

Noble 8-Fold Path
Dhamma Talk given at Joshua Tree Retreat I
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One of the things that I noticed as I was practicing over the last 30 years or so, was that the 8-fold path was always called Right view, Right thought, Right speech and so on. And I started realizing that this was taken from Rhys Davis' original translation in the late 1800', early 1900's. And he was using Old English.

When I looked at the word 'Sammā', which is the Pali word that's translated as 'Right'; that IS one of the definitions, but it gives other definitions as well. And the feeling you get from it is more about a 'HARMONIOUS Path' rather than a 'Right' path. And that seems to be much closer to the word 'sammā'. So, as I kept on looking at the different translations I started coming up with different words that had more meaning. As I was practicing and studying in the last 10 or 12 years, I started realizing that the Buddha gave the 8-fold path with the first discourse, and he was talking directly about your MEDITATION EXPERIENCE.

Now when people talk about the 8-fold path, is more like a philosophy. It's something that's WAY OUT here that doesn't have anything to do WITH your experience. So I started toying around with words and I ran across a teacher that was doing basically the same thing, and we came up with different kinds of understanding with the 8-fold path.

For example, the first part of the 8-fold path is called Right View or Right Understanding, but as I was talking with this other monk we came up with the idea of 'HARMONIOUS PERSPECTIVE'.

And what is a HARMONIOUS PERSPECTIVE?...

... the perspective of, everything that arises is IMPERSONAL..

This is the very essence of the Buddha's teaching. This is the part that if you really understand well, you go through all of the different stages of the meditation very quickly. Because whatever arises is JUST PART OF A PROCESS. And is not YOUR process personally; it is just A process..

So when you have a harmonious perspective, that means that you're seeing everything in a harmonious way, and you're seeing it impersonally..

When somebody says something to you and anger arises, what happens in your mind? It's a painful feeling and there's an "I don't like it" and then there's all kind of thoughts about WHY you don't like it. It causes your mind to contract; it causes your mind to get hard; it causes you to think over and over the same kinds of thoughts of dislike and dissatisfaction..

Years ago I was living in Maui, and I was helping a friend build his house. And I was helping him because I wanted to help him, I wasn't getting paid for it; I just wanted to help. And all of the sudden he started thinking that he was my boss, and that started getting me a little bit upset. And finally one day he said something and I was really angry. I put in a hard day's work and he didn't appreciate that I gave him that hard days work, and he complained to me a little bit. As I was walking away, I was kind of thinking very uncomplimentary thoughts about this man, and what a turkey he was and how I didn't really liked the situation, and as I was walking I was digging my heels into the ground and I was REALLY WALKING and I was mad.. And I stopped and I looked at that and I thought: "This clown thinks that he is my boss.", and it made me laugh. And as soon as I laughed, I saw the PERSPECTIVE change from 'I'm mad and I don't like it', to 'It's just anger'. What is that? As I changed my view, as I changed my perspective of the situation, it went from 'I am that' to 'It's only that'. And anytime any kind of emotional states arise, we always have the tendency to think about them personally... 'This is me', 'This is MY problem' 'I'M depressed' 'I'M fearful' 'I'M angry' 'I'M sad', whatever happens to be the catch of the day..

And as we identify with it more and more, we start having repeat thoughts about the situation, and when you start to look at that, the repeat thoughts are just like it's on a tape deck. It's the same thoughts, same words, same order over and over again. Any time you see that you have repeat thoughts about anything... there's an ATTACHMENT there..

What's the attachment to?.

"I AM THAT." It's the false belief that these thoughts and these feelings are yours personally. It's the belief that you're caught by this feeling and there's nothing you can do about it. And it causes frustration and it causes more and more dissatisfaction to arise. And now you're thinking your feeling. As you heard me say over and over again, any time you try to think a feeling, that feeling is going to get bigger and more intense. And the suffering is going to become overwhelming..

So what we have to do is learn how to change our perspective, right in the middle of these kind of emotional outbursts, problems, dissatisfactions, sufferings, whatever you want to call them.. The fastest way that I've found, to overcome these big huge emotional problems is to develop your sense of humor, and laugh!. As soon as you laugh, that changes your perspective. And it helps you to see: 'It's ONLY this'..

Now when you have an emotional thing arise, it turns into this huge mountain of a problem. You can't see over the top, you can't see around... you're just CAUGHT in it..

When you practice... being able to smile and laugh, that huge problem, that one that you can't see around at all, all of the sudden turns into this little blip... "it's just this, what's the big deal about that? Why am I making myself upset? Because it's ONLY this feeling, it's only this anger, it's only this sadness", whatever it happens to be... "And it hurts." "Yeah, ok there's pain there", Who's pain is it?... "It's not mine, I didn't ask it to come up, I didn't arrange for the pain to come up." The pain came up because the conditions were right for

it to be. As you allow the feeling to be there without resistance, without trying to THINK your feeling... then that pain becomes less and less and less until it'll fade away by itself. Every time that fades away there is a CLARITY in your mind. Every time you let go of this kind of a hindrance, you see more and more clearly that this in fact is a process. THAT is what the MEDITATION IS. Seeing everything as a process. It's not personal at all. All of these weird thoughts that come flying through our heads, they're just weird thoughts coming through!... NO BIG DEAL... Unless we don't like them! Or unless we try to push them away or we try to control them in one way or another. Then it turns into a major thing; now you're fighting; you're at war.

One of the handouts was a poem that I wrote while I was in Burma about "No fighting, no war", and how to let go of that, how to recognize that, let it be. And when you do, then mind becomes pure. There is no suffering. There is only this CLEAR AWARENESS.

That change in perspective, the first part of the 8-fold path is the one that's actually most important, if you can say one is more important than the other, because they all work TOGETHER.

Whenever you can change your perspective, whenever you can go from this tight, tense mind that sees everything as a problem to "It's only this. It's not any big deal!" All of the sudden you start becoming more efficient with what you're doing while you are doing it, because you haven't got that "mental pull down".

Now, when I was in Malaysia I had an awful lot of college students that were coming to me right before the test. They had one test a year. Either they passed the course or they didn't. And Chinese, being the way they are, they are really ambitious and they really wanted to do well with their studies. And they were finding out that they had an awful lot of anxiety, and their minds would be worried about what's going to happen in the future, about taking the test. So about... between two and three weeks before they had this big test, all of the sudden I had an influx of college students coming to do a retreat. And I taught them ... when they are studying, what happens

when they start worrying while they're studying. All of the sudden they're thinking about this and thinking about that while they are trying to read something, and then they have to go back and re-read it and they might get part way done, before that comes up again. And they were having a hard time focusing in what they were doing in the present moment.

So I taught them how to change their perspective a little bit and see this feeling for what it was - "Just a feeling!" No big deal. And I taught them while they were sitting and studying, when you saw that you're really starting to get caught by the anxiety, then put the book down... close your eyes... meditate, let go of that restless feeling... let it be. Now, come back, you're ready for whatever is there. I taught them that they need to laugh at their mind for being so upset and so worried. They had to have this change of perspective before they could actually become efficient at what they were doing while they were doing it.

When they let go of this worry feeling and anxiety feeling and all of the other stuff that goes along with it, when they let that go, now they sat down and they actually studied and they actually were starting to grasp what they were trying to grasp.

So having a HARMONIOUS PERSPECTIVE is the first part of being efficient with what you're doing while you are doing it. When you have a balanced mind, you do things... you have this job...done, this job... done, this job...done. You don't jump from one thing to another to another to another and none of them ever gets done. You stay with what you're doing while you are doing it. And with that balanced mind you become very efficient. And actually you start having fun doing this kind of thing.

There's an awful lot of people that, if there's a job that has a lot of repetition in it: "Aw! I get bored doing that!"

What is Boredom?

Yeah, it's restlessness and aversion, it's a lack of attention and it's a 'not being satisfied with what I'm doing in the present moment'. In Malaysia. I'd get some different colored beans, and I'd mix them all up and I'd tell them that they had to take one bean at a time and put one color here and one color here and one color here. And there was a big thing of beans.

And about a quarter of the way through, they were looking around and they were bored with tears by this. But there's nothing boring about doing it, UNLESS your PERSPECTIVE of doing this repetitious thing, unless your perspective is [not] in HARMONY with what's happening in the present moment. There's NO job that's boring. Unless your perspective and your identifying with that boring feeling, and your thoughts thinking about this boring job... when that arises, IT'S TERRIBLE! It's painful! Who wants to do something like that? That's a boring thing to do... And actually there's nothing boring at all! It can be incredibly interesting if you start watching how your eye hits the color and form, and then your hand grabs that and picks it up and puts it over here. What's boring about that?

Sometimes haha, some of my students told me that I was a Sadist... because I'd give them jobs like that to do, and I'd say: "You have to do this for an hour... and I want it done correctly, you can't have this mixed up. And no, you can take a whole hand full out and just do it like this, you have to do it one at a time!" Hahhahah

Oh! They called me a lot of real interesting things, is what they called me! hahaha But they also had an opportunity to learn how their mind was moving around and how the dissatisfaction arose and how they fought that feeling...

Some jobs that you have can be incredibly tedious, IF there's that criticism in your mind that 'this is boring and I don't want to do it'. But as you soften into that and you start seeing subtleties about what it is you're doing, all of the sudden it can turn into one of the most interesting things that you've ever ran across... It's JUST A CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE...

Now, this whole retreat I've been talking to you about 'I want you to smile, I want you to laugh'. Why?

Because that helps change your perspective... I'm a sneaky monk! I had some students up in Missouri that... they were doing a retreat for a fairly long period of time, like three weeks or something like that, I don't remember the exact number. But, they were trying so hard that they were starting to get stale. And they weren't really very aware. So, we got up one morning and I came into the meditation hall and we went through our little pūjā in the morning, and then I said "OK, today I don't want you to meditate at all. I want this to be a play day. I want you to go out and do whatever you want to do. The only stipulation is, that whatever you do, if you find yourself getting serious, you have to let that go and laugh!" And then I said: "Go!"

So, they were real thrilled with that. And I came in for the talk in the evening and everybody's face was just RADIANT!, and they had a great day, and I said: "How did your meditation go today?" "Oh! We didn't meditate! We were playing! And we were laughing and we had a great time!" And I said, "Did you notice when your mind started to get serious and you let that go and you began to have fun again?" "Oh yeah! We did that all the time." I said, "That's GREAT meditation, isn't it?" Then they said something about being a sneaky monk...

That's a lesson that they took HOME with them, and when they started to see themselves getting serious, they started laughing and not making it serious anymore. And what they were doing? They were CHANGING THEIR PERSPECTIVE. They were changing the perspective of 'I'm doing this and I have to be serious about this' to 'I still going to do this, but I'm going to have fun at it'. That's how you become really incredibly efficient with what you are doing in the present moment.

And there's no job that's a bad job. Everything can be fun! IF you have that PERSPECTIVE.

The next part of the 8-fold path is always called 'Right Thought' (HARMONIOUS IMAGING) and I've always kind of objected to that because that has to do with thinking, and I never really appreciated that. I didn't think it was right. It didn't seem right.

So, this other monk and I, after long talks about it, we started realizing that this has to do with the IMAGES you bring up in your mind. Now the images of feeling happy when you're practicing loving-kindness, feeling Joy, feeling peaceful and calm. All of these images are something that you can bring up and put into your meditation. And that's actually what Right Thought was all about. It's bringing up an image of peace and harmony, of happiness, of wishing other people well, of practicing your generosity in all kinds of different ways, with your speech, with your actions, with your mind. It's having those kind of images coming up in your mind and putting that WITH that kind of perspective.

Now, the next part of the 8-fold path is always called 'Right Speech'. Now, when I was practicing with Mahasi, there was a Mahasi method, my teachers always said: 'Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, you don't have to worry about these because you are doing meditation'... I started looking at how is it applied directly in your meditation, and I started to see that HARMONIOUS COMMUNICATION, even with your self is the way that you practice, when you are practicing with an uplifted mind that's alert, you don't have criticisms in it, you don't have "I should be better than I am" in it. You're COMMUNICATING WITH HARMONY WITH YOURSELF. "This is what's need to be done. Let's let that go...Let's relax..." You're using that kind of way of communication with yourself. As you start making that part of your HABIT, you start becoming more aware of movements of mind and HOW those movements of mind occur.

So this helps you to focus in better with your mindfulness. When you have a HARMONIOUS COMMUNICATION with yourself, with your body, with your activities... communication in all different kinds of ways. It's not just about talking!

The next part of the 8-fold path is always called 'Right Action'. Right Action they define as: 'not killing, not stealing, not having wrong sexual activities, or in the case of a retreat, not having any sexual activity.' But Right Action is really an interesting part of the 8-fold path, especially when you start to think about it in terms of HARMONIOUS MOVEMENT.

You know, a lot of people when they're practicing, especially Loving-Kindness, when they first start off, they try to use Loving-Kindness as a stick to beat away thoughts, beat away things that they don't want to be there. They try to focus too hard on the Loving-Kindness... That's not Harmonious Movement, is it?

HARMONIOUS MOVEMENT is gently seeing, relaxing, coming back to your object of meditation SOFTLY. Not with chaotic kinds of movements of mind. But with a FLOWING, HARMONIOUS kind of movement of mind.

Now the next part of the 8-fold path they always call 'Right Livelihood' and the definition of Right Livelihood has always tickled me... 'Well, don't kill any beings, don't sell any poisons, don't trade in slaves and that sort of thing.' What does that have to do with your meditation?

You know, that was in the first discourse and the Buddha was talking to the monks about what is Right Livelihood. So I started thinking about that one, with my friend and we came up with the idea of HARMONIOUS LIFESTYLE.

Being in Harmony with your lifestyle, with whatever you are doing, with your daily activities. Now with monks, it means being in harmony with your lifestyle of going out on alms round, practicing your Loving-Kindness while you are on alms round.

It means PRACTICING; being in Harmony with EVERY ASPECT of your life.

I had a student in Malaysia, she was actually quite an advanced student and she started coming to me and talking about the horrible dreams that she was starting to have. So I said: "Well, ok, you are having these horrible dreams, why?" And she said: "Well it might have to do with... I have bad dreams every time after I go to the movies." "Well, what kind of movies are you going to see?" "Well, I like horror movies!" and I said, "Well, don't do that!" "But I like them." "Well, then don't come to me complaining about bad dreams!"

You have to be careful with what you put in front of your mind. Remember: "WHAT YOU THINK AND PONDER ON, THAT'S THE INCLINATION OF YOUR MIND!" So if you like to do things that are scary, then scary is going to come up in your mind! Your mind is going to tend towards that sort of thing..

But it's WATCHING YOUR ACTIVITIES DURING THE DAY. How you're doing your activities if you can do them with a smile. You do them in a relaxed way. You don't do them with dissatisfaction. Because the more you think and ponder on dissatisfaction and dislike, the more your mind is going to tend towards dissatisfaction and dislike. And then everybody around you is going to start to think: 'Well, this is a grumpy person, I don't want to be around them!'

So, when you see that you've develop this habit of having a critical thought arise and getting involved with it, not being satisfied with what's happening in the present moment, you are developing an Un-harmonious Lifestyle!

And you are causing suffering to yourself and everybody else around you. So, developing a Harmonious Lifestyle means WATCHING WHAT YOU'RE DOING WHILE YOU ARE DOING IT very nicely, doing it in a Harmonious way, do it in a light way, do it in a fun way.

The more you can have fun doing whatever you are doing in the present moment, the CLEARER your mind is. That's the whole point of having JOY arise!

If you have fun with what you are doing, you are having JOY come up! When you have joy your mind is VERY ALERT. Your mind is very quick to notice when it starts to get heavy. And it's very easy to let go of, when you're developing this kind of mind. MAKE THAT PART OF YOUR LIFESTYLE!

There's no sense in getting upset, when somebody gives you a call on the telephone or comes by and they see you and THEY have upset... you don't need to take THEIR upset and make it YOUR upset. Because if you take THEIR upset and make it YOUR upset, you're going to throw YOUR upset back at them. Now you are at war! You are fighting with them... and both of you walk away, and what does your mind think about? 'That no good so and so, I hate it when they do this... if they just pay attention to me, they wouldn't have those problems...' All of this kind of thoughts arise... 'And I don't like it when they do that... and I'm right and they're wrong'. And then on that tape deck, happens again... and happens again... and then the next person you happen to run across... you still have that dissatisfaction, and they say something a little bit like you don't like it, and all of the sudden you're raining on their parade. You're giving them that dissatisfaction that you got in the past, that you are still carrying with you, and it makes for a real rough day... You HAVE a choice! You don't HAVE to take anybody else's dissatisfaction and dislike. That's when you want to practice your compassion... What is compassion?

Compassion is seeing another person in pain, allowing them the space to have their pain, but love them anyway.

It doesn't mean that when somebody comes at you with anger that you have your anger going to protect yourself. It means you allow them the space... they can be angry if they want to, that's fine, you don't even have to pay attention to it. You can start radiating Loving-Kindness to them, right then, right there! Focus on that Loving-Kindness...

Now, one of two things is going to happen. Either, they're going to settle down and then you can talk about what the real problem is,

cause it isn't what they are yelling about. OR, they're going to go away, stomp off their heels on the ground, the same thing I was doing... and your mind is going to stay bright and alert and ready for whatever else is going to happen!

You are going to stay happy...

The practice of compassion is incredibly important. I used to go and visit a lot of people in hospitals. And I would always begin walking in the hospital, thinking in my mind: "Whatever person I'm going to see, it's ok for them to feel what they are feeling. It's ok for them to say anything they want. I'm going to love them, I don't care." And I walk into a room where somebody has a lot of pain. They can be depressed, they can be angry, they can be sad... they can be hurting, physically. Now, if I don't prepare myself, I walk in and I start looking at their pain and I say: "Oh you poor dear. I feel so bad for you." And I try to take their pain away. I can't take your pain away! Your pain is your pain. All I can do is make myself miserable and that certainly doesn't help that other person at all!

When I walk in and I see how they are doing, even though they have a lot of pain, they could be moaning in pain... and I think: "OK, they can do that", I Wish them Happiness, I start radiating Loving-Kindness to them.

Their mind starts to calm down. immediately. And before long, I'm talking with them and I'm making them laugh. Laughter is one of the best painkillers that you can experience. It changes the chemistry in your body, so that the painkillers naturally in your body will start functioning.

It used to be kind of unusual, because I'd walk in after seeing the same person three or four days in a row, they would give all kinds of insights of the different people that walked in the room. Some people walk in and they tried to take their pain away and then they have to get busy. They fluff up a pillow, they open the window, they close the window and they're there for three minutes and then they go away! And they said, whenever I walk in the room it was like fresh

air coming in the room, because I was allowing them the space to experience whatever they wanted to experience, or whatever they were experiencing... And I loved them no matter what...

And they always felt better... Have you ever walked into a room where somebody is depressed and you feel like you want to walk out? You know, you walk in, you are depressed, you want to turn and come out? That's the time to practice your compassion...

You don't try to take their pain away, they can be depressed as they want, you don't have to be. You can be happy, you can talk about things and laugh. And what happens? Their mental state starts to come up and it starts to match YOUR mental state. And then they start feeling relief!

One of the biggest problems that we have is we think we can change other people by trying to TALK their pain away... and quite often, the best way to handle someone else's pain is by not talking, by radiating Loving-Kindness to them. And then when they start to get a sense of balance you can start talking.

I've told this story a few times, there was a man that he started meditating with me. He was a pilot of 747s; he was flying all over the world, all the time. And about six weeks later he came to me and he said: "I have cancer and I'm going to be dying very soon." "OK"... "What should I do?"... "Well, practice your Loving-Kindness...when the pain is there, let it be, relax and come back to your Loving-Kindness". Right after that, he went into the hospital and I started going and visiting him fairly regularly and we would meditate together and we would kind of giggle and laugh about different things, you know? Chit chatting.

And one day I walked into his room and he was really serious. And there were three or four people in the room and he said: "I want to talk to Reverend alone." I said: "Ok.", so everybody left the room and I sat down and I said: "What's up?" Then he said: "The doctor told me that I'm terminal". And I started to laugh, and [I] said: "I'm terminal too! Everybody is! It's ok to be terminal."

And all of the sudden this HUGE mountain disappeared! And he started laughing right along with it "Oh, that's right!" I said "You got an advantage, you know closer to when it's going to happen. How lucky you are!"

As he started getting weaker and weaker, I had to go give a two week retreat, I had to go to Thailand and give a retreat because people had asked me to do that a long time ago. So I told him right before I left, "I don't care what happens, you have to start telling people around you how much you truly appreciate them, how much you truly love them. And I'll be back as soon as I can be." And he took that to heart, and he was practicing his Loving-Kindness, and the last couple of weeks of his life, all the flesh just started falling off of him, he was just skin and bones.

The day before I got back, he had died. Some of my students had been going and sitting with him and practicing with him and generally BEING with him. And I said, "Well, how did he die?" And they said: "He died very very peacefully. And, actually, he died with a smile."

His perspective was not fear or anxiety, but it was wishing somebody else happiness. That's how you practice your generosity in the best way. You CAN'T keep Loving-Kindness hidden. If you do, it'll disappear. You got to practice, giving it away, ALL THE TIME... You are standing in line. How much do you like that? Oh, what's your mind doing? Thinking about this and you look down the line and they're taking that, they got a really big pile of stuff, it's going to take a long time... aahhh!" And then you are thinking this and you are thinking that." Don't do that...

You see the dissatisfaction that arises, "Oh I'm bored, and I'm looking at my watch and I got to get going, and I can't stand here in line... and oh! They just dropped something, now they got to clean it up!"

All of those kinds of thoughts, those kinds of dissatisfaction thoughts. What you think and ponder on, that's the inclination of your mind. You think and ponder dissatisfaction, dislike thoughts, your Harmonious Lifestyle is not so Harmonious at that time. So what to do? LET GO of that stuff!, every body in line is thinking basically the same thing. And it's just nonsense thoughts. Impatient thoughts. All of that.

Put a little smile, start radiating some Loving-Kindness. Send some Loving-Kindness to the clerk. That's a hard job. Having a big line of people that are all impatient and quite often they are not very nice... all they want to do is pay for this stuff and get out of there. So send her some Loving-Kindness, she needs it. When you get up to her, practice your Harmonious Lifestyle by giving her kind speech, loving speech.

Your JOB is, MAKE EVERYBODY AROUND YOU SMILE AND LAUGH AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.

That's the JOB!

When you practice that, for real, YOU ARE CHANGING THE WORLD AROUND YOU in a positive way.

You know there's all kinds of peace marches and peace day and all of these kinds of things. I haven't really seen them be too successful. There's more wars right now happening than there ever has been, there's more dislike and greed and dissatisfaction happening everywhere.

As you practice more in a CONTINUOUS WAY, smiling, being happy, giving that happiness away, you start affecting everybody around you in a positive way. And it's your choice whether you want to do that or not.

When I was a layman, I'd been practicing Loving-Kindness with a little Indian man by the name of Munindra, and he was wonderful, he was really great. And he was talking about affecting the world around

him when he's radiating Loving-Kindness, so I thought: "I want to see what this is really like." So I went to a shopping mall, and I walked around with a grumpy face. And I kind of scolded everybody and I saw what kind of reaction they were giving me and I thought: "OK, I know I can affect them negatively!" So then I went and I sat down on a bench, and I put a smile on my face and I started radiating Loving-Kindness. And after a few minutes I started feeling eyes on me! And I couldn't stand it anymore, I had to open up my eyes to see what was happening... and there was ten or twelve people, ABSOLUTE STRANGERS, I've never seen them before in my life, standing around me SMILING! hahaha Now, isn't that peculiar? TRY IT!

One of the things that I've always used as a key for my Loving-Kindness, is when I see a little kid I make it my job to have them smile. It's great! It's really fun. And quite often it helps out the parents quite a bit! HAHAhahah... And the parents start smiling if they see that you are smiling at their child. You are admiring their little kid.

And they start doing things that will make you smile! Right after 9/11 happened, everybody was really depressed. I wasn't out in the public very much, but whenever I went out into public, nobody was smiling, everybody had this frown, and they were all somber and... Some people took me to this shop and there was a little... I guess he was two years old, two and a half, three, something like that. And as soon as I saw him, I started smiling! Because that's part of my mindfulness practice, when I see a little kid, I smile.

And he caught my eye, and I caught his eye, and he started shaking his head like one of those little animals that you put on the dash that bounces back and forth... he was doing that, and he was watching me walk, and then I got down there, turn around and I came back and he was doing the same thing! And I started laughing out loud because he had this little gleam in his eyes hahaha he was really doing a good one!

As I was walking through the door, I was laughing! And there were a couple of women that were coming in, and they heard my laugh, and all of the sudden THEY started smiling!

You affect the world around you, when your mind is uplifted every body around you will come up to YOUR level. And if they don't, that's ok too. You can still love them... and that gives them the space to change. That's what your HARMONIOUS LIFESTYLE is all about. While you are doing your meditation practice, your Harmonious Lifestyle is staying with the meditation as much as you possibly can. And saying things to other people to make them happy, make THEIR mind uplifted. Let the people who work here... let them know that you really appreciate them. They work hard to keep this place going. And the food they make is absolutely brilliant.

Right, or Harmonious Speech, Harmonious Communication, Harmonious Lifestyle... it makes everybody more efficient... and everybody happy...

The next part of the 8-fold path is always called 'Right Effort'... and again, I like to change things around... so I called that, HARMONIOUS PRACTICE, because this is really the practice... What's Harmonious Practice?

NOTICING when there's an unwholesome state, any kind of distraction, any kind of thing that pulls your mind away from your object of meditation; LETTING GO of that Unwholesome State , AND RELAXING... COMING BACK to your object of meditation... STAYING with your object of mediation.

That's your HARMONIOUS PRACTICE.

When do you get to do that? ALL THE TIME.

I used to be real big on.... when I first started teaching meditation, I was really tough. I mean, REALLY tough. I wouldn't let people talk at all, and I was pushing them, "Well you are only sitting for two hours? What's the matter? Sit longer!"

I started seeing that their progress wasn't so good, while I was being tough... but that's because I had tough teachers and that's the way that they taught me so that's what I was teaching them.

After a little while I started to loosen up a little bit and I allowed them to speak a little bit, as long as they were speaking Dhamma... but not to distract themselves too much, and I was still big on everybody sitting for as long as they possibly could. "Sit through the pain! Doesn't matter."

But as I got older, I started mellowing a little bit more and I started seeing that, especially the Chinese in Malaysia, they're goal-oriented... and the Westerners, we don't need to be pushed, we don't need to be forced to try. We already do that. We don't need any more push in our practice, what we actually need is to be 'backed away' from it a little bit, so we can have the Joy coming up more easily with our daily activities and that sort of thing.

So I'm not near as strict as I used to be on retreat, but I keep reminding you over and over again: "What is your mind up to? Is your mind tightening down around something? Let it go and relax." I don't care what you are doing.

By practicing the retreat the way I'm teaching right now, what I have found is: it's much easier for you to integrate what you learn on retreat when you go back out there, when you go back into your daily life. You still can have this habit that you are just forming right now, of staying and watching what your mind is doing in the present moment, lightening up, not getting caught by your mental states so heavily.

When you get off retreat, your practice is going to dip a little bit. If you continue sitting everyday, in a short period of time your practice will come up to where this retreat was, where your mind was in this retreat, and it will start to go on further. Your progress will not be AS FAST as with this retreat, BUT it will continue if you keep your practice going DAILY.

AND, your daily activities are incredibly important, don't get caught in your old habit of always acting in this way when this situation comes up!

Start WATCHING more clearly, more closely: What your mind is doing in the present moment.

And this is the Harmonious Practice of the meditation.

SEEING the unwholesome state, LETTING GO of the unwholesome state, RELAXING, SMILE... BRINGING UP a wholesome state, STAYING with that wholesome state.

See, the thing is, you can stay... you can take a day and you can say, "Ok, let's make this a day for being in the first jhana."

And when you have gained skill at going in and out of your Jhanas, you'll be able to do that! And the thing that happens is: by the end of the day people will walk up to you and they'll go: "Boy! You're RADIANT right now!" You are VERY alert. You are very relaxed. You have JOY. It doesn't matter whether you are walking or going to the bathroom, or talking with other people... you can have that Jhana and STAY IN that Jhana ALL DAY! It takes Practice...

You still need to have your quiet time. Now, how long, how long, this is one of the questions almost everybody asks... "Well, how much should I meditate when I get off retreat?" And the answer is: "ALL THE TIME." All the time! Don't stop!

"How much should I sit?" As much as possible.

If you have a break of ten minutes, instead of getting impatient waiting for somebody... MEDITATE! Sit down, close your eyes, start wishing somebody happiness, wishing them well!

One of the things that I really would like to see everyone do, and this is kind of an odd thing, is: by your computer and by your telephone, I want you to put a mirror there. When the telephone rings, I want

you to pick it up, I want you to look in the mirror and SMILE while you are talking to whoever is on the other end.

I've had wrong numbers calls when I was practicing this and I was answering the phone, I don't answer too much anymore, but I've had 'wrong number', you know? And all of the sudden I wind up talking to them for half an hour because they feel so good, they don't want to hang up!

This is one of the ways to keep your practice going, and when you are working with the computer and things don't go well, as we all know, that computers there are not very agreeable machines sometimes, and you wind up talking to them most of the time not in a complementary way. Take a look in the mirror to see what your face is doing. You, actually... what will happen is you'll start to laugh at how bad your face looks! hahahh 'Cause you're mad! arghh... And then your mind becomes clear and you're not caught in: "I don't know what to do! And I don't know how I just lost all of this stuff!!"... The Worry... The Anxiety... The Dissatisfaction... Are you being efficient at that time? Are you solving the problem at that time? No, you're adding to the problem at that time.

So, you develop your sense of humor and you laugh with it. Now you start becoming efficient.

Here is a little secret, and I use it often, and that is: I put Loving-Kindness into things. Before I give a talk I radiate Loving-Kindness and the image that I hold is that I'm saying exactly the right thing at exactly the right time. And I radiate that feeling for a little while, and then I just sit with it. Only do it one time. And now my mind becomes peaceful and calm, and then things just start flowing! Sometimes it's real surprising the things that come out of my mouth because I haven't planned it at all!

If your computer starts messing up, then that's the time to let it be and put Loving-Kindness is helping me solve this problem. And radiate the Loving-Kindness... don't think about the problem... but what happens is you start to get a connection with your intuition.

And your intuition comes up with the answer really nicely, "Oh! I bet if I try this it'll work... It did! All right!"

Do the practice all the time. Put Loving-Kindness into EVERYTHING, as much as you can remember to. And when you forget, you can't get critical on yourself. You can't blame yourself. You can't dislike your self for making mistakes. All you can do is LAUGH and start over again... THAT'S THE KEY!

Now, I told you at the start of the retreat, I want you to make a determination at night that you are going to wake up in the morning smiling and happy... I don't want you to stop that! I want you to continue doing that... Do that every night.

And as soon as you wake up smiling and happy, KEEP IT GOING. It's a GREAT way to start up the day!

Now the next part of the 8-fold path is called 'Right Mindfulness' and I call this HARMONIOUS ATTENTION.

It's watching mind's attention move from one thing to another. It's your Observation. It's being able to see without judging 'this is good, bad or indifferent', just WATCHING HOW mind works, letting it be, relaxing and bringing your mind back to your object.

With your daily activities if you let go of a hindrance and relax, and then let go and relax, and let go and relax, it doesn't work. You have to let go, relax and COME BACK to an object of meditation. If it's your breath, fine, stay with your breath, one or two breaths, and relax. Then you'll start to have more balance in your practice. If it's Loving-Kindness, then do it with Loving-Kindness, it doesn't really matter.

But I've had students that have come and complained and say: "Well this works when I'm in a retreat, but it doesn't work when I'm practicing. I keep on letting it go and relaxing, and the hindrance doesn't go away!" Of course it's not going to go away, you are not doing the practice all the way. It's the same way that you are

practicing right now. Let it be, relax, come back to your object of meditation. Doesn't matter how many times you do it. Eventually that hindrance will go away by itself. And the candy you get from that is that your mind gets a LOT more clear, and alert and more efficient.

Now, the last part of the 8-fold Path is called 'Right Concentration' and I REALLY don't like that translation at all. I call it HARMONIOUS COLLECTEDNESS. Because 'Concentration' always implies that you're having your mind on one thing to the EXCLUSION of everything else. What happens when you start practicing One-Pointed Concentration is your mind CONTRACTS a little bit and then becomes very focused. And people that practice one pointed concentration, at one point or another they wind up getting this massive headache. It's because of the Absorption Concentration they are practicing. You're focusing too hard.

Now, you notice that when you practice in the way that I'm showing you, you don't get headaches. You don't get these tightnesses, you don't get this kind of... sometimes with absorption concentration, people will get ringing in the ears, their sense of balance is not very good... There was one guy that was teaching absorption concentration, and all of his students, at some point or another, they would flip over backwards... they'd lose their equilibrium and then... so they couldn't be on any kind of a platform at all. hahaha. But that sort of thing doesn't happen when you're practicing this kind of meditation. And a lot of people practicing absorption concentration talk about "Ahh! The Lights! They are really wonderful when they come up." Well that's part of the absorption concentration, but that doesn't have anything to do with the Samatha/Vipassana that I'm showing you.

IF lights appear with your meditation, then you take that as a distraction and let it be, and relax, and come back to your object of meditation... don't get involved with it... they will go away after a while.

But the COLLECTEDNESS that you need to practice is the CALMNESS, the TRANQUILITY.... your mind will become very very STILL. And

you can say it's 'concentrated' at that time, but it's NOT the ABSORPTION kind of concentration, there's still ALERTNESS to other things that arise. There's still SEEING other things. There's not JUST the focus on one thing at a time.

So, that's the 8-FOLD PATH. And that's what is on this stand, actually.

The more you can keep your Harmonious Lifestyle going, the more you can keep your Harmonious Perspective, the more you practice LAUGHING with yourself, about how crazy your mind becomes. When you bring up that laugh, you're bringing up the ENTIRE 8-fold path. And that leads to REAL HAPPINESS.

That light mind leads to Nibbana.

Ok, Gee, I can't believe how long I talked! HAHAHA

He is a long winded monk, what can I say! hahaha!

Ok, let's share some merit then:

May suffering ones, be suffering free
And the fear struck, fearless be
May the grieving shed all grief
And may all beings find relief.

May all beings share this merit that we have thus acquired
For the acquisition of all kinds of happiness.

May beings inhabiting space and earth
Devas and nagas of mighty power
Share this merit of ours.

May they long protect the Buddha's dispensation.
Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . . Sadhu . .

Transcribed by Adrian Montoya Leyton

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