



Buddha's Eightfold Noble Path- The Development of Wisdom

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Abstract

The Noble Eightfold Path, as taught by the Buddha, is a practical guide to end suffering and attain spiritual liberation. Central to this path is the cultivation of wisdom (paññā), which forms the first of its three core divisions—the other two being ethical conduct (sīla) and mental discipline (samādhi). This article focuses on the development of wisdom through the two path factors: Right View (Sammā-Diṭṭhi) and Right Intention (Sammā-Saṅkappa). Right View involves a clear understanding of the Four Noble Truths, impermanence, and non-self, establishing a foundation for spiritual insight. It is developed through study, reflection, and direct meditative experience. Right Intention complements this understanding by aligning one's mental attitudes with compassion, non-attachment, and harmlessness. The article explores how these intentions shape behavior and deepen one's inner transformation. Rather than being abstract philosophical concepts, Right View and Right Intention are presented as living principles that guide ethical and mindful living. Wisdom in Buddhism is not merely intellectual comprehension but an experiential realization that transforms perception and behavior. When cultivated properly, it leads to a life of clarity, compassion, and freedom from craving and delusion. By examining these elements in depth, the article highlights how the development of wisdom serves as the guiding light on the Eightfold Path, enabling the practitioner to navigate the complexities of life and progress toward the cessation of suffering. This exploration reaffirms the central Buddhist premise that liberation begins with seeing clearly and thinking rightly.

Keywords: Wisdom, Development, Noble, Nirvana

Introduction

The teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, known to the world as the Buddha, have guided millions on the path to inner peace and spiritual awakening. Central to his doctrine is the Noble Eightfold Path, a practical guide designed to free individuals from suffering (*dukkha*) and lead them



toward enlightenment (*nirvana*). Among its three core divisions—Wisdom (*Paññā*), Ethical Conduct (*Sīla*), and Mental Discipline (*Samādhi*)—the development of Wisdom marks the beginning of this transformative journey. The Eightfold Path is not a sequence of steps to be followed one after the other, but an integrated system where each element supports and reinforces the others. However, wisdom stands as the foundation. Without it, ethical behaviour and mental discipline lose their direction.

The development of wisdom

Although correct concentration declares as the final stage among the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path or the Midway Path, consideration itself does recognise the path's termination. The acceptance of concentration makes the mind able to be still and stable, its attendants, opens vast routes of happiness, tranquillity and power. However, by itself it does not satisfy to reach the peak accomplishment, release from the manacles of suffering and agony. To attain the gathering of agony demands that the Noble Eightfold Path be changed into an implement of discovery, that it be used to culture the perceptions disclosing the ultimate verity of objects. This requires the collective contributions of all eight factors, and thus a new organisation of correct view and correct intention. Up to the current point, these first two path factors have practised only a preceding function. Now, they must be taken up again and lifted to a higher level. Correct view is to become a direct observation into the actual essence of phenomena, formerly hold only theoretically; correct intention, to become a true renouncement of debasements born out of deep knowledge.

Before the progression of intelligence is fixed upon, it would be useful to inquire as to why concentration is not sufficient to the accomplishment of deliverance. Concentration is not sufficient to bring deliverance because there is a dereliction on its part to contact the debasements at their basic level. Gautama Buddha instructed that the debasements are categorised into three layers: the stage of quiescent tendency, the stage of extermination, and the stage of violation. The most deeply fixed is the level of quiescent tendency (*anusaya*), where a debasement absolutely remains dormant without carrying out any action. The second stage is the level of externalisation (*pariyutthana*), where debasement, through the effect of some provocation, shoots up in the form of unhealthy notions, sentiments, and preferences. Furthermore, at the third level, the debasement passes beyond an



absolutely psychological externalisation to motivate some unhealthy activity of body or oration. Henceforth, this level is known as the stage of violation (*vitikkama*).

The three divisions of the Noble Eightfold Path give the check against this threefold layering of the debasements. The first, the training in ethical regulation, holds back unhealthy bodily and verbal deed and hence prevents debasements from attaining the stage of violation. The training in concentration gives the safety against the stage of externalisation. It eliminates already manifest debasements and guards the mind from their consistent influx. However, although concentration might be pursued to the depths of complete absorption, it cannot reach the fundamental origin of ailment of the dormant tendencies lying latent in the psychological continuum. Against this concentration is helpless, since to root them out calls for more than psychological serenity. What it calls for, ahead of the equanimity and tranquillity of the merged mind, is intelligence (*pañña*), a penetrating view of occurrence in their basic mode of being.

Intelligence alone can take out the dormant tendencies at their origin because the most basic member of the set, the one which fosters the others and keeps them in place, is ignorance (*avijja*), and intelligence is the antidote for unintelligence. Although verbally an antagonistic, “unknowing,” unintelligence is not a factual negative, a mere privation of correct understanding. It is, rather, a crafty and eruptive psychological factor constantly at work penetrating itself into every chamber of our inner life. It distorts consciousness, dominates transgression, and determines the complete tone of our existence. At the conscious level, which is its most fundamental area of operation, unintelligence infiltrates our insights, notions, and visions, so that we come to misunderstand our expertise, overlaying it with multiple layer of illusions. The most significant of these illusions are three: the illusions of observing permanence in the non-permanent, of observing satisfaction in the unacceptable, and of observing a self in the philanthropic. 66 Hence, we consider ourselves and our world to be fixed, steady, tolerating individuals, in spite of the ubiquitous reminders that everything is subjected to alter and deterioration. We presume we have an inborn right to gratify, and guide our efforts to intensify our joy with an ardour abash unafraid by repeated meetings with agony, disappointment, and irritation. And we discern ourselves as self-contained egos, holding to the various notions and pictures we form of ourselves as the incontrovertible verity of our identity.



Whereas unintelligence obscures the pure essence of objects, intelligence removes the covers of contortion, making us able to observe phenomena in their basic mode of being with the liveliness of direct insight. The training in intelligence centres on the advancement of perception (*vipassana-bhavana*), a deep and apprehensive observation into the essence of existence which comprehends the verity of our being in the only area, where it is directly achievable to us. Usually we are immersed in our expertise, recognised with it so entirely that we do not fathom it. We live it but unable to interpret its essence. On account of this blindness, experience comes to be misinterpreted, worked upon by the illusions of permanence, joy, and self. Of these conscious contortions, the most deeply fixed and resistant is the illusion of self, the notion that at the core of our being there is a truly developed “I” with which we are inevitably recognised. This idea of self, the Buddha instructs, is a mistake, a mere presumption lacking an actual referent. Yet, although a mere presumption, the notion of self is not insignificant. On contrary, it entails consequences that can be disastrous. Since we create the vision of self the lookout points from which we survey the world, our minds bisect everything up into the dualism of “I” and “not I,” what is “mine” and what is “not mine.” Then, confined in these dichotomies, we fall prey to the debasements they breed, the desires to hold and destruct, and eventually to the agony that essentially follows.

To deliverance ourselves from all debasements and agony, the delusion of self that sustains them has to be banished, detonated by the identification of selflessness. Accurately this is the chore set for the advancement of intelligence. The first step along the way of progression is an analytical one. In order to root out the vision of self, the field of expertise has to be planned in certain sets of factors, which are then technically inquired to discover that none of them singly or in combination can be considered as a self. This analytical treatment of expertise, so attributes of the higher attains of Buddhist philosophical psychology, is not deliberated to indicate that experience, like a watch or car, can be deduced to an accidental assortment of separable parts. Expertise does have an indissoluble unity, but this unity is functional rather than solid; it does not need the assumption of a unifying self-separate from the factors, keeping its individuality as a constant amidst the endless flux.

The methodology of analysis applied most often is that of the five accumulates of holding (*panc’upadanakkhandha*): material form, affection, insight, psychological formations, and awareness. Material form comprises the material side of existence: the bodily organism with its sense



capabilities and the outer objects of consciousness. The other four accumulates comprise the psychological side. Affection generates the effective tone, insight the factor of recording and recognising, the psychological formations the voluntary and sensitive elements, and cognition the fundamental consciousness necessary to the entire occasion of expertise. The analysis by way of the five accumulates paves the path for an attempt to observe expertise wholly in terms of its constituting factors, without slithering in indirect references to an baseless self. To obtain this insight needs the advancement of intense mindfulness, now appealed to the fourth foundation, the consideration of the factors of existence (*dhammanupassana*). The follower will dwell considering the five accumulations, their rising and passing:

The follower dwells in consideration of occurrence viz., of the five accumulations of holding. He understands what material form is, how it emerges, how it passes away; understands what affection is, how it emerges, how it passes away; understands what insight is, how it emerges, how it passes away; understands what psychological formations are, how they emerge, how they pass away; understands what awareness is, how it arises, how it passes away.

Or the follower might instead base his consideration on the six inner and external areas of sense expertise, that is, the six sense capabilities and their corresponding things, recording the “fetters” or debasements that emerge from such sensory touches:

The follower dwells in consideration of occurrence viz., of the six inner and external sense bases. He understands the eye and forms, the ear and audios, the nose and smells, the tongue and tastes, the body and tactile, the mind and psychological things; and he understand as well the fetter that emerges in dependence on them. He knows how the un-emerged fetter rises, how the emerged fetter is left behind, and how the abandoned fetter does not emerge again in the future.

The vision of self is further impaired by evaluating the factors of existence, not analytically, but in terms of their associational structure. Examination discloses that the accumulations exist entirely in dependence on states. Nothing in the set enjoys the true self-sufficiency of being assigned to the presumed “I.” Whatever factors in the body-mind complex are observed at, they are discovered to be dependently emerged, tied to the vast net of happenings expanding ahead of them temporally and spatially. The body, for instance, has emerged through the meeting of sperm and egg and survives in dependence on food, water, and air. Sentiment, insight, and psychological formations happen in



dependence on the body with its sense capabilities. They need a thing, the corresponding cognition, and the touch of the thing with the awareness through the media of the sense capabilities. Awareness in its turn relies on the conscious organism and the complete conglomeration of co-emerged psychological factors. This entire procedure has been emerged from the earlier lives in the especial cycle of existences and inherits all the gathered karma of the previous existences. Hence, nothing has a self-sufficient mode of being. All conditioned occurrence exist in association, contingent and rely on other objects.

The above two steps the factorial analysis and the judgement of association assist cut away the intellectual compliance to the notion of self, but they lack enough power to destruct the implanted holding to the ego endured by wrong insight. To take out this subtle form of ego-holding needs a counteractive insight: direct wisdom into the nothingness, coreless essence of phenomena. Such wisdom is produced by considering the factors of existence in terms of their three general marks impermanence (*aniccata*), unsatisfied (*dukkhata*), and selflessness (*anattata*). Universally, the first of the three marks to be judged is impermanence, which at the level of wisdom does not mean absolutely that everything ultimately comes to a termination. At this level, it means something deeper and more prevalent that conditioned occurrence is in consistent procedure, happenings which break up and die almost as soon as they emerge. The steady things appearing to the senses disclose themselves to be strings of transient formations (*sankhara*); the individual postulated by common sense dismisses into a present made up of two entwining streams a stream of material happenings, the accumulation of material form, and a stream of psychological events, the other four accumulations.

When impermanence is observed, wisdom into the other two marks closely follows. Because the accumulations are consistently breaking up, we cannot attach our hopes on them for any abiding satisfaction. Whatever suppositions we put on them are bound to be rushed to pieces by their essential change. Hence, when observe with wisdom they are *dukkha*, agony, in the deepest sense. Then, as the accumulations are temporary and unsatisfactory, they cannot be considered as self. If they were self, or the possessions of a self, we would be able to manage them and mould them to our determination, to make them abiding origins of happiness. However, far from being able to practise such mastery, we find them to be grounds of agony and dismay. Because they cannot be subjected to management,



these very factors of our being are *anatta*: not a self, not the possessions of a self, just nothingness, desolate phenomena occurring in dependence on conditions.

When the course of wisdom examines is entered, the eight path factors become charged with intensity understood earlier. They obtain in force and join together into the oneness of a single coherent path ushering towards the aim. In the examination of wisdom, all eight factors and three trainings exist together; each is there assisting all the others; each creates its own especial contribution to the task. The factors of ethical regulation hold the tendencies to violation in check with such care that even the idea of moral conduct does not emerge. The factors of the concentration group place the mind firmly focused upon the stream of occurrence, considering whatever emerges with flawless accuracy, deliverance from amnesia and distraction. Correct vision, as the intelligence of Perception grows consistently sharper and deeper; correct intention shows itself in a detachment and stability of purpose bringing a tranquil equilibrium to the whole procedure of consideration.

Perceptive meditation considers as its objective area the “conditioned formations” (*sankhara*) consists in the five accumulations. Its work is to uncover their necessary attributes: the three marks of brevity, undesirability, and selflessness. Since it still works with the world of conditioned occurrences, the Eightfold Path in the stage of perception is known as the ordinary path (*lokiyamagga*). This designation in no way entails that the path of perception is deal with ordinary ambitions, with accomplishments falling in the range of samsara. It intends to transcendence, it ushers to deliverance, and however its objective domain of consideration still resides within the conditioned world. But, this ordinary consideration of the conditioned serves as the vehicle for attaining the unconditioned, for achieving the supra-ordinary. When perception meditation attains its peak, when it fully apprehends the brevity, undesirability, and selflessness of everything formed, the mind breaks through the conditioned and recognises the unconditioned, Nirvana. It observes Nirvana with direct view, makes it an object of instant recognition.

The advancement to the unconditioned is accomplished by a kind of awareness or psychological event, termed as the supra-ordinary path (*lokuttaramagga*). The supra-ordinary path happens in four stages, four “supra-ordinary paths,” each marking a deeper level of recognition and issuing in a fuller degree of deliverance, the fourth and last in full deliverance. The four paths can be attained in close proximity to one another — for those with exceptionally sharp capabilities even in



the same sitting or (as is more typically the case) they can be expanded over time, even over many lifetimes. The supra-ordinary paths share in common the immersing of the Four Noble Truths. They know them, not theoretically, but instinctively. They hold them through vision, observing them with self-validating certainty to be the invariable verities of existence. The view of the verities which they present is full at one time. The four verities are not known orderly, as in the stage of reflection when notion is the instrument of knowledge. They are observed at the same time: to observe one verity with the path is to observe them all.

As the path enters the four verities, the mind practices four concurrent functions, one with regards to each truth. It entirely apprehends the verity of agony, observing all conditioned existence as imprinted with the mark of dissatisfactions. Simultaneously, it leaves desire, cuts through the mass of pride and craving that repeatedly gives birth to agony. Again, the mind recognises termination, the endless element Nirvana, now straightforwardly present to the inner eye. And fourthly, the mind establishes the Noble Eightfold Path, whose eight factors vault up furnished with enormous power, achieved to supra-ordinary stature: correct vision as the direct observation of Nirvana, correct intention as the mind's application to Nirvana, the threesome of moral factors as the checks on ethical violation, correct effort as the energy in the path-awareness, correct mindfulness as the factor of consciousness, and correct concentration as the mind's one-sided focus. This capability of the mind to perform four functions at the same time is juxtaposed to a candle's capability to burn the wick at once, use up the wax, remove darkness, and generate light.

The supra-ordinary paths have the particular chore of eliminating the debasements. Before the achievement of the paths, in the stages of attentiveness and even perception meditation, the debasements were not cut off but were only weakened, checked and subdued by the training of the higher psychological capabilities. Underneath the surface they kept on lingering in the form of dormant tendencies. However, when the supra-ordinary paths are attained, the task of elimination starts. As long as they bind us to the circle of becoming, the debasements are categorised into a set of ten "fetters" (*samyojana*) as follows: (1) individuality view, (2) uncertainty, (3) holding to principles and rituals, (4) sensual craving, (5) hatred, (6) craving for fine-material existence, (7) craving for irrelevant existence, (8) vanity, (9) edginess, and (10) unintelligence. The four supra-ordinary paths each remove a certain stratum of debasements. The first, the path of stream-entry (*sotapatti-magga*),



remove the first three fetters, the prickly of the set, eradicates them so they can never emerge again. “Individuality view” (*sakkaya-ditthi*), the vision of a purely existent self in the five accumulates, is eliminated since one observes the selfless essence of all phenomena. Doubt is eradicated because one has held the verity manifested by the Buddha, observed it for oneself, and so can never again hold back owing to uncertainty. And holding to principles and rites is eliminated because one understands that liberty can be won only through the exercise of the Eightfold Path, not through rigid ethics or ritualistic observances.

The path is followed instantly by another condition of supra-ordinary awareness termed as the fruit (*phala*), which results from the path’s work of eliminating debasements. Each path is followed by its own fruit, wherein for a few times the mind enjoys the joyful serenity of Nirvana before coming down again to the level of ordinary awareness. The first fruit is the fruit of stream-entry, and an individual who has experience this fruit becomes a “stream-enterer” (*sotapanna*). He has entered the stream of the Dhamma directing him to ultimate liberty. He is bound for deliverance and can no longer retreat into the paths of an unenlightened worldly being. He still has certain debasements remaining in his psychological makeup, and it might consider him insofar seven more lives to attain at the ultimate aim, but he has obtained the necessary recognition required to attain it, and there is no way he can drop away.

An ardent practitioner with sharp capabilities, after attaining stream-entry, does not relax his struggle but affirms energy to complete the whole path as quickly as possible. He presumes his exercise of perceptive consideration, goes through the growing stages of perceptive understanding, and in time attains the second path, the path of the once-returner (*sakadagami-magga*). This supra-ordinary path does not entirely eliminate any of the fetters; however it devalues the origins of avarice, hatred, and illusion. Following the path the mediator experiences its fruit, and then arises as a “once-returner” who will come back to this earth at most only one more time before achieving full deliverance.

Furthermore, if the chore of consideration is observed at the following stage of supra-ordinary recognition he reaches the third path, the path of the non-returner (*anagami-magga*), with which he eliminates the two fetters of sensual craving and animosity. From that point on, he can never again fall under the clutch of any craving for sense gratification and can never be bewitched to exasperation,



aversion, or dissatisfaction. As a non-returner, he will not come back to the human form of existence in any future life. If he does not attain the ultimate path in this very life, then after demise he will be rebirth in a higher area in the fine-material world (*rupaloka*) and there attain liberation.

First and foremost, effort emerges, progressing into perception and at its peak, reaches the fourth path, the path of arahatship (*arahatta-magga*). With this path, the five remaining fetters get eliminated viz., the craving for fine-material existence and craving for irrelevant existence, vanity, edginess, and unintelligence. The first is the craving for reborn into the heavenly planes made attainable by the four jhanas, the planes generally included under the name “the Brahma-world.” The second is the craving for reborn into the four irrelevant planes made attainable by the accomplishment of the four irrelevant achievements. Vanity (*mana*) is not the coarse kind of ego to which an individual becomes disposed through a heightening of one’s virtuousness and talents, but the tender residue of the idea of a pride which keeps on going even after theoretically obvious views of self have been eliminated. Edginess (*uddhacca*) is the subtle eagerness which continues in any mind not yet entirely enlightened, and unintelligence (*avijja*) is the basic conscious concealment which prevents complete knowledge of the Four Noble Verities. Even though the coarse grades of unintelligence have been wiped from the mind by the intelligence capability in the first three paths, a thin cover of unintelligence laminates the verities even on those who have not come back.

The path of arahatship disrobes the concerned ultimate covering of unintelligence and with it, the complete remains of psychological defilements. This path issues flawless knowledge of the Four Noble Verities. It completely measures the verity of suffering and agony; cleanse up the craving from which agony emerges; recognises with complete manifestation the unconditioned component known as Nirvana (Pali), Nirvana (Sanskrit), as the discontinuation of agony; and perfects the progresses of the eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path or the Midway Path.

With the achievement of the fourth path and fruit the follower emerges as an arahant, the individual in the current life has been liberated from all bonds. The arahant is no more a follower of the path but its living personification. Having established the eight factors of the path to their



perfection, the enlightened one resides in the amusement of their fruits, enlightenment and ultimate liberty.¹

Hence, the Midway Path is a route to overthrow misery and can be appealed to all features of life. It comprises finding a balance between “endeavouring with conviction” and “viewing with calmness”.

Conclusion

The development of wisdom through Right View and Right Intention is the cornerstone of the Buddha’s Eightfold Path. It empowers individuals to understand the true nature of existence and to reshape their inner world in alignment with truth. With wisdom as the foundation, the remaining limbs of ethical conduct and mental discipline unfold naturally, leading to liberation from suffering.

As the Dhammapada says:

"Wisdom is the best wealth a man can possess; through wisdom, one finds the path to peace."

The path is clear, the way is open—walk it with insight and compassion.

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