

Path to End Suffering

The Fourth True Reality for the Spiritually Ennobled: The Path to the Cessation of the Painful

In the first sermon, the Buddha has this to say on the Path:

Monks, these two extremes should not be followed by one gone forth [into the renunciant life]. What two? That which is this pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of the ordinary person, ignoble, not connected to the goal; and that which is this pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, not connected to the goal. Monks, without veering towards either of these two extremes, the *Tathagata* has awakened to the middle way (*majjhima patipada*, Skt *madhyama pratipad*), which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to higher knowledge, to full awakening, to *Nirvana*.

And what, monks, is that middle way . . .? It is just this noble eight-factored path (*ariya atthangika magga*, Skt *aryastangika marga*) . . .

Now *this*, monks, for the spiritually ennobled, is the true reality which is the way leading to the cessation of the painful. It is this noble eight-factored path, that is to say, [1] right view, [2] right resolve, [3] right speech, [4] right action, [5] right livelihood, [6] right effort, [7] right mindfulness, [8] right mental unification. (numbers added) (*Samyutta Nikāya* v.420-4).

The Noble Eight-factored Path is a middle way that avoids a life of pursuing either sense-pleasures or harsh asceticism, and it leads to the cessation of *dukkha* . . .

The Path has eight factors (*anga*), each described as right or perfect (*samma*, Skt *samyak*; S.v.8-10; BW.239-40). These factors are also grouped into three sections (M.I.301). Factors 1-2 pertain to *panna* (Skt *prajna*), or wisdom; factors 3-5 pertain to *sila* (Skt *sila*), moral virtue; factors 6-8 pertain to *samadhi*, meditation. The eight factors exist at two basic levels, the ordinary (*lokiya*, Skt *laukika*), and the transcendent (*lokuttara*, Skt *lokottara*) or Noble, so that there is both an ordinary and a Noble Eight-factored Path (M.III.71-8).

In the Table, the key difference between the ordinary and Noble Paths can be seen to arise from the different forms of right view. The order of the eight Path-factors is seen as that of a natural progression, with one factor following on from the one before it.

Right view comes first (S.V.2) because it knows the right and wrong form of each of the eight factors; it also counteracts spiritual ignorance, the first factor in Conditioned Arising (S.V.1– 2; SB. 226). From the cool knowing of right view blossoms right resolve, a right way of thinking/aspiring, which has a balancing warmth. From this, a person's speech becomes improved, and thus his or her action. Once he is working on right action, it becomes natural to incline towards a virtuous livelihood. With this as basis, there can be progress in right effort. This facilitates the development of right mindfulness, whose clarity then allows the development of the calm of meditative concentration.

Neither the ordinary nor the Noble Path is to be understood as a single progression from the first to eighth factor, however. Right effort and mindfulness work with right view to support the development of all the Path-factors (M.III.72–5): the Path-factors mutually support each other to allow a gradual deepening of the way in which the Path is trodden. Each Path-factor is a skilful state to be cultivated; it progressively wears away its opposite 'wrong' factor, until all unskilful states are destroyed.

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