

The Four Noble Truths & The Noble Eightfold Path

This teaching is based on Santosha Recovery's founder interpretation of the Buddha's teachings of The Four Noble Truths and The Noble Eightfold Path according to the writings of Thich Nhat Hanh in his book *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*.

Siddhartha Gautama was 29 when he left his family in search of a way to end suffering for himself and for others. He tried many ways of living to end his suffering and find joy but none worked. Then he studied meditation with the masters for 6 years and one day he sat under the bodhi tree and said that he would not get up until he found his answer. Night came and went, then as morning arose he had a profound breakthrough that later become his teachings of suffering and transforming of suffering into peace, joy and liberation.

What I find so interesting and humbling is that the Buddha says that without suffering and embracing your suffering you cannot grow. The Chinese refer to the Four Noble Truths as the Four Holy Truths. Using the definition of holy as sacred. "Our suffering is holy if we embrace it and look deeply into it. If we don't, it isn't holy at all. We just drown in the ocean of our suffering." And so many people do this. They move through life complaining that life is not fair, that they have been dealt a bad hand, that everyone is out to get them. And as long as they think that they will just continue to suffer. I know of many people who make excuses for their suffering. Making excuses for their drinking or other addictions. It is like saying "hey with no roof on my house, every time it rains my couch gets wet. That dang rain. It is out to get me!" If you embrace your suffering and dig to the root of the suffering, you may find that you can either put a roof on your house or get waterproof furniture. To be more literal I know someone who blamed his drinking on his survival method for being raised by a neglectful mother. And this was 30 years after he had left the guidance and house of his family.

What I find even more enlightening with the Buddha's message is that most people are suffering. Whether it is addiction, self esteem, physical and mental health, greed, self interest, separateness, or loneliness. Most people suffer and do not know that they suffer or do not know that they have a choice not to suffer.

The First Noble Truth is know that there is suffering. Suffering is called *dukkha*. We all have suffering whether in the body or the mind. We have to recognize this suffering in our lives and touch it.

The Second Noble Truth is the cause of suffering. When we recognize and touch our suffering, we need to look deeply into it and see how it came to be.

The Third Noble Truth is that suffering can be eliminated by refraining from that which is causing the suffering. That healing can happen.

The Fourth Noble Truth is that healing can happen or the cessation of creating suffering by doing what causes suffering can happen by following The Eightfold Path.

So the Buddha doesn't just say stop doing those things that make you suffer, the Buddha gives you The Eightfold Path to follow in order that you might heal and then remove that which causes suffering. He gives you a path to guide you on your journey towards happiness, joy and contentment.

The Path of Eight Practices are: Right View, Right Thinking, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration.

Right View: Whether we are happy and peaceful or whether we are suffer depends largely on our perceptions. It is important to look deeply at our perceptions and know their source. For example: As a young person a large group of motorcycle riders came to my brothers wedding party. They were crashing the party and my brothers and their friends got together and there was a brawl. I was young and feared for my brothers lives. So after that when I saw a group of motorcycle riders, I grew in anxiety and dislike. My perception of those riders later in life were false as I

did not even know them or their character. My perception of them came from an earlier childhood experience. Right View is liberating ourselves from the suffering of wrong perception.

Right Thinking: Thinking is the speech of the mind, therefore Right View is the foundation for Right Thinking. But Thich Nhat Hanh says that much of our thinking is unnecessary. Much of our thinking is preoccupied by sorrows of the past and anxieties of the future. Our thoughts are like a tape recorder playing the same thing over and over. If we practice mindfulness and being in the present moment, we begin to see where healing needs to happen and we can find peace and joy in the moment. Thich Nhat Hahn suggests that when you find yourself thinking negatively, replace those thoughts with positive thoughts. It is suggested to always ask yourself “are you sure?” Put this proposed question on your refrigerator. Many times while I have been driving on a highway, from afar I see an animal that is along side the road whom I thought was killed by a car. I get really angry and sad then to get closer and discover it was a piece of clothing or a bag of some sort laying along side the road. Useless suffering. I could of said “am I sure that is a dead animal?” and then waiting until I am close enough to see the circumstances. before getting so upset. But even then when I am close enough to see, if I was in the present moment I might thank the animal for providing food for other animals.

Right Speech: Right Thinking is a foundation of Right Speech. When our thinking is clear from Right Perception we speak truth, kindness, and words that inspire and bring hope and joy to ourselves and others. Right Speech is speaking truth and speaking pure. Speaking pure is thinking and saying the same thing. When our speech is impure, we are thinking one thing and saying another. Deep listening is also a foundation of right speech. If we cannot listen mindfully, we cannot practice right speech. If we are not listening mindfully to another then our speech is from our own ideas instead of responding to another’s needs. When we listen with our whole being, we can diffuse a lot of troubles and worries. Right Speech is also not exaggerating or embellishing. Right Speech is to try to change our habits so that we speak from the Buddha within us, and not from our unresolved and unwholesome seeds.

Right Action: Right Action follows and has as its foundation, Right View, Right Thinking and Right Speech. And the basis of Right Action is non-harming self and others. And to do everything in mindfulness. This includes mindful eating, drinking and consuming. And ingesting only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness and in the body and consciousness of my family and society. When we practice not drinking alcohol, we protect ourselves, our family and our society.

Right Livelihood: Those who earn their living by manufacturing weapons depriving other of their right to live, or earn their living by destroying the environment or exploiting nature and people or producing items that put harmful toxins into the environment are practicing wrong livelihood. Mindfulness is required to assure that your way of making a living is beneficial to society.

Right Effort: It takes great effort to develop great virtues and great effort to resist the passions of our desires. Right Effort means to know through mindfulness, the seeds of our karma in which to water (our strengths and great virtues) and the means to know which seeds not to water or come into fruition (our negative karma). What is the difference between great virtues and negative karma; it is determined which of these brings you lasting happiness. It is determined by that which brings you to your spiritual goal. It is determined by that which brings you closer to being compassionate and loving towards all sentient beings. Right Mindfulness is the foundation of Right Effort.

Right Mindfulness: Right Mindfulness is at the heart of the Buddhas teachings. To cultivate mindfulness within ourselves is to find the Buddha within ourselves. Mindfulness is what brings us into the present moment. When we are mindful, we have all the other elements of The Eightfold Path and we are aware of The Four Noble Truths. And the practice to Mindfulness is through the body and the breath.

Right Concentration: Right Concentration will come after one has practiced all the other elements of The Eightfold Path. Right Concentration leads to being able to sit and move into a state of absorption. This is the way to lasting happiness, bliss (*ananda*) and enlightenment.