

Robert Cusick Coastside Vipassana 09-22-2010



The Dharma talk on September 8th was by Robert Cusick. Robert has been practicing Buddhist meditation since 1997. He is a student of Gil Fronsdal and was trained as a Buddhist monk at Pa Auk Forest Monastery in Burma. He also trained in the Soto Zen tradition at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center in 2001. He has worked with Hameed Ali in the Diamond Approach (Diamond Heart Six) and is a certified Kripalu Yoga teacher. Robert participated in the 2nd Buddhist Chaplaincy training offered through the Sati Center for Buddhist Studies and completed the first Dedicated Practitioners Program at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in 2003. He subsequently served there in the role of Retreats Program Manager.

The Eightfold Path - Part 3 of 3

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

Way to the End of Suffering

(3 of 3)

A Factorial Analysis, as presented by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Right View (Samma ditthi)

- understanding suffering
- understanding its origin
- understanding its cessation
- understanding the way leading to its cessation

Right Intention (Samma sankappa)

- intention of renunciation
- intention of good will
- intention of harmlessness

Right Speech (Samma vaca)

- abstaining from false speech
- abstaining from slanderous speech
- abstaining from harsh speech
- abstaining from idle chatter

Right Action (Samma kammanta)

- abstaining from taking life
- abstaining from stealing
- abstaining from sexual misconduct

Right Livelihood (Samma ajiva)

- giving up wrong livelihood one earns one's living by right livelihood

Right Effort (Samma ajiva)

- the effort to restrain defilements
- the effort to abandon defilements
- the effort to develop wholesome states
- the effort to maintain wholesome states

Right Mindfulness (Samma sati)

- mindful contemplation of the body
- mindful contemplation of feelings
- mindful contemplation of the mind
- mindful contemplation of phenomena

Right Concentration (Samma samadhi)

- the first jhana
 - the second jhana
 - the third jhana
 - the fourth jhana
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Review – Weeks 1 and 2...

The teachings of the Buddha (the *Dhamma*) are not a set of doctrines about the origin or ending of things (i.e., creation) that require belief in a specific ideological creed. The Dhamma is rather a message of “*deliverance from suffering*,” its goal is the complete uprooting and ending of all *mental* suffering.

This Dhamma, the Buddha tells us, is the ultimate truth of things, visible through our direct experience, timeless and always available to us. It is found within, is verifiable, and is the truth of our own experience “...reached only by understanding our experience, by penetrating it right through to its foundations.” It has to be known and seen directly through the stages of [ever deepening] insight. All that’s asked from us is to test it out for ourselves.

Embedded in the Buddha’s message is a method of practice, a way leading to the end of suffering. This way is the Noble Eightfold Path. We are told that liberation from suffering, the highest happiness, is the inevitable fruit of the path. The Buddha assures us time and again that liberation is bound to flower and fruit when there is steady and persistent practice.

There are only **two** requirements for reaching the final goal: To **start** and to **continue**. Once we begin, we discover that the Dhamma unfolds for most of us gradually. It is a matter of gradual practice followed by gradual progress. Expecting quick results is a sure formula for disappointment and suffering. Results sometimes come quickly, usually they don’t. Rather, this practice evolves as a way of living, a life-long gradual unfolding. There may be periods when everything lines up perfectly and works in sync. This may lead to deep insight and the awakening of wisdom, but for no apparent reasons we can find ourselves sinking into periods of heaviness, dullness or the despair of feeling stuck, followed by...*fill in the blank*. In all cases, there are only two requirements for reaching the final goal: To **start** and to **continue**.

...“If these two requirements are met, there is no doubt the goal will be attained. This is the Dhamma, the undeviating law.” (Bhikkhu Bodhi)

Once again the eight path factors divide into three groupings. These three groups represent the three *stages of training*:

1. The **moral discipline group** (*silakkhandha*) is the training in the higher moral discipline. It includes:
 - Right speech
 - Right action
 - Right livelihood

2. The **concentration group** (*samadhikkhandha*) is the training in the higher consciousness. It includes:
 - Right effort
 - Right mindfulness
 - Right concentration

3. The **wisdom group** (*pannakkhandha*) is the training in the higher wisdom. It includes:
 - Right view
 - Right intention

The initial training in morality, as we've seen, includes the path factors of *right speech, right action and right livelihood*. This training serves as the foundation for the second and third trainings in concentration and wisdom. In the usual unfolding of the path, we proceed from grounding in 'moral restraint' to direct mental training, which is the training in concentration (*samadhikkhandha*). The concentration group is comprised of *right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration*.

Sila, as we discussed last week, morality (*sila*) is the cornerstone of the other two trainings in concentration and wisdom. We saw that in order for concentration to develop, the mind has to be established in sila. Likewise, in order for insight and wisdom to develop, the power of sustained concentration is required.

“Wisdom is the primary tool for deliverance, but the penetrating vision it yields can only open up when the mind has been composed and collected.” To accomplish this, ‘right concentration’ or mental unification that gives rise to deep states of mental absorption known as jhana is needed. The mind in jhana rests in profound state of stillness with undistracted focus on a single object. However, to accomplish this level of concentration – or any level of concentration – right effort and right mindfulness are required.

Right effort is what provides the energy for the task.

Right mindfulness provides a stabilizing function for awareness.

Right effort *and* right mindfulness together support *right concentration*.

Right Concentration (Samma samadhi)

- the first jhana
- the second jhana
- the third jhana
- the fourth jhana

Right Effort (Samma ajiva)

- the effort to restrain defilements
- the effort to abandon defilements
- the effort to develop wholesome states
- the effort to maintain wholesome states

Right Mindfulness (Samma sati)

- mindful contemplation of the body
- mindful contemplation of feelings
- mindful contemplation of the mind
- mindful contemplation of phenomena

So, how do we come to truly know and see our own experience? We undertake and develop the practice mindfulness (*sati*).

Mindfulness is the mental faculty through which the field of our experience is brought into focus and through which we gain access to insight. Mindfulness can be defined as presence of mind, attentiveness or a special kind of 'precise awareness.' In order to cultivate this kind of awareness, we are taught to deliberately keep the mind at the level of *bare attention*, focusing on whatever is arising or passing away in our actual experience – in the present moment. We observe or and bare witness to what's happening within and around us through a lens of detachment. We know and see the unadulterated truth of whatever mental and material phenomena is arising and passing away in our experience. Gradually, the mind comes to rest in the present, knowing and seeing the *present event* absent distractions or perceptual overlays. With the practice of mindfulness "...all judgments and interpretations have to be suspended, or if they occur, just registered and dropped." Our task is simply to notice what comes up, as it comes up and passes away. Through this practice we develop the ability to come back into the present moment, to be in the here and now without drifting off or being overwhelmed by distracting thoughts or feelings.

This kind of precise knowing and seeing is different from our ordinary cognitive processes. Ordinary consciousness generally takes our immediate present moment impression (i.e., the present event) and begins to construct interpretations about it that reflect its own ideas and assumptions. This is different from the original event. The Buddha calls this process of mental construction *papanca*. It is, in fact, conceptual proliferation; our mind spinning out of control and unchecked. It both clouds cognition and serves as a basis for all kinds of mental projections. Finally, because our awareness has been so distorted, the way we end up thinking or believing or acting in our lives is not based upon the bare truth of the original event but rather upon our deluded interpretations. It's important to point out, however, that in this process not everything is an illusion. The basic material in our immediate experience (*the original present event*) may be the springboard for our thinking, but the end result arises out of the embellishments constructed by our minds. These embellishments are, in fact, our latent defilements projected outwardly. They are what hook and overwhelm us both in our formal practice and in our day-to-day experiences.

The Buddha tells us that, in order to see through our erroneous views of the way things are, wisdom has to arise. But in order for insight and wisdom to dawn, it needs direct access to what is truly arising (the original, actual present event) absent our conceptual elaborations. "*The task of right mindfulness is to clear up the cognitive field.*"

So, this practice of mindfulness is not so much about 'doing' as it is about 'not doing.' It's not about thinking or planning or wishing or judging. These things are how the mind manipulates our experience, how it gains dominance and control over us. Mindfulness sees through all of this. Mindfulness simply observes and bears witness to each moment of our experience, as it arises, prevails and eventually passes away. Mindfulness neither embellishes nor diminishes the original impression (the present event). As mindfulness becomes more and more continuous, it has the power to anchor the mind in the present. At this stage, the mind no longer drifts off into mental proliferation. The effort to develop this level of mindfulness leads us to the attainment of both concentration *and* insight.

So we see that the task of mindfulness, *in the case of concentration*, is to keep the mind focused on the object of the meditation, to not stray away from the object of meditation, and to return to the object of meditation whenever it does drift away in random undirected thoughts. Mindfulness also sees the hindrances when they begin to stir in the mind, and this seeing can sometimes neutralize them before they can fully arise and wreak havoc.

The task of mindfulness, *in the case of insight*, is to observe, to note, and to discern phenomena with bare attention, with the utmost precision until the fundamental characteristics of all mental and material phenomena are brought to light. This level of continuous, moment-to-moment mindfulness leads to a state described as 'momentary concentration' and creates the conditions for insight into the true nature of our direct experience. This leads to wisdom.

So we see that this next training in concentration (meditation) is also a key component on the noble path that the Buddha refers to as the middle way (*majjhima patipada*). This Noble Eightfold Path is the way to liberation, to the attainment of the highest happiness, to the deathless.

So, once again, in order to cultivate and develop right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration, please remember that there are only two requirements: To **start** and to **continue**.

“If these two requirements are met, there is no doubt the goal will be attained. This is the Dhamma, the undeviating law.” (Bhikkhu Bodhi)
