

RIGHT ACTION

We are focusing on sila. The idea here is that we do this not to be good girls and boys, or more perfect people. Sila is for our own happiness and joy, and thus a great gift we can bring to the world around us.

The Eightfold Path is a driver's manual of practical training and instruction to move us into a place where we can begin to align our small, separated, ego-based sense of self to the larger, connected space of the Ground of Being that is already here but obscured by the dualistic mind.

We turn our attention to wise (right) action. The pali word for 'right' is "samma", which is not right as opposed to wrong. Samma means with complete view, with right understanding, with the presence of mindfulness.

Watch your thoughts, they become your words; watch your words, they become your actions; watch your actions, they become your habits; watch your habits, they become your character; watch your character, it becomes your destiny."

— Lao Tzu

Do you find that to be true? that what you repeat to yourself in your mind tends to come out of your mouth, that actions you think about doing are the ones that end up happening, and that words and actions tend to form patterns that repeat?

If there is a one sentence explanation of wise action, one might say that wise action is the action that flows from the Ground of Being, when the ego-identified mind is not in the way. It is light, obvious, with effortless effort and flows with the natural current of life.

Ok, the brochure sounds great, but here we are in our small selves, not sure of what this theoretical Ground is. Where do we start? We need sort of a "fake it till you make it" training in the meantime, which is what the Eightfold Path is.

The training will not wake you up into the larger Ground, but it will align your lived experience within the small mind so that the two are in parallel, going the same direction with the same intention. When the two are aligned, the larger awareness can begin to connect and permeate through the fog of the small self.

Here's some background from the suttas as to what Wise action might be:

*"And how is one made pure in three ways by bodily action? There is the case where a certain person, **abandoning the taking of life**, abstains from the taking of life. He dwells with his rod laid down, his knife laid down, scrupulous, merciful, compassionate for the welfare of all living beings. **Abandoning the taking of what is not given**, he abstains from taking what is not given. He does not take, in the manner of a thief, things in a village or a wilderness that belong to others and have not been given by them. **Abandoning sensual misconduct**, he*

abstains from sensual misconduct. He does not get sexually involved with those who are protected by their mothers, their fathers, their brothers, their sisters, their relatives, or their Dhamma; those with husbands,. This is how one is made pure in three ways by bodily action."

— *Āṅguttara Nikāya* X 176

Pretty much aligns with the reading from Thich Nat Hanh, who correlates right action with the mindfulness trainings:

- non-harm, protecting and revering all life
- generosity
- abstaining from sensual misconduct (we might also add relationship misconduct)
- consuming mindfully, protecting the body - and the planet

Secondly, with intention and mindfulness as primary supports.

"One tries to abandon wrong action & to enter into right action: This is one's right effort. One is mindful to abandon wrong action & to enter & remain in right action: This is one's right mindfulness. Thus these three qualities — right view, right effort, & right mindfulness — run & circle around right action."

— *Mahima Nikaya* 117

Each one of us knows what right action is, the taste and feel of it. We each know this because the truth in our beings expresses right action as a natural flow of life energy. We each have a core of wisdom and compassion that is inherently expressed in right action

Here's a list of what wise action feels like. We all know it. Please note this includes non-action: times we refrain from doing.

loving - warm and connected
light - like a feather
free, releasing - letting go of the burden of control supportive
clarity- both in doing and as a response
peaceful
allowing- letting go of clinging
wells up with presence
obvious- just presents itself
energizing, energy producing

effortless, just sort of rolls out
grateful- being able to pay things forward
complete lack of resistance- no other option seems possible aligned
satisfactory, no regrets
enough- not needing more and more

Single words:

kind

balanced
healing
order
life giving
on track
useful
simplicity
creative
self aware
authentic
expressive
unconflicted
spontaneous - not 'figured out' in the mind

Right action works in either direction, cultivating any of the qualities in the list above leads to right action and right action leads to the qualities.

Appreciating beauty and peace in life, listening to good music, taking time to smell the flowers, doing useful things and keeping our lives in order, simplifying and so forth connect us to that core from which right action flows as a natural consequence.

As with skillful speech, it is transparent:

We each do right action many times every day. Yet we tend not to notice it. Why? Like skillful speech, wise action is clear, leaves no trace of injury. There's a transparency, a not-doingness, and thus it tends to fall below the radar of the ego. What we do tend to notice is when we fall short of right action, that does leave a trace. It leaves karmic baggage that follows us. We feel uncomfortable, we spend mental time trying to justify our actions, which is an outflow of the discomfort, knowing something is wrong and trying to make it right. Falling short does leave a trace, it feels solid and opaque, it sticks in our craw.

One of our son's girlfriends once confessed that the first few months she spent time with our family was hard for her. She said our family seemed invisible, she could not see the flow of relationship very well. She further explained that there was so much tension in her family of origin you could feel it the moment you walked through the door. Because the relationships were strained, they were solid, dense, palpable. You could see it in the

edge of someone's voice, in harsh retorts or in closing someone out. This was familiar and home territory for her.

Being in a grouping not defined by tensions felt weird and unfamiliar. She felt she could not 'see' anything or understand what the relationships were. It took a while for her to understand that the ease of hanging out together, the lack of strain, WAS the relationship, was the flow of the family. It needed a new kind of orienting to.

In a similar way, we tend by default to notice the places in our lives of conflict and strain. They feel more palpable. Focusing on right action in our lives in order to see it and to see that it is already expressing, but is transparent. We tend to not notice it. The clarity, the flow, the ease of it is the medium of a life without suffering. Much like the girlfriend, we tend to see things in terms of stress, stress makes it feel solid and real. We train in order to become used to this transparency, this lack of issues and stress, as the normal baseline from which to live.

The fact is, we know all this already. There's not anything new here. So it's easy to blow off these teachings, assume there's not much to do.

The challenge here in these trainings is to actually engage this work. Actually give it some thought and attention. See if doing so makes a difference.

You were given a 'right action' worksheet in class - also attached to this email. Notice the square that jumps out to you, and reflect on it. Write down ways wise action is or could express in that aspect of your life. This includes non - action. What might you put in this square?

HOMEWORK:

We need to work this in order to see what difference it makes. Two underlying fundamental principles that underpin our homework:

1) **What we focus on tends to become bigger in our lives.** This is a well known principle in training. We focus on right actions, trusting that the times we fall short will take care of themselves.

Pick a word from the right action list that jumps out for you. Work on one word at a time. Make that word your mantra. Write it on the bathroom mirror, on your phone screen.

During the day, look for that mantra expressing. Look for those qualities in your actions, and in your life. The words will also highlight its opposite as it occurs also.

For example, if your word is "free, releasing", notice the moments you feel free and flowing, notice the moments you feel trapped.

If your word is "energizing", notice the moments you feel filled with energy and are ready for life. Notice the moments you feel drained.

2) Pick one square in your work sheet and focus on it for a day or two. Then switch to another square. Reflect some, fill in some suggestions, and focus on it.

See if it makes a difference.

with love,

Susan