

HOMEWORK:

1) Print out a copy of the unwholesome/wholesome intentions sheet.

When you find that a stressful situation has arisen, reflect on what's going through your mind and emotions, either by journaling or reflection.

Using the list as a reference, ask yourself what unwholesome intentions might be present. Remember, you are not fixing or changing them, just seeing they are present. Honor them with a bow.

Then look at the list of wholesome intentions. What wholesome intentions might be cultivated instead? What is it you truly want from the situation, what intention will best make that possible?

See what happens, what improves and what gets in the way.

Next week we will come back and look at what works, and the barriers and obstacles.

2) Keep a regular sitting practice.

INTRODUCING THE EIGHTFOLD PATH

In the last class, we talked about the promise and possibility of the first three Noble Truths.

OK, what next? For most of us, the brochure sounds good, but upon hearing it, there has not been some magic effect. Our suffering has not stopped. Clearly something more is needed to actually realize the end of, or to experience the lessening of suffering.

How do we start? What do we do while we are where we are? Right where we are, with all our identifications, stories, delusions, and agendas?

There is something more, additional steps needed to find the fulfillment of the first three Truths. We need a how-to-proceed operating instruction manual of some kind.

What's needed a plan of action that will work in the places we are now: identified with separation, with our ego needs and patterns, with the seemingly separate self. However, to be effective, it needs to remain useful as we become less caught and begin to find more freedom in the growing observer. Ideally, this training will still be valid when established in the bigger inner container beyond the ego, living life from 'big mind', our essential nature.

This plan of action is the Fourth Noble Truth, the Eightfold Path.

Some general principles that are helpful:

1) Understood to be 'the middle way'. This means it is balancing act, a dynamic process, more than a future destination. As such, it does not involve extremes, which tend to be static points of view held rigidly.

2) It is about living, not only formal practice. It is having our practice inform our lives, and aligning our lives to support our growing realization. The deeper understanding is that any spiritual work that does not help us find a more loving, more compassionate place to stand in the world has limited value. A path of value must be a path with heart.

3) Understanding the use of the word 'right'. (As in right speech, right view, right effort, etc.). "Right", as used here, is not right and wrong, but right as in:

- aligned with truth
- aligned with harmony and compassion.
- co-operative with peace and non suffering.

4) The eightfold path can be used as a diagnostic touchstone. When we feel stuck, or numb, or caught in a habitual pattern that is not serving us, we can look at this map to see what is missing, what we need to bring us back into vibrancy, into freely open hearted living. Often, when we feel stuck in some way, we look at the eightfold path and see a limb of the path that needs attending to, that is out of balance.

The Eightfold Path defines eight areas vital to this realization process, which subdivide into three categories or limbs of this path:

- **panna** (wisdom, or right understanding and right intention),
- **sila** (living ethically, or right speech, right action, right livelihood),
- **samadhi** (fully present, or right mindfulness, right concentration, right effort).

At the beginning, where we are mostly in the ego-identified place of separation, this is training, pure and simple. We start by beginning to see and shift the reactive beliefs and identities that keep us in stress. This takes an effort of will, because it means seeing deep seated patterns, which is uncomfortable because it challenges the status quo. This will comes from the first three Noble Truths, seeing clearly how suffering works and wanting to find our way out.

INTRODUCING PANNA:

RIGHT VIEW or RIGHT UNDERSTANDING: understanding the cause of suffering, and seeing how it is tied to the limitations and the misunderstandings of the ego-identified separated sense of self. Eventually, we see that all stress comes from this 'small mind', and naturally seek to live in 'big mind', or within our awake and free center.

RIGHT THINKING or RIGHT INTENTION:

Knowing the difference between wholesome and unwholesome intentions activating our thoughts and actions. These can be described as reactions, forces, emotional pulls and desires, craving pleasant and pushing away unpleasant things.

Thich Nat Hanh calls these 'roots', an apt term, as roots are the hidden (i.e. unseen or largely unconscious) forces that sustain the plant growth above ground (that are visible and what we notice).

Right view and intention means seeing unwholesome forces that cause us to speak and act in ways that cause suffering, and choosing not to follow their impulses.

Important: this is not about fixing. It is about abandoning. This means noticing them when they are present and not following their energies. This is an act of will, and the energy to do this comes from right understanding. We know that to follow them will mean remaining trapped in suffering.

What do we mean by wholesome and unwholesome roots? In class, we worked up a list of both unwholesome and wholesome intentions, and did a short exercise seeing them in our lives in stressful situations. They are useful to keep around for reference, so are a separate attachment that you can print out.

Choosing to abandon the first list and cultivate the second list initially is an act of will, especially in the face of hurt feelings or pain. It's hard to walk away from our inner sense of grievance. However, once we start to experience the freedom that results when we do, it becomes easier and easier. Like anything worth doing, it takes time and practice. The results begin slowly, and become cumulative, until being in a place of stress is so different than our norm that it alerts us that something needs to be attended to and we attend to it.