Right Understanding, however, is required at the very start, because some grasp of the facts of suffering, etc., is necessary to provide convincing reasons, and an incentive, for a diligent practice of the Path. A measure of Right Understanding is also required for helping the other Path factors to fulfil intelligently and efficiently their individual functions in the common task of liberation. For that reason, and to emphasize the importance of that factor, Right Understanding has been given the first place in the Noble Eightfold Path.

This initial understanding of the Dhamma, however, has to be gradually developed, with the help of the other Path factors, until it reaches finally that highest clarity of Insight (*vipassana*) which is the immediate condition for entering the four Stages of Holiness and for attaining *Nibbana*.

Right Understanding is therefore the beginning as well as the culmination of the Noble Eightfold Path. (From Nyantiloka)

Free from pain and torture is this path, free from groaning and suffering: it is the perfect path. (From *Majjhima Nikāya*, 139)

Truly, like this path there is no other path to the purity of insight. If you follow this path, you will put an end to suffering. (From *Dhammapada*, 274-75)

But each one has to struggle for himself, the Perfect Ones have only pointed out the way. (From *Dhammapada*, 276)

Give ear then, for the Deathless is found. I reveal, I set forth the Truth. As I reveal it to you, so act! And that supreme goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of good families rightly go forth from home to the homeless state: this you will, in no long time, in this very life, make known to yourself, realize, and make your own. (From *Majjhima Nikāya*, 26)

Source: Nyanatiloka (compiler, translator). *The Word of the Buddha: An Outline of the Teaching of the Buddha in the Words of the Pali Canon*. 14th edition. Kandy, Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society, 1967. (Pages 27-29)