

The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path (ariya atthangika magga)

PERFECT VISION**The Eightfold Path in general: The Path of Vision and the Path of Transformation**
the Path of Vision**initial flash of insight, which can arise, e.g.:**

- a. through meditation
- b. through bereavement
- c. through deep thought or aesthetic experience
- d. through spontaneous spiritual experience
- e. through general experience of life
- f. through altruistic activity

flashes of insight generally: need to be kept alive**the Path of Transformation**

all the other seven angas of the path

transformation of emotion, communication, behaviour, livelihood, effort, awareness, and higher consciousness

these are not a path in the sense of a series of steps. *Anga* means limb – see them like developing parts of a body, the body of your spiritual life. Or like spokes of a wheel, growing out of a centre.

Even *samyak drsti* – the initial spark of vision – is like this: it's a growing faculty. Flashes of insight increase, grow and are supported by the development of the path of transformation. Vision – transformation – more vision – more transformation.

Samyak Drsti

Not an intellectual understanding, though it may be conditioned and stimulated by right intellectual understanding (*samyak drsti* in sense of Right View)

A seeing of the nature of existence

this seeing can be expressed in various different ways – these ways are concretised in images and conceptual formulae

important to understand that these formulae are simply expressions, not the actual seeing of reality. Understanding the image or the conceptual formula may point us in the right direction, but it is not the insight itself.

Images

Wheel of Life
the Buddha
the Path

conceptual formulae**the Four Noble Truths**

1. unsatisfactoriness
2. its cause
3. its cessation or nirvana
1. the path to that cessation, i.e. the Eightfold Path.

Three Characteristics of Conditioned Existence***Conditioned existence is suffering***

1. actual suffering i.e. pain

2. potential suffering, i.e. you will lose everything
3. metaphysical suffering, i.e. nothing conditioned can fully satisfy the heart, only the unconditioned.

Conditioned existence is impermanent

this applies to everything. You can't hang on to anything.

All existence is devoid of true selfhood

if everything is impermanent, if there is nothing that doesn't change, it means that there is no centre, no core, to anything – not even to ourselves. We can only think in those terms, but that is not the actual situation.

Karma and Rebirth

This is also a kind of insight – one sees vividly how all beings are changing themselves through their actions, and how they are continually reborn in the states of being and consciousness which arise out of those actions.

The Four Sunyatas

Emptiness of the Conditioned: Samskrta sunyata

Samskrta means 'put together' or 'constructed'. This is perhaps a better term than 'conditioned', because it points to the fact that our experience of the world is our own construction of reality, our own assembly. We add up all the experiences we have and we construct them into a particular kind of world. But this world is seen very much from our individual point of view. Others have a different experience, and certainly a Buddha, who sees things as they really are, will see things quite differently. So this construction of ours is empty. The constructs of time, and space, and other mental concepts like 'me' and 'you' and 'it' which we use all the time, are not ultimately real. Reality is not describable in those terms, reality is beyond description of any kind, beyond our constructions of language and ideas. So our constructions are, as it were, empty. 'Empty' here is a poetic image. It doesn't mean just a vacuum. It really means 'open' or 'unlimited by concepts'. So this is the first level of sunyata, when we start to see more and more how our world consists of these constructs. We might notice it in quite small ways at first. Someone might, for example, tell us a little home truth about ourselves. And with this little, well meaning truth, our whole world tumbles down. Our self image has to change. Our self image is a complex construct, and we depend on it very much. When we are forced to change our ideas, it's possible that we start to see that the whole way we see existence is like this. In this way we can see that our unenlightened existence is a web of constructions.

In other words this conditioned experience of reality we have is empty of the real, unconstructed, nature of existence. This unenlightened experience is characterised by unsatisfactoriness and impermanence. Whereas the realm of the unconditioned, or the unconstructed, the real nature of things, is characterised by complete satisfactoriness. It is also characterised by a transcendence of time and space, so the notion of impermanence doesn't fit any more.

Emptiness of the Unconditioned: asamskrta sunyata

Which brings us to the second level of sunyata, the Emptiness of what is unconstructed, or the asamskrta sunyata. Reality as it is, is completely open in a way it is difficult for us to imagine. So it is said to be empty of the characteristics of the world we construct. It just isn't like that.

So with these first two levels of sunyata we look at samsara, and we look at nirvana, in complementary terms. On the one hand, our samsaric experience, being a mere web of constructions, does not display the characteristics of nirvana. It is empty of the characteristics of nirvana. On the other hand if we were Enlightened and perceived things as they are, free from our ignorance, it would not be like we experience it now. Nirvana is empty, or free, from the characteristics of samsara.

Great Emptiness: Maha Sunyata

But there is a further level of sunyata which goes beyond this complementarity. This is Great Emptiness or Maha Sunyata. Maha means great. This notion of Mahasunyata, great sunyata, refers to the fact that ultimately you can't make a distinction between our samsaric experience and a Buddha's nirvanic experience. Sure, one is unenlightened and the other is enlightened, but both Enlightenment and unEnlightenment pertain to the same experience, the same basic stuff of life. The difference is in the interpretation. The unenlightened person just misinterprets what is happening, constructs it wrongly, sees things wrongly. The Enlightened person is free from this tendency to construct a world in terms of a permanent self, etcetera. He sees things as they actually are. But the raw material, the basic reality, is the same. It's the same reality, it's just that one sees it and one doesn't. And that reality is empty, In other words it is totally free and unbounded. So in this way, Mahasunyata refers to the non-difference between samsara and nirvana. They are equally empty.

the Emptiness of Emptiness: Sunyata Sunyata

The Emptiness of Emptiness, the Sunyata Sunyata is an important reminder that despite these profound levels of sunyata, actually what we still have is an *idea* of sunyata. For us, sunyata – even Mahasunyata – is a concept. We are constructing our own concept of sunyata as I speak. That's all we can do, unless we have the Buddha's vision. That is the only way that we can conceive of things, at present. But this teaching reminds us that that constructive, conceptual understanding is what we are creating, even out of the idea of sunyata. So it undoes the concept of sunyata itself, saying that that is also sunya, the concept of emptiness is itself empty.

In fact all these ways of expressing the Buddha's samyak drsti or Perfect Vision, like the four sunyatas, or the four noble truths, or the three characteristics of existence, are conceptual. They have to be. That's why it's also good to speak in terms of images and symbols, like the image of the path. The eightfold path itself uses an image, the image of a journey along a path. Even though, as we've seen, that also is inadequate as a description, such an image is good as an alternative, as a counterweight to our more rational way of understanding.

In fact now we have a few ways of looking at Perfect vision, even the path of vision. Over the next few days we'll look at the next seven *angas* of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, which comprise what is known as the Path of Transformation.

PERFECT EMOTION

Difference between reason and emotion, theory and practice.

Chinese Emperor and Indian bhikshu: what is the essence of Buddhism? 'Cease to evil, learn to do good' – easy to say, hard to practice.

We know– but it is so difficult to put into practice sometimes

We are not just reason. We are also emotion. Emotion is much less conscious. Unconscious mind contains many things, including lots of resistance and negativity. And emotion is stronger than reason.

What we want to do motivates us far more strongly than what we feel, or think intellectually, that we *ought* to do. It is very hard indeed for us to go against what we want to do.

Yet in a way, the Path is a whole set of 'oughts', and 'shoulds'. The Dharma is just a huge collection of different methods. It's all practice. It's up to you to practice the methods or not, but if you don't, you don't get the results. So if you want Enlightenment, if you see your need for spiritual growth and development, you naturally want to put the methods into practice – practice sila, samadhi and prajna. So you feel you need to do this, need to maintain awareness of that, reflect on this, reflect on that.

But you don't always want to.

That's rather tough at times.

But at least in Buddhism we can't say that we've been told to do these things by God. No one has said that we must do this, and we now have to obey, or else. It is just that our awareness has made us realise that we need to develop such and such. In Buddhism, it's our choice, every time. We have to make the decision, the commitment, again and again at different levels of our being. There's no one out there going to make us do it. Now perhaps we sometimes wish there was. Perhaps not having someone to obey sometimes just makes it even more difficult. Because it's entirely up to us whether or not we practice the Buddha's teaching.

And sometimes, of course, we encounter resistance. Our emotions get in the way. So this is the area, this is the field, and occasionally it's almost a battlefield, within which the second aspect of the Buddha's eightfold

path comes into operation. Emotion is stronger than reason – reason may be much clearer and much more straightforward, but emotion usually wins the contest.

This, you could say, is the area of resolve. The term for right or perfect emotion is *samyak samkalpa* (Sanskrit) or *samma sankappa* in Pali. *Samkalpa* really means will, the volitional side of our nature. *Samyak* means right, whole or perfect, so *samyak samkalpa* means the harmonisation of the whole volitional or emotional side of our nature – as opposed to the rational.

This transformation of volition affects the whole of the rest of the Path of transformation, affects all the other stages of the path. So it's sort of mid way between the path of vision and the rest, it's the turning point you could say.

Emotional transformation is the crucial point for us, because we need to make the path real. The path is abstract to us. *Sunyata*, the four noble truths, are mostly abstractions. We need to turn them into emotional realities. We need emotional equivalents for our intellectual understandings. In other words we need to be emotionally involved in the Teaching. We need to involve our emotions in our practice of the Dharma.

But how to involve our emotions in our practice of Buddhism? It's not a matter of involving our crude emotions – for example getting very worked up and shouting with anger because we can't meditate. That is getting emotionally involved but it is not what we are talking about.

What we are talking about is a transformation of our volitional life, a transformation in *what we want*. How does this take place? It isn't something we can think ourselves into. It won't be enough just to see that the transformation is necessary. That's why the first stage of the path isn't just right view. The first stage of the path is that flash of spiritual vision, and it is only that flash which can change us emotionally.

You can see the transformation negatively or positively.

Negatively:

renunciation

Renunciation means wanting to give certain things up. You see something in your life, something that needs to be changed, some addiction or other. You are subject to craving, and you see what that is doing to you. And you see that it will help that tendency to craving if you give something up, you renounce it. It might be a kind of behaviour, physical or mental, or vocal. It might be something you own. But the desire to let it go comes quite naturally. It might be a little difficult actually to give it away or give it up, when it comes to the crunch, but nevertheless you do it, and it makes you happier. You'd grown out of it, you didn't need it anyway. In other words your tight grip on the things which once brought you security has relaxed a bit, and you don't mind if you have them or not.

There's no uniform pattern to renunciation. You can hardly get annoyed with someone for not being a vegan, for example, if you are totally addicted to designer labels, and vice versa. People have different concerns, different conditionings. Most Buddhist monks aren't even vegetarian, but they give a lot of other things up. So there's no point in making yourself give things up in a forced kind of a way. It shouldn't be a sacrifice. It should come relatively naturally, though of course some conflict will be involved. When it does come naturally, it shows that there has been some emotional transformation as a result of the vision which fires your spiritual efforts.

Patience

Or non-hatred. The negative emotion of hatred is caused by the frustration we feel when we don't get what we want. We hardly ever get what we want, in fact, and if we aren't careful we can, quite unconsciously, be deeply resentful of this. Not only that, we may seek revenge on the rest of humanity – an attitude which will make life much more frustrating, because others will pick it up straight away, unconsciously of course, and turn away from us. But practising perfect emotion, we see through this tendency in ourselves, and we are able to give up that kind of retaliatory attitude. We become patient, more understanding of others and ourselves. We become less inclined to cruelty.

Positive aspect of perfect emotion

1. Dana
2. Maitri
3. Karuna
4. Mudita
5. Upeksha: tranquillity of mind. Especially as a result of seeing that all beings have to experience the

result of their actions.

6. Sraddha: confidence trust, seeing the value of the Three Jewels

The sevenfold puja as an expression of positive emotion, and also a practice to develop it.

1. Worship
2. Offerings
3. Going for refuge
4. Confession of faults
5. Rejoicing in merits
6. Opening to the teaching
7. Transference of merits

PERFECT SPEECH (Samyak Vaca)

Vaca = speech.

Significant that speech is considered to be a separate limb of the path.

In a way, just a kind of action. But Buddhism sees communication as especially important.

Buddhism sees each person not just in terms of body and mind, but in terms of body, *speech* and mind. Speech comes between body and mind. In terms of the main *chakras* or psychic centres which are brought more and more alive through spiritual practice, the throat centre is associated with speech and communication; and the throat centre is located midway between the centre associated with the physical body – which is at the head, because the body and senses are centred on the physical brain – located between the head centre and the centre located at the heart, the heart of course being the seat of the emotions. Between head and heart lies speech. The head, that is the brain, is also associated with the intellect, with thinking. So speech, which lies between head and heart, you could also say bridges head and heart, it shares the nature of both. With our speech we can express ideas. With our speech we can also express how we feel, we can express what we want, what is in our heart.

We cannot not communicate. We have to communicate. We use speech a lot of the time, we also write, which is also a form of verbal expression, and we also speak in our heads, speak in our imagination. We speak in our dreams. Speaking is one of the main things we do, it's something we identify very strongly with. It is a major part of our ego-identity. It matters to us whether we are heard, it makes a big difference whether or not we are understood, we care whether or not we can communicate what we think and feel. It can be a crucial issue whether or not we can communicate something that is actually happening. In short, if we can't communicate, we have a problem. Communication is something that can be well done, it is something that can be poorly done.

And speech is something that is particularly human. Maybe some animals have a form of speech, I'm sure they do, but human language is something extremely rich and really quite wonderful, if you start thinking about what poetry and literature can do. Literature opens up for us a far greater appreciation of what it means to be human than we can expect to find in our ordinary experience.

In short, there is a whole world of speech and words which is as real and as important as the world of pure mind, and as important as the purely physical world of physical objects. It is in fact the world of speech which helps us more than anything else to understand the worlds of mind and matter. Speech teaches us meaning. Anyway, perhaps we don't have to define what we're talking about any longer. You get the idea. You get the idea from the words, from my speech, about the nature of speech as Buddhism sees it. In terms of Buddhist practice, in terms of the Buddha's eightfold path, speech is especially singled out as an area for our further development.

four precepts of speech

In the Buddhist Order I belong to, the Western Buddhist Order, we undertake to practice four precepts of speech which are taken from the Buddha's early teachings.

They are: first of all, to speak the truth, and not to speak anything false; secondly, to speak in a way that is kind and friendly, that is not rough and harsh; thirdly, to communicate in a way that is helpful, not always to just chat uselessly; and fourthly, to speak in a way that promotes harmony, and to avoid communication that tends to set people against one another.

These four precepts, or principles of training, are not just different aspects of the art of transforming one's

faculty of speech, they are also different *levels* of that art, each one more profound than the last. This progressive deepening will, I hope, become clear as I go through the four.

truthful speech

what is the truth?

factual accuracy

not exaggerating or minimising or embroidering: watch tendencies!

Psychological / spiritual truth

attitude: sincerity, honesty. Others pick it up immediately. What is *really* on your mind? What *aren't* you saying?!

But do we actually know what we think? NO! Trying to speak the truth reveals our lack of self knowledge, lack of inner dialogue. Need self inquiry. Learn to discover what we think, at least provisionally, is the truth. We rarely and perhaps never speak the whole truth!

loving speech

affectionate, friendly. Not rude or harsh – swearing; hard, antagonistic, fear-based attitude.

Aware of the other person. First level of right speech is about us, expressing truth. This is about us in relation to *others*.

Look at them! Empathise. *Listen* to them. Attitude of wanting to get to know others.

We very often don't see others at all as they actually are. We see what we like or dislike – very subjective.

Not communication at all.

we need to see this in ourselves before communication is possible.

There is so much misunderstanding in the world. We can make a difference. Especially by practising the next two levels of perfect speech.

helpful speech

speak so that others feel appreciated.

Not discouraging, unhelpful.

It's difficult *really* to help others, even if we want to. To do that, we need to know properly what they actually need. This takes a lot of insight, and we need actually to know them. That's why this level of speech comes after the stage of friendliness and empathy.

It's no help to others if we're going around being a Buddhist bore and giving spiritual teachings all the time, assuming we know exactly what others need.

Have an attitude of wanting to be of use. A Bodhisattva-like quality. Shantideva: 'Just as the earth and other elements are useful to all beings, may I also be of use to all beings everywhere'. This attitude affects our speech.

harmonious speech.

Certainly not being disharmonious, not being divisive – speaking behind someone's back so that others get a distorted impression; making divisions between people. Instead, creating harmony with all our communication. If we are truthful, friendly, and helpful in our communication, we start to get on to a completely different level in which we forget ourselves a bit. Communication is much less about our getting our point of view across, making sure we are understood, and making sure we get what we want in communication.

You are much more interested in getting *others* into communication. So in this way you transcend your own interests, and the effect on others is that they do too. So there is a mutual self-transcendence, a mutual transcendence of habitual clinging to a fixed idea of oneself. And you try to do this all the time, until that way of communication becomes simply natural, simply the way you communicate.

The more you are authentic and truthful, the more others can trust you, the more you are able to be friendly.

The more you can express friendship in communication, the more use you are to others. Communication becomes most useful when it enables others to enter this path of increasingly illuminatory communication.

So this is the Buddha's vision of the perfection of communication, seen through the four speech precepts:

Truthful speech

Friendly speech

Helpful speech

Harmonious speech.

PERFECT ACTION

Recap: perfect vision à perfect emotion à perfect speech, **action**, and livelihood.

Speech, action and livelihood are all aspects of sila, which means skilful or ethical action.

Yesterday we explored the ethics of speech. Tomorrow we explore the ethics of livelihood. Today we explore the core principles of Buddhist ethics.

Current ideas of morality

Remember that our own cultural background is a Christian, theistic morality. In theism, morality is conceived in terms of crime and punishment. Morality is seen as the law of God. And to disobey the law of God is a sin which will be punished.

Most people these days in the west are not practising Christians. Even if they are, most of them no longer conceive of God in quite the same way. But even so, most of us still tend to conceive of morality as something imposed upon us which we are expected to obey without question.

At the same time, we no longer believe in God, at least not God the Law-giver. So of course we don't feel very inclined to obey the moral law. It is understandable if we see little point in obeying the commandments of a being who doesn't seem to exist.

So in this way morality has become an area of confusion. There is a BBC radio programme which still, I think, goes out every week, called 'the Moral Maze' and this title just about sums up our dilemma. There seems to be no clear criterion for good human behaviour. We can see that it's wrong to kill and exploit people, and other things too, but it is no longer clear why it is wrong. It is clear that some actions are good, but why? In the aftermath of the death of God, we have no reasons for morality any more. While God was around, it was nice and clear. You were good, because God said you had to be, otherwise he'd punish you. Now we don't believe that, we need other reasons, more persuasive reasons, for being good. On the whole, we are good people, we have a kind of morality, but we can't really explain it.

The fact that Buddhism offers a non-theistic criterion for moral behaviour perhaps partially explains why it is becoming popular in the west. Buddhism is very strong indeed on morality, yet its morality is not a morality of 'do this or else'. So what is its ethical criterion?

what is Buddhist ethical criterion?

It is that the goodness of an action depends on the state of mind with which it is performed. One of the earliest Buddhist texts we know contains the following very interesting statement:

Mind is the forerunner of all things... mind is their chief; they are made up of mind. If one speaks or acts with an impure mind, then because of that, suffering follows, just as the wheel follows the ox who draws the cart.

Mind is the forerunner of all things... mind is their chief; they are made up of mind. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, then because of that, happiness follows, just as one's shadow never leaves one.

In other words the criterion for ethics, what makes an action good or bad, is the state of mind with which it is performed. If one's action or speech is motivated by an impure state of mind, then the result, for you, will be suffering. If it is motivated by a pure state, then happiness will be the result for you.

We also notice another little ethical principle here: the result of the action. Actions are seen as having consequences in terms of happiness and suffering. So what characterises a good action is the fact that it creates happiness. What characterises a bad action is that it creates suffering. So here we have the basis of all Buddhist ethical practice. An action is seen as moral if its motivation is pure and if its result, for the one who acts, is happiness.

So this is very interesting, because it makes us personally responsible, not only for the morality of our actions, but also for our state of happiness in the future. If this is how life works, this really does give us very good reasons for behaving in an ethical manner. It isn't that God will punish or reward us. Perhaps actually that is just the crude, mythic way of expressing the same truth. It is that our actions are self-rewarding and self-punishing. Goodness is its own reward. Evil is its own punishment.

But this also raises quite a few questions. In particular, What is this impure or pure mind which will produce

suffering or happiness if we act with it? And how exactly is it that the happiness, or the suffering follows – what is the process involved?

the next few verses of this same text, the Dhammapada, provide an answer:

“He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me”, in those who harbour such thoughts hatred is not appeased.

“He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me”, in those who do not harbour such thoughts hatred is appeased.

Hatreds never cease through hatred in this world; through love alone they cease. This is an eternal law.

In other words, an impure mind is one that is affected by negative emotions such as hatred and craving, and a pure mind is one that is not. Negative emotion produces more negative emotion. What is needed is positive emotion. Skilful action is motivated by love. Unskillful action is that action which is motivated by hatred or craving.

so in this way we come to the Buddhist precepts or principles of ethics. I use the word principles in contrast to the idea of commandments. The way we chant the five or the ten precepts illustrates this. As we chant each precept we say, ‘veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami’, which means ‘I undertake the training principle to abstain from (whatever the precept is).’ The precepts are expressed in this way, as abstentions from something negative, but they can also be expressed positively, and this is what we do in the Western Buddhist Order. We first chant the precepts in Pali in the traditional way, and then give, in English or other local language, the positive version of the precepts. So I’ll just list these, and then we can go into the details of how each one is understood in practice.

five precepts as prohibitions

1. taking life
2. taking what is not given
3. sexual misconduct
4. false speech
5. intoxicating substances.

Now the positive version of each of these, the positive quality which Buddhist practitioners undertake to create:

five precepts as positive action

1. Helping others
2. Generosity
3. Sexual contentment
4. Truthful speech
5. Mindfulness.

Now we’ll go into both the positive quality and the negative quality to be abstained from.

other sets of ethical precepts

There are also quite a number of other sets of ethical precepts, such as the ten ways of skilful action, the 150 Monastic rules and precepts, the 64 Bodhisattva precepts, and the eight special precepts which some lay Buddhists observe on full moon days. But all of them are based on these five, they just go into more specific detail. So these five are the most important of all. And of the five, the first – not harming but helping others – is the most basic of all. All ethical behaviour comes out of that.

How are we to work on our ethical behaviour?

It’s a process of awareness. We just start to notice more often when we are falling short of the standard we set ourselves. In a way, you could say, the path of developing ethical awareness is a path in which we increasingly develop a good conscience. This good conscience is considered very important, because it gives us confidence, and removes fear, hesitation, and conflict.

We never practice the precepts perfectly; we are always breaking them or compromising them. It’s important to acknowledge this and not give ourselves too hard a time over our constant failings. The point is to acknowledge when we compromise the precepts and to keep trying our best to practice them. But we constantly fail, so this means we have to deal with the whole area of shame and guilt feelings.

Shame

In Buddhism shame is seen as a very positive emotion, but shame is distinguished from what we call irrational

guilt. Shame or *hiri* is an interesting emotion. In the heart centre of Amitabha, the deep red Buddha, is the seed syllable *Hri* and this seed syllable, which is supposed to encapsulate the core of Amitabha's wisdom, is linked etymologically with this word *hiri*, meaning shame. Amitabha's deep red colour is the colour our face goes when we blush, and this connection with the red Buddha's heart syllable is meant to show how profound this is. We blush when we know we've done something wrong. It's the hidden ethical sense within us coming out, you could say. In other words we have this potential for developing ethical sensitivity which can be nurtured and brought more and more to life. It starts with the precepts, which are obviously a bit rough and ready, just a basic framework. Over a lifetime of experience, and of failing again and again not to harm ourselves and others, we learn to be kinder and more aware of others as they actually are. We mostly learn through our mistakes, even though reflecting on ethical principles, as we are doing now, can help give us direction. We learn through concrete activity, and we learn through our sense of shame, positive shame. We acknowledge our regret for the little harmful acts we impose on ourselves and others. We don't want to be full of regrets all the time – regret takes up a lot of energy – so we change our behaviour. As we change our behaviour, we no longer have regrets. With no regrets dragging at our heels, we feel happy. This is good conscience, or *pramodya*. *Pramodya* is a kind of joy which comes from living well, living a life of awareness in which we are able to avoid doing too much damage, and are ready to repair the damage we do do.

Distinction from irrational guilt

we do need to distinguish shame in this very positive sense from irrational guilt. This is when we feel anxious and guilty about having done something, but actually there was nothing at all wrong with that action, or we have over-rated its importance. This is very common, and it is another hang-over from theistic morality. We are afraid of punishment by the jealous god, so we exaggerate the importance of quite minor failings, or feel guilty about something which has done no harm to anybody. Obviously irrational guilt is itself harmful to us – it eats away inside – so in ethical we always need to look at our feelings of guilt and try to see if they are justified or not. If they are, then we can simply acknowledge our shame and regret, resolve to do better in the future, and put it behind us. If we are indulging in irrational guilt we should see it clearly and just put it aside, let it go, forget about it.

so this is the process by which our ethical sensitivity grows and develops. By which we grow in confidence, in fearlessness, and in increasing lack of inner conflict. This leads to what we can call the faculty of total action. We begin to act more and more with the whole of ourselves. All of us is involved. There is no division inside, no conflict. This is a long way away for most of us. Most of us have many conflicting impulses. One part of us wants to get up in the morning and another doesn't, one part is obsessed by Buddhism and eastern ideas, but another is fixated on James Bond or computers or babies or mediaeval history. There are all these fascinations, all these emotional investments going on. As we develop as individuals, all this is sorted out. We find out through the trials and errors of ethics who we really are and what we really want to do.

The ideal of total action is provided by Amoghasiddhi, the deep green Buddha in the northern quarter of the mandala, who holds his right palm towards us in the gesture of bestowing fearlessness. His name means infallible, unobstructed success. Through Amoghasiddhi we can see the whole path of Buddhism as a path of decreasing fearfulness, decreasing conflict, the resolution of all conflict whatsoever, as we become more and more clear as to what in each moment we are doing, and what in the future we want to do with our lives.

RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

recap: perfect vision à emotion à ethics: speech and action. Now Livelihood also an aspect of Buddhist ethics.

Why pick on livelihood? Speech and action are about our individual development. This is about our collective development. It is about Buddhist practice in society. It is even about how Buddhists can influence the larger society.

It is also simply about the ethics of how we, personally, earn our livelihood. It is an inescapable fact that once we are born and grow up, each of us has to find a way to do this. In fact for most people in the world, livelihood is the dominant factor, the factor which more than anything else determines what we do and what sort of person we become.

Most people in the world spend the greater part of their lives engaged in earning a livelihood. Eight or more hours each day, five or six days a week, fifty or so weeks a year, they are engaged in a particular set of activities. They arouse in their minds a particular set of concerns, and those concerns keep vibrating away in their consciousness even after work. And this is the case whatever they do – whether or not they like or care

about their job. Whatever thoughts you have about it, whether your work is a wonderful creative vocation or is something you hate but it pays the rent – whatever your thoughts about it, you are going to have so many of those thoughts over such a large proportion of your life, that those thoughts are going to affect you very deeply indeed. You can just see the effect on those people that we know personally, of the work that they do every day. In terms of Buddhism, we have seen already, in the last two talks which have been in the area of sila or ethics, how our minds are deeply affected by what we do, by what we say, by what we think, and – above all – by how we react emotionally.

karma

This is the essential point about karma, a teaching which really belongs with the last talk, the talk on *samyak karmanta* or perfect action. However we didn't have time for it then, and it applies here too. So I'll say a little about it. The word karma means action. Very often people understand it to mean the result of action: they say 'something happened to me today. It's always happening to me. It must be my karma'. But actually karma is never something that happens to you. Karma is always something you do. Karma is action, it is what you do in terms of a physical, verbal or mental act. At the very least it is a mental volition – that's the minimum definition of an action or karma. That mental volition, that desire formulated in the mind, is an action – an action that affects us. It affects our mental state after we've formulated it.

So actions have consequences, and that's including mental actions. What we say also has consequences; what we do, physically, also has consequences. Body, speech and mind – all actions have a conditioning effect on our mental states afterwards. They set up an atmosphere; they start a kind of vibration in the mind. It may last a long time, it may not last very long – that depends on how powerful the volition is. Some karmas are strong, some are weak. Generally, the stronger our emotional investment in the volition, the more powerful the karma is, and the stronger the effect of the karma on subsequent mental states.

You can see that karma is a kind of momentum that keeps going. It's the momentum of habit. What generally happens to most people – people who aren't trying to change themselves through spiritual practice – is that their habitual volitions just get stronger and stronger. For example if they dislike someone, they tend to dwell on that emotional reaction, thinking about it over and over again. And so the karma of aversion is simply intensified more and more.

There is of course positive karma. We know this because we've been talking about skilful action, action that produces happiness for ourselves and others. The five precepts which we spoke about yesterday are channels for creating that kind of karma. Skilful habits, you could say. I don't think there's anything wrong with habits in principle, there are just useful habits and destructive habits. The Dharma consists of useful habits which lead towards Enlightenment.

The main interest Buddhism has in karma is that it is our karma, our actions, which change us. In a way, we *are* our karma. Buddhism says that we don't have a permanent, unchanging existence. Still, it's undeniable that we have an experience of a self. So what is this feeling of selfhood that we have, what is it based on? It's based on our emotional investments, our volitions. We are our volitions, if we're anything. We are this constant stream of wanting and acting based on wanting. Experiencing this or that feeling, and reacting emotionally to it – pushing away pain, grasping at pleasure. The pushing away and grasping just creating more of a tendency to push away and grasp. The pushing away just making us more sensitive to that which we dislike, the grasping just making us more attached than ever. This is painting in big broad brushstrokes, but that's generally how we have become the kind of people we are at this point in time. This is us: a bundle of very particular volitions, moving through time and space, becoming slightly different in each moment of consciousness, on account of our ceaseless responses to the feelings we experience. So this is the process of karma.

As I said in yesterday's question period, everything we experience is not necessarily the direct result of some previous volition. According at least to the Theravada, there are other kinds of causes – moral action is not the only kind of cause in the universe. According to the doctrine of the five *niyamas*, a phenomenon may arise simply because of a chemical reaction, because of biological activity, or because of some purely mental reaction not related to morality at all. These cause-effect processes are known as *utu-niyama*, *bija-niyama*, and *mano-niyama*. Then there is karmic causality as a fourth kind, i.e. the *karma-niyama*; and finally there is the very subtle and mysterious cause – effect process known as the *Dharma-niyama*, which has to do with the activity of the transcendental, in other words, it has to do with the effect, in one's life, of one's spiritual

realisation. So if you have a cold, it might be because of some karma, something you did in a previous life. But the cause might just as well lie with one of the other niyamas. Karma is a very difficult subject. There are lots of other aspects to it which would take us a long way out. The main thing to remember is that our actions have consequences for our mental states and therefore for our future experience of life.

Work as transformation

Lets get back to how this expresses itself in our livelihood. What we do changes us, and what we find ourselves doing, in the end, is mostly livelihood.

So clearly we have to take this very seriously. If we want to practice Buddhism we need to support ourselves in a way that is in accordance with the precepts. Ideally, our livelihood shouldn't exploit others or harm living beings in any way. Which of course cuts out the arms industry, and in fact quite a lot of livelihoods. Those of us living in the west, though, can fairly easily find work that isn't going to cause us too many ethical qualms. The issue of right livelihood certainly doesn't stop at fulfilling that basic criterion, that base line – that at least we don't support ourselves by killing or exploiting others, by stealing or extortion, by encouraging sexual misconduct, by preying on untruth (perhaps in some quarters of journalism or the advertising industry), or by encouraging intoxication by, for example, working for a distillery or dealing in drugs. Right livelihood starts at that base line, but it can go much further. Because Right Livelihood is also about the quality of our life, about bringing our Dharma practice into our life, and even about transforming society.

Work is often a situation which people dread because of the atmosphere they have to work in. The working environment is very much about communication, or the lack of it. So the principles of right livelihood, as well as the work itself being ethical, are also about transforming the way we work with others.

In our movement, the FWBO, we therefore encourage people to set up situations where they can earn their living in an ethical way. Now this is not at all easy, because establishing any kind of business is never easy, even in the west.

For one thing, those doing it have to take a lot of responsibility, and they have to work together. If they don't take responsibility to follow everything through, and if they don't succeed in working together, the whole thing collapses, perhaps creating a certain amount of disappointment.

So this is where our fine principles of Buddhism, our practice of meditation and ethics and wisdom, meets the real world, meets the world of people who aren't especially concerned with those fine principles, but who are very concerned with making money, and in competition with us! It's a very testing arena, but also a very interesting one, because through the kind of interactions that take place, provided one is moderately successful in one's work, provided one provides something that is of use to the community at large, one begins to have an influence.

In the UK and the USA, in some European countries and India, the FWBO has influenced the establishment of many team-based working environments which are run on Buddhist principles. Principles of communication, of Buddhist practices like meditation, and of taking responsibility for what one is doing. Usually these are set up on co-operative lines. Just to give some examples:

- Centres and retreat centres
- Restaurants and cafés
- Gardening
- Architects
- Building
- Wholefood and other shops
- Charity fund raising and social projects
- Translation, writing and publishing

Just to give a concrete example, by far the largest and most successful of these is Windhorse trading where LV works on the vans. They import goods on a fair trade basis from all over the world – crafts, giftware, fabrics, and household goods – and sell them to gift shops all over the UK. They also have their own chain of around 30 shops. The set up cost of these shops is usually shared by the local Buddhist centre, and for this the centre gets half the profits, and it also employs people from around the centre. So this raises money for the movement generally, for the local centre, and also provides a living for five or ten people around the centre. In Cambridge where it's based there are around 300 people employed, I think. The business has been very

successful over the last fifteen years or so, and for several years was listed in the top 100 fastest growing businesses in the UK.

It would be interesting to look into some of the ways such a large and fast moving enterprise manages to do everything it does *and* practice the Dharma. Unfortunately I have no experience of WT. But LV has, so maybe if there is an interest we can have some discussion with him. I have a few questions:

- How do workers live?
- How do they practice Buddhism?
- How much do they get paid?
- Don't you get a split between the management and the workers?
- What if you're not happy about the way things are being done?
- How do you get a job with WT?

PERFECT EFFORT

Transformation of the will

Spiritual life is very active. Virya v. samadhi – work in meditation | meditation in work.

Effort is needed at every stage. Need more and more. 'More you do, more you can do.'

This is the activity behind the whole 8FP = samyak vyayama in general

Effort to do what?

But effort to do what, specifically? If effecting the path, this comes down to working with our actions, our speech, and our mental states. And in the end it comes down to our mental states, positive and negative. With respect to negative mental states – prevent them arising at all, if possible. If they have arisen, somehow eradicate them.

With respect to positive mental states – develop them. And if they're already there, keep them there.

So preventing and eradicating the negative, developing and maintaining the positive.

So this little knot of activity is the dynamo which powers the 8Fpath. It never stops, we can't afford to slacken off until we're past the point of no return, otherwise we'll lose our positive mental states, and those negative mental states will rise up and stay in us.

Unskilful mental states

Preventing

- i. Guard the 6 sense doors

Eradicating

What? the Five Hindrances:

1. craving for material things (sense desire)
2. hatred
3. restlessness and anxiety
4. sloth and torpor
5. doubt and *indecision*.

How? The four traditional antidotes

1. reflect on consequences
2. cultivate the opposite
3. let them pass; witness
4. suppress
5. (go for refuge).

Skilful mental states

Developing

Meditation: the 4 dhyanas

access

jhanas: soap powder and water, lake with underground spring, lotus in water, white sheet in heat.

Maintaining

Must keep up the practice all the time. Don't slacken off.

Concentration of mind and mindfulness particularly important

Go for stream entry, the point of no return.

PERFECT MINDFULNESS

Samyak smrti, samma sati.

Sati = remembering, keeping in mind.

Keeping what in mind?

1. The Dharma
2. The situation you're in.

Why do we need to practice it – where does it fit into the Eightfold Path?

With perfect effort we started moving more into the centre of the great wheel which is the Eightfold Path. Perfect Effort, samma vayama, is right at the centre because effort needs to be made at all levels of the path. The effort to stop unskilful states arising, and to relinquish those which have arisen. The effort to develop skilful states of mind, and to maintain those we have already developed.

Perfect mindfulness, samma sati, is also there right at the centre, because again it is needed at all levels of the path. Mindfulness is the awareness we need to see where to apply our efforts. If we don't notice the unskilful states of mind arising, we won't be able to prevent them. We also need to remember to develop skilful states. So remembering the Dharma, being aware of the situation we are in.

Normally, if we look at our state of mind, the situation we are in is chaos.

Mind goes down many tracks. Discontinuous. Opening new tracks all the time. No continuity of purpose. Need to make a *habit* of continuity. Keep coming back to what one is trying to do – in meditation, in life generally.

As one becomes more aware, especially as one begins to practice the ethical aspects of the Eightfold Path, one starts to notice how the things that that one wants to do, in each moment, are sometimes skilful, sometimes unskilful.

From this, one gradually learns to develop more of a continuity of skilfulness out of the more normal discontinuity of mixed skilfulness and unskilfulness.

Twin aspects of practice: what is happening / what we are trying to do

1. Sati: being aware of what is happening. (physical activity, conversation, thinking).
2. Sampajanna: recollecting one's purpose and coming back to what one is doing.

These need to be applied in the four foundations of mindfulness or satipatthana:

1. body
2. feelings
3. states of mind
4. objects of mind

all this is in oneself. But there is also a world out there. We need also to be aware of

1. things
2. other people
3. the overall reality

so start applying sensitivity and awareness also to the world outside:

See one's reactions (situation/sensation à feeling à emotional reaction à becoming)

Realise that one can choose, to some extent, one's emotional reaction to situations. So can *change one's mental states*.

One can even choose to look at the real nature of one's experience: look at its unsatisfactoriness, its impermanence, its insubstantiality, its emptiness – its real indescribable nature.

Buddha – 7 years of this: Enlightenment! Let alone years – months – days even! But it has to be deep, continuous, dedicated and transformative. Not just sati, but sampajanna. Not just being here now but also recalling, at all times, what one needs to do.

Mindfulness is to be practised at all times, all activities. Going to sleep, waking, dressing, toilet, eating, walking, sitting, conversing, working. All the time body, feelings, mental states, mental objects. Always come back to it again and again.

Gradually see more and more the nature of ones self and the world we experience.

PERFECT SAMADHI

Recap: vision and transformation

We come now to the culminating part of the eightfold path: the stage of *samyak samadhi* or perfect *samadhi*.

We've seen the Buddha's original Enlightenment here at the Bodhi tree. Seen how in us as well, something of this experience has to be there to start us off on the path – at least to start us off properly. You can't really practice Buddhism, you can't even be interested in real Buddhism, unless you are shaken by some kind of experience – perhaps sparked off by a bereavement, or by meditation, or by deep thought and reflection on the nature of life. If we are interested in Buddhism, something has started us off, some spark of the transcendental; and if we carry on with Buddhist practice, this spark will eventually set the whole of us alight with the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha's Enlightenment.

But it won't happen of its own accord. For the path of vision, as this first stage is called, to be completed – so that complete Enlightenment grows out of that initial spark of vision – one needs to tread the path of transformation. As we saw earlier on this week, this path of transformation consists of all the other seven aspects of the eightfold path: perfect emotion, perfect speech, perfect action, perfect livelihood, perfect effort, perfect mindfulness and, finally, perfect samadhi. These are the workings out in practice of that initial spark of vision. We saw that perfect emotion represents that spark of spiritual vision transforming the battleground of our conflicting emotions. And we saw that in practice, much of this emotional transformation comes down to our ethical practice, as expressed in the detail of perfect speech, perfect action, and perfect livelihood. We talked about ourselves in terms of a karmic momentum which changes in accordance with our deeds of body, speech and mind. Yesterday and the day before we went more into the principal heart of practice, went into how the energy of the Buddhist path is directed, and then into the practice of awareness, through which we discover exactly and specifically what in us needs to be transformed by this energy. Mindfulness underpins the path in the sense that it reveals what is and reminds us that we need to act. Energy is the action, the spiritual act itself. And it acts in our ethical life, in our speech, our actions and our livelihood, it acts to transform our negative emotional reactions into positive ones. And all this comes out of, all this is implied, by that initial spark of vision.

Perfect Samadhi comes back, you can say, to that point of vision, and takes us right to the end of the path. So what is it?

What is samadhi?

Samadhi as samatha and as vipassana

The word samadhi is the same in Sanskrit and Pali, and refers to the state of being firmly fixed, firmly established. But what is it that is established in this way? Of course it is the mind, and we know already, without my saying anything, that samadhi refers to meditation. But there are two senses in which this samadhi can be understood. First of all we can be established in a state of deep concentration. A dhyana state. That is known as a state of samadhi. In fact the stages leading up to the dhyanas are called samadhi. There is first of all parikamma samadhi, the point where you get some preliminary concentration. Then there is upacara samadhi, the stage known as access concentration, that stage when it becomes easy to settle the mind on the object of concentration. Finally you get the apana samadhi, which is when we enter into dhyana proper. These are all samadhis. Samadhi is, you can say, the whole field of higher consciousness developed through

meditation. And that's all it is. These levels of samadhi are all mundane – they are not states of Enlightenment, they are not connected with insight into reality, they are just very positive, healthy, blissfully happy states of mind.

But just to confuse matters, there is another sense in which the word samadhi is used. Samadhi is also used to mean higher states of consciousness in which there is a very powerful element of insight. This usage is found a great deal in the Mahayana sutras, but it is also there in the Theravada, particularly in terms of the three great samadhis, the imageless, the directionless, and the voidness samadhi – which I'll speak about later on.

In these talks we've already discussed samadhi in the first sense in several contexts. We've looked at the four dhyanas, we've looked at access concentration. We've looked at the hindrances to concentration and their antidotes. All that comes in here too, even though we looked at it in the context of perfect effort. The topic of samadhi in the sense of samatha – in the sense of developing higher states of consciousness – is quite a large one, especially if you start to consider how to set up the supporting conditions for samadhi. There is a whole art of preparation for meditation, for example. If you set up the right conditions before you start, it's much more likely that you'll be able to concentrate. There are external conditions like the place where you meditate, whether it's quiet, whether food is easily available, whether we'll be free from disturbances. There are internal conditions like the state of our conscience, the state of our energy, the state of our enthusiasm and interest, and the regularity of our practice. There are all kinds of issues like this which you can read about. And a lot of what has already been said in these talks, such as what has been said about ethics, will have an indirect effect on our ability to settle into samadhi.

Samatha, samapatti, and samadhi

I will mention one more way of looking at samadhi in the narrow sense of higher states of consciousness which clarifies its relation to samadhi in the sense of insight. That is the series of samatha, samapatti, and samadhi.

Samatha, samapatti, and samadhi. The words sound a bit similar, don't they?

Samatha means calm or tranquillity, and the word refers to the whole business of calming the mind through meditation practices such as the mindfulness of breathing, going through the stages which I mentioned before, that is preliminary concentration, access concentration, and full concentration or dhyana.

Samapatti means attainment. Samapattis are experiences which happen as a result of some success in samatha practice. Some people get a lot of these experiences – often it's a sense in the mind of light of various colours, white or gold or bluish radiance. But there is a very great variety of samapattis. Sometimes it may be very strange, a kind of pleasant distortion of perception, as when you feel as though your body had become huge, or tiny, or very heavy or very light, or that you are suspended upside down, or that the top half of your body is facing in a different direction from the lower half. Or you may hear voices, or see wonderful patterns or landscapes unfolding before your mind's eye. Or you may see images of people, or faces. These experiences are fairly common if you do quite a bit of meditation. They don't mean you've reached an incredibly advanced stage, but they are encouraging because they do mean that you have established a certain level of concentration. However you may be quite deeply concentrated but not have experiences like this – it seems partly to be a matter of temperament, and also the samapatti experiences can be much subtler than I've described them, so if you blink, as it were, you might miss it.

Then there are samapatti experiences which are more like developing subtle senses. Your senses do become more refined in a general way through meditation, but some people start to develop a much greater understanding of what is happening, what people are trying to say, even what others are feeling. On from that, in some cases, some people develop a degree of clairvoyance and clairaudience.

What I've described so far are mundane samapattis, but some samapattis are definitely connected with insight. They are flashes of insight, when something that you understand theoretically suddenly becomes illuminated in actual experience and you realise just how little you understood it before. This is also samapatti, and it's where samapatti starts to merge into samadhi proper, samadhi in the sense of insight.

Samadhi in the full sense is that establishment in reality – rather than just establishment in a highly positive and concentrated state of mind – that establishment in reality which comes from insight into it. One is established in freedom, in understanding, and in universal loving kindness. One is liberated from any tendency to any kind of becoming in samsara. So this is what one is established in, it is in this that one achieves full samadhi in the sense of insight.

the three doors of liberation and the three lakshanas

Sometimes this insight samadhi is described in terms of the three doors of liberation or *vimokshas*, which are the *apranihita* samadhi, the unbiased samadhi; the *animitta* samadhi or the signless samadhi; and the *sunyata*

or the samadhi of the voidness. These refer to three different ways in which people penetrate into nirvana or Enlightenment. They might sound rather remote but if you look into them a bit you get at least a bit of a handle on the whole process, and it perhaps makes more sense of the Eightfold Path as a whole, since this is the culmination of the path, both of vision and transformation.

Each door of liberation opens out from a reflection on one of the three characteristics of conditioned existence, which we've mentioned a few times recently. The unbiased samadhi arises from reflection on dukkha or universal unsatisfactoriness; the signless samadhi opens out from reflection on universal impermanence; the voidness samadhi comes out of reflection on universal insubstantiality.

Through reflection on unsatisfactoriness, you have to deal with your likes and dislikes. Your deepening insight into the ultimate unsatisfactoriness even of the most pleasurable experiences you can imagine allows you complete freedom from attachment and detachment. There is complete equanimity as to wants and desires.

There are no preferences, no inclination to have, or not to have, any particular experience. You lose interest in ordinary egoistic goals and aims. So this is the unbiased, the apranihita samadhi.

Or, through reflection on impermanence, it's as though you go right through reality. Nothing in the world stays the same, even for a moment. So you start to realise how the words and concepts we use to label things don't really fit, because the things have such an evanescent existence. This is the signless or the imageless samadhi, the animitta samadhi. Nimitta means a sign. All our concepts are just signs, attempts to describe something we don't really understand at all. Only when we start to see that we don't understand the phenomena around us at all, *that's* when we begin to understand. We begin to understand, through reflection on their impermanence, that the signs by which we recognise them are just crude labels strapped onto a reality which cannot be described in any language. We see that reality is animitta, signless.

Or, in the case of the third gateway to liberation, we reflect on the universal characteristic of non-selfhood or essencelessness. Despite appearances, things don't have an essence. This is because of their impermanence. There's no part of anything which doesn't change, so there isn't really any core. There's no 'real Kamalashila' somewhere between my eyebrows. There's no essential self. All there is is a form, certain feelings, certain emotional reactions, certain mental operations like recognition, and the consciousness of various object. That's it. I'm not saying those bits aren't significant, they are highly significant, but they don't amount to a 'self'. That's an illegitimate notion, an illegitimate conclusion arising out of a false premise. There is no essential me. In fact there's no essential anything, no essential roof, no essential sky, no essential Mahabodhi Society. These are concepts in our heads, and they are slightly different kinds of concepts for each individual head. My sky, my Mahabodhi society, differs from yours. And this building can be broken down into parts which consist of other parts, also consisting of parts, ad infinitum. Which is the building? The roof? The walls? The paint? The atmosphere? The general appearance? The overall concept in the manager's mind? Or my mind? What do we mean by the Mahabodhi Society? In a very important sense, it doesn't exist. It is another plastering over of the real situation with a network of concepts which involve essences. Meditating on this, and seeing this as it is, is to open the door of liberation known as the sunyata samadhi or the samadhi of the voidness. We see through that network of concepts to reality itself, as we also do with the signless samadhi, but this time it's done through reflection on anatta or the universal characteristic of the lack of essence or substance in all things. Everything is seen as having one taste, one single characteristic, and that is the characteristic is sunyata.

So this I hope gives something of the flavour of the Eighth limb of the Buddha's Eightfold Path, perfect samadhi or samyak samadhi. In a sense this is its culmination – that is, in the sense that samadhi in the sense of vipassana or insight is the crucial point of the Buddhist path, since it is this which is distinctively Buddhist, since it is this alone which leads to Enlightenment or Buddhahood. As I hope I've made it clear in the other talks, though, we keep developing it – even insight develops in stages. First flashes, then more and more until Enlightenment .