

## **The Noble Eightfold Path:**

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What happened with the translations in Buddhism, was, in the late 1800s, a very good scholar by the name of Rhys Davids went to Burma, and he took all of the texts, and he translated them into English. And because he was the first one to do the translation, a lot of the words that he used are still being used today. and actually, because he didn't have the practice, and he really didn't do much studying, to find out what the real meaning was behind some of the suttas, there's some pretty radical mistakes.

Now when the Buddha was talking about the eightfold path, he used the word "samma," and Rhys Davids translated that as "right." This is "right" view, this is "right" thought--all of these kind of things. But actually, the word "samma" has a softer meaning to it. So I choose to use the word "harmonious." If you think of "right," it's like black-and-white: right and wrong. But when you use the word "harmonious," it has more of a flow to it, and that's really closer to the meaning of "samma" than "right" is.

### **I. Harmonious Perspective**

(Right View)

The first factor of the eightfold path is "Samma Ditthi." "Ditthi" is "view" or "understanding," the way that Rhys Davids translated that. But, again, it has kind of a deeper meaning than just "understanding." So I've changed that to "harmonious perspective."

[How do you like that?]

Now when you're practicing meditation, and there's distracting thoughts or sensations or emotions or whatever pulls your mind

away from your object of meditation, you have a tendency to take these thoughts or feelings very personally and identify with them. And there is the craving that arises of "I like it or I don't like it," and then there's all of the clinging that arises right after that: the reasons why you like it or you don't like it. But all of these things have a tendency to make your mind get very tight and very tense.

When you're practicing the eightfold path, the way you can change your view of things--your perspective--is by letting go of those thoughts and then noticing the tightness in your head, in your body somewhere, and relax, and then come back to your object of meditation. The fastest way that I know of to change your perspective, is to laugh at how crazy your mind is for getting caught by it. A lot of people, really, they have a lot of resistance. I mean, "if you're on the spiritual path, that means you're supposed to be serious about it." But if you have anger arise, who's angry? "I am." Who doesn't like it? "I don't." See how that tightens everything up? When you can laugh at being caught by anger, it changes this real tense tightness, and it lets that go, and then it turns only into, "Well, this is anger. It's no big deal. It's not even mine." It changes your perspective from "I am that" to "It's only that." So the more you develop your sense of humor about how crazy your mind is!-- welcome to the human race, we all are the same, we're all crazy-- when you develop that skill to be able to laugh at how serious your mind becomes, it changes your view of the whole world around you.

When anger comes and you take it personally, you feel it tight in your body, and you feel a tightness in your mind. Your body--your heart starts beating faster. Your muscles start tensing up. Blood pressure goes up. Your face becomes red--can even turn black; your face becomes incredibly ugly. And that all stems from, "I want things to be this way, and they're not this way, and I don't like it." It all stems from that craving, and then the clinging behind it--all of those thoughts--and then the being behind that--your habitual tendencies. When certain things come up, you always act in the same way. We're creatures of habit. When your perspective becomes in harmony, is when you develop the sense of humor about it, and you start relaxing into it. And then it's not "my anger" anymore, it's "only anger." So it's like it takes a step away from you. It takes that tight grip and loosens it.

Now one of the big things in Buddhism is ignorance. This is what we're all trying to let go of: ignorance. In Pali, it's "Avijja." Now, what are we ignorant of? Break down that word "ignorance"; what is the base meaning of it? It's a verb: to ignore. What are we ignoring? We're ignoring the fact that everything that arises, every thought, every feeling that arises, is impersonal. Nobody is going to say, "Well, I haven't been depressed for a long time. I haven't been sad for a long time. I haven't been highly emotional for a long time. I guess I might as well have some now." Nobody says that! It happens because the conditions are right for these kinds of things to arise. What you do with them right now dictates what happens in the future.

If you take these thoughts and feeling personally, what you wind up doing is you try to think the feeling away. But thoughts are one thing, feelings are something else. The more you try to think a feeling away, the bigger that feeling becomes, the more intense it becomes. One of the real popular words these days is "stress." What is stress? Nothing more than, "I don't like it!" "I want it to be different than it is." It's a non-acceptance of what's happening in the present moment, and identifying with those thoughts that are trying to control this feeling that you don't like. So, in order to have a harmonious perspective, we need to let go of the idea that these thoughts are ours. We need to let go of the idea that these feelings are ours and relax. And the fastest way, again, is by laughing. By laughing at how your mind got caught again. So, what we need to do is we need to change our perspective from, "I don't like it," to "Ah, it's only that, and it's alright for that to!

be there." It has to be alright, because the truth is it's there. As you open and relax and let it go, it'll float around for a little while and disappear and not come back and bother you.

So, I was at a retreat in Australia one time, and somebody asked the teacher, Sayadaw--he said, "Why did the Buddha choose this as the start of the Eightfold Path?" And he [Sayadaw] didn't have a clue. He just said, "Because that's the way he wanted to do it." But this first

factor is incredibly important. If you don't have a harmonious perspective, the rest of the Eightfold Path doesn't follow along. So, you need this harmonious perspective; you need to be in balance, and letting go of this false idea that these thoughts and feelings belong to us.

Now, when somebody comes up, and they're angry with you, and they start shouting at you and giving you their anger, what's the natural tendency? Take their anger, put it inside yourself and throw your anger back at them. Now you're at war, and you say things that you wish you hadn't have said, and you do things that you wish you hadn't have done. And quite often, you're both talking at the same time. You can't hear what somebody else is saying when you're talking, too. So you think, "Well, I really told them off!" And they think, "I really told him off!" But neither one of you heard what was being said! Now, when that person walks away, what happens in your mind? Everything that happened in that conversation--"I said this and he said that" and "I, uh, should've said this, and I'm right and he's wrong. Shouldn't have done that." And then--just like it's on a tape deck: same words, same order--happens again and again until you get distracted, and the whole day starts going downhill. Why? Because of that wrong idea that these thoughts and these feelings that arose were yours. You're taking them personally, and you're holding onto them very tightly. And that's clouding the way you see the rest of the world for a period of time until you can suppress those thoughts and those feelings--for a little while--until another situation that's similar comes up. Then this old anger gets added to some new anger, and there's a lot more suffering that occurs.

Now if you have a harmonious perspective, somebody can come up, and they can have all kinds of anger at you. And they can be right or not, it doesn't really matter. What are you doing with that in the present moment? Are you going to take their anger and make it your own and throw it back at them? You can do that; that's the old way of our habitual habits. We re-act the same way. Every time somebody gives us anger, we take their anger and make it ours and then give it back. We give them our dissatisfaction. That leads to more and more pain and suffering, and you walk around with this

attachment. Somebody says something you don't particularly like, and you snap at them. Now, we can do this, and we do it all the time. Or, if our mindfulness is good, we see that. That person that comes with this anger is suffering--and they're suffering big-time. You know what it feels like to be angry. It's not a pleasant feeling. So, your compassion can arise, and--instead of listening to what they're saying and moaning about--you can radiate loving-kindness to that person. Now what's the definition of "compassion"? Seeing another person's pain, allowing them the space to have their pain, and loving them. When somebody's angry, there's a lot of pain there. So we allow them to have their pain. "Okay, they can say anything they want; they can do anything they want, as long as they don't harm me. That's fine." As you start radiating loving-kindness to that person, what happens to that other person? That other person--because it takes two to fight and there's only one fighting--that anger starts disappearing. Then, they'll either walk away, disgusted, or they'll start telling you what the real problem is, because it's not what they're talking about.

So, when you start radiating loving-kindness, you're being very much in the present moment. You're allowing that space for that other person to be the way they want to be, and it's okay. You can't take another person's pain away from them, but you certainly can love them. Now, when they walk away disgusted and grumbling, you start doing something else, and your mind is uplifted, and you're happy. You're not thinking about what they said, because you weren't paying attention to what they said. It wasn't worth paying attention to in the first place. And your mind is uplifted, and you're ready for whatever else arises in the present moment. Now, what happens if this person walks away grumbling--and you know what they're thinking about: "What I said, and what you did," and "I'm right, and they're wrong." Now they get into a car and start to drive. What happens? Are they really driving the car? Or are they thinking--like on that tape deck--over and over again, that whole situation!

That's when accidents occur. Not all accidents, but most. People really aren't paying attention to driving when they're driving; they're thinking about something else. They don't even realize what a real

weapon they have that they're not taking care of. A lot of people say, "You've got to get rid of guns," and, "You have to do this." We ought to take the cars away from people when they're angry, when they're upset, when they're highly emotional, because they're not driving anymore. They're not paying attention to what they're doing in the present moment, and they're dangerous.

So, when we have a harmonious perspective, that means that we soften around everything, and we relax any tension or tightness that begins to arise. Every time you let go of that tension or tightness in your head, in your mind, your mind opens up and takes a little step down. And [with] that little step down, you'll find your mind is very peaceful and calm, and there's no thoughts. There's only this pure awareness, and you bring this pure awareness back to your object of meditation. Now you might have to do this over and over again with a distraction. It doesn't matter how many times you do it. Because--every time you see that distraction, and you let it go, and you come back to your object of meditation--you're building your mindfulness a little bit more and a little bit more. So your mindfulness gets sharper, and then you start looking at how your mind became distracted--what's the process--and you become more and more familiar with it. As you become more familiar with the process of distractions, of dissatisfactions, of emotional upsets, you're looking at little tiny parts. You know there's sadness; sadness is a concept.

There's no such thing as sadness. Sadness is a whole lot of little things put together to make up this idea of what we call "sadness." But what happens first? What happens right after that? What happens after that? What happens after that? How did your mind go from being either neutral or happy to painful and sad? It didn't just all of a sudden jump there, from one thought-moment to the next. It's part of a process, and it's an impersonal process. It's not yours; you don't have any control over it, but you can certainly watch it. And, by watching this process and becoming familiar with it, you can let go of it more easily, and relax into that, and gently come back to your object of meditation again. That leads to happiness. That's how we have a harmonious perspective.

## II. Harmonious Imaging

### (Right Thought)

Now, the next factor was translated as "right thought," and again, we use "harmonious." But, "sankappa," it has three or four different meanings. It's not only "thought." That really isn't very close to what the Buddha was talking about with the Eightfold Path. The closest word in English that I can come up with is "imaging." I'm not talking about imagination, I'm talking about imaging.

Now, when you were practicing the loving-kindness meditation, I said, "You make a wish for your friend's happiness, and then you feel that wish and bring it into your heart." That's imaging that feeling into your heart; that's bringing that image up. So we quite often--because of our attachments and our emotional upheavals--we image a lot of things that cause a lot of problems. We image all kinds of dissatisfaction and all kinds of pain, depression--that's one of the favorites these days. A lot of people are getting drugs for depression. What is depression? A little tightness, feeling, thoughts that get bigger--don't like those feelings, don't like those thoughts--push them away. That craving gets stronger; that dissatisfaction gets bigger. The thoughts get bigger; the feeling gets bigger. "Push that away. I'm depressed. I don't like that feeling." Who doesn't like that feeling? Who's imaging their dissatisfaction into the present moment? What you resist, persists. Why? Because "I" want it to be different than it is. "I" don't like this situation. So, you mentally try to push the feeling away with your thoughts, and the feeling gets bigger--more intense. The more intense it becomes, the more you get dissatisfied, and you try to run away from this feeling of depression, until you go to a doctor and he gives you some kind of drug that has negative side effects. When, in fact, you can let go of the depression yourself just be starting to image in a different way.

Now, when you have depression come up, you're really attached to it. "I like it. I don't like it." Same coin, different sides. As you try to control and identify with these thoughts and these feelings, they get bigger and more intense. You remember when I gave you the

instructions in the meditation: a sensation arises in your body; the first thing that happens is there's thoughts about it. "I wish it would stop. I wish it would go away. I don't like it. I want it to be different than it is." And every thought about that feeling makes the feeling bigger and more intense. So you bring up that image more of "I don't like it. I want it to stop. I want it to go away."--more and more trying to control your feelings with your thoughts, bringing that image of dissatisfaction and identifying with it very heavily.

So what can we do? Somebody that's real depressed, I can come along and say, "Well, just let that feeling go and relax. Let go of all of the thoughts and relax. Start imaging feeling happy." And they can do that one time, and their mind runs back to that feeling of depression and the dissatisfaction. They say, "Well, it's too hard. It doesn't last." Why doesn't it last? Why does your mind go from a happy feeling to an unhappy feeling? Because you're attached to the unhappy feeling! You're strongly attached to it, so it's going to keep coming back. So you've got to work a little while. So you have to let go of the thoughts again and let the feeling be there and relax. "It's a painful feeling." Okay, so it's a painful feeling. So what? It's alright for it to be painful. It has to be because it's there. But you let that feeling float. You let it be there; you let it float, no matter what's happening. Just open up and allow it. And always come back to your object of meditation!

Always come back and image a positive image. This is one of the reasons why the loving-kindness meditation works so well. Because it's real easy to image positive things. You know what it feels like to be happy. "Well, I can only do it for a second, then it disappears." Okay, then do it again. "But I can do it for a whole ten minutes, and my mind still goes back to being unhappy." Okay, do it for three hours. Do it for five days--and watch. You'll start losing your attachment.

What is attachment? "I like it. I don't like it." That's craving. So the more this unpleasant feeling is allowed to be there without trying to push it away again--without trying to make it different than it is--as you allow that feeling to be there by itself, it doesn't have anything to

push against any more. It starts losing its energy, and it will go away all by itself from lack of attention. And what happens? As you keep coming back and imaging this very positive feeling of peace and calm, happiness, joy, whatever, you're developing a new kind of habit. You're changing the old habit of re-acting the way we always act when this feeling arises to responding with openness and love. So your mind begins to stay on your object of meditation longer and longer, and the depression just fades away.

When that happens, all kinds of great things happen in your mind. Why? Because all of the time and energy you put into fighting this unpleasant feeling--you don't have to do that any more. And there's this great big open space. And in the middle of that open space grows that happy feeling. And it gets real big and real strong. You feel a sense of relief. You feel joy come up. You feel real comfortable in your body and in your mind. And you start thinking, "This isn't such bad stuff. Seems to work pretty well." You feel real strong tranquility, real strong peace. That's not to say that some time in the future depression won't arise again. It depends how strong your habits are. It might come again two days from now, who knows? But you have to treat it in the same way every time by changing your perspective and by imaging that positive image.

### III. Harmonious Communication

(Right Speech)

Now the next part of the Eightfold Path, Dr. Rhys Davids called it "Right Speech." And that's--"vaca" is very close to that. But, because I started changing all the words around, I called it "Harmonious Communication." Now communication is bigger than just speech. It's body language and the communication you have with your thoughts and with your feelings.

Now, when I was in Burma, they taught me the Eightfold Path, and they said, "Well, after you have Right View and Right Thought, the next three--they're just morality. They don't have much to do with meditation at all. So they would skip those three. And then they would come up with a few more, and then the last one--they would

say, "That's Right Concentration, but our concentration is different than what the Buddha was talking about." So actually I was practicing a fourfold path.

But, you know, when I started thinking about how important the Eightfold Path is--and it was so important that the Buddha taught it the first time he taught anyone, and it had to do directly with the mental development and attaining Nibbana--that I started looking at: every part of the Eightfold Path has to do with your meditation. It's not "just morality."

Now, when I was taught in Burma, they told me that Right Speech means "not lying." But there's more to it than that, because it's the communication you have, and how you get caught in the present moment by certain thoughts, and the communication you have with these unpleasant feelings when they arise, and how you try to control them. So it's more than just speech. The more you can open up and allow and relax into the present moment, this is Harmonious Communication.

See, I've been telling you all week, there's like two parts of your brain, right? You have a left side and you have a right side. And every time you open up and relax, it's like they're pulling apart a little bit and where there was attachment, now you're starting to relax even more. And you'll go deeper and deeper in that sense of well-being and that sense of real clear mindfulness. And attention as to how all of these things arise becomes easier. Your mind becomes more and more open, and that means you're able to communicate deeper into your own psyche, into your own mental and physical phenomena. And, as you relax more, there's less gross movement of mind. And then there's just the observation.

So now, you've been sitting for a while, your meditation is starting to go very nicely, and you can still have a distracting thought come in your mind, but your mindfulness is so sharp it looks at that and it's just nothing; it's just going on through. You're not getting caught up in the communication of "I like it" and "I don't like it."

## IV. Harmonious Movement

### (Right Action)

Now the next factor, they called "Right Action," and I've never really been satisfied with that definition at all, even though in Pali it's pretty close. But, one day I was sitting in meditation, and I started reflecting on the fact that I was trying to watch all of the movement of mind. And then it dawned on me: "movement." When we have harmonious movement, that means we're watching in a very fluid way, and there's no tension and tightness that will arise. So this Right Action that was always--"watch what you do with your body; don't step on ants on purpose and kill things"--turns into watching how your mind goes from one thing to the next, and how you can open up and relax into that.

## V. Harmonious Lifestyle

### (Right Livelihood)

Now the next one has always been really kind of comical to me, and that is "Right Livelihood." And the definition of Right Livelihood is: "Don't sell guns. Don't sell poisons. Don't harm other beings." What does that have to do with your meditation practice, right here, right now? You're not going to do anything with guns, you're not going to do anything with poisons. So I changed it from "Right Livelihood" to "Harmonious Lifestyle." Now what does that mean? It means keeping the precepts as well as you can.

Now, for a monk, we have 227 rules. You've only taken eight precepts. This is a piece of cake for you. But that's what the right lifestyle is: you don't kill living beings or harm them, you don't take anything that's not given, you don't have any sexual activity, you don't tell lies or use harsh speech, you don't take drugs or alcohol. Now this is not talking about medicines--they're a little bit different. We're talking about drugs and alcohol that cause your mind to really be affected.

And I wonder sometimes about that, because I was in Burma, and I started getting a cold, and I went to the doctor there, and I said, "I'm starting to get a cold." And he said, "Well, just take an aspirin, and that'll help with the headache, and that'll help with the aches in the body and that sort of thing. So I grabbed the aspirin, and I went back, and I decided that an aspirin was too strong--one whole aspirin, so I cut it in half. And I took that, and my awareness was affected negatively all day because of that half an aspirin. So be careful with this kind of stuff. My mind was real dreamy and wandering. I wasn't able to stay with my object of meditation for any length of time, where it had been great right before I started feeling this. And the next day, the cold got worse, but I didn't take any aspirin, and my mindfulness was right back up where it was before. So I took that to mean it's not time for me to take any aspirin. And a lot of people have a tendency to run to these kind of things thinking, "Well, I need this," and it affects the consciousness quite a bit, even though you might not notice it. When your mind settles down, then you really start noticing.

So, you don't take any solid food after the noonday meal. You don't sing, you don't dance. You don't beautify your body with perfumes--although I spray you every now and then with a scent, but that's not as a perfume. This scent that I use helps your mind to become sharper, more alert.

Now the last precept of the eight precepts, I don't give for retreats because it's really not appropriate for this country. And, in Asia, they have these real high beds that are super-soft, and underneath the beds they have statues of animals as protection. So the Buddha said, "Don't sleep on high and luxurious beds," because that was superstition. So, in this country, we don't have those kinds of superstitions, so there's no need to take that precept. So I changed that precept so that you will be loving and kind to yourself and all other beings. When you're practicing loving-kindness retreat, you're going to feel like being that way.

Now, if you break one of these precepts, it will affect your meditation very negatively, and your mind will get super-restless. So, if you

happen to break one of the precepts--I don't care which precept it is, there's no finger-pointing--come and talk to me, and we'll take the precepts again right there so you can purify your mind. And then you make the determination not to do that again. That's all.

But that's the right lifestyle--is keeping those precepts very closely. Now one thing I've found in this country is a lot of people go out, and they do retreats, and they take the [eight] precepts. And then they get off retreat, and they take the five precepts and immediately forget them--"They're not that important. That's only for when I'm retreating." And then they come back and do another retreat, and they start right from the beginning again. So their progress is incredibly slow.

Now the precepts are there for a very good reason. If you break one of the precepts, you'll feel a guilty mind. You'll feel remorse, and that turns into restlessness and a hindrance. And that is--it takes a lot of work to let these things go, to purify your mind again. So I encourage you all to take the precepts very seriously. Now, for people that are taking just five precepts, the third precept about having no sexual

. . . tape break . . .

What this basically comes down to is any kind of sexual activity that causes mental or physical pain or harm to anyone else--don't do that. That, of course, includes things like rape and that sort of thing. But also it means not having relations with anyone who is still young and under the care of their parents or with anyone who has another partner, being married or not.

Now, taking these five precepts, I know a lot of people--when I first started practicing in the mid-70s--marijuana and alcohol were still pretty popular at that time, and people would go and they'd take the retreat, and as soon as they got off their retreat, they couldn't wait to get a joint. Yeah, go smoke a joint, maybe get a few beers. And they'd come back for the next retreat, and their retreat was really

horrible, because their mind was dulled out. They had a lot of sloth and torpor, a lot of dreamy, wandering mind. Why? Guess what? You broke your precepts. So the more seriously you take keeping your precepts, the more advantage it is to you.

Now, if you happen to break a precept in your daily life, then you know that you did it. You know that you told a lie, or you know that you killed something on purpose, or whatever. Stop right then, and forgive yourself for making a mistake. Then, take the precepts again with the determination not to break the precepts. Now when you get off retreat, I strongly encourage that you take the precepts every day. Take them in the morning--not as some kind of rite and ritual, and you don't have to do it in another language that you don't understand. But you're doing this to keep them in your mind, as a reminder.

Now what's the advantage of keeping the precepts?

Your mind naturally becomes tranquil, very peaceful, very calm. You understand the instructions in meditation, and your progress is incredibly fast. I had a student in Malaysia. She was truly a wonderful person. She spent all of her time helping other people. She taught in Sunday school (we had Buddhist Sunday schools there). And she was just sweet. Now she'd never done any meditation, and I was giving a weekend retreat. So, she asked if she could learn some meditation from me, and I said, "Sure. No problem." And she came and about halfway through the first day, I came around to see how she was doing and said, "How's your meditation?" She said, "Well, it seems to be going on all right." I said, "How long are you sitting?" She said, "Only 45 minutes." ("Only" is the keyword here.) And I said, "Why don't you sit longer?" She said, "You know, I have such pain in my knees that I just can't sit any longer. The pain is just too intense." So I said, "Okay. Don't sit on the floor any more; sit in a chair." And her next sitting was four hours, and she got into the first jhana! The first day of a retreat! I wanted to hit her in the back of the head. Nobody is supposed to progress that fast, but the reason that she did was

because she was real careful about keeping the precepts. And she was a true example of a virtuous person. So that's "Harmonious Lifestyle."

## VI. Harmonious Practice

(Right Effort)

Now the next one they talk about is "**Right Effort.**" And--when I was in Burma right after it was really run into the ground--gotta "try, try, try all the time. Put more energy into it; put more effort into it." When I went to Mahasi Center, I went to Sayadaw U Pandita, and he said, "How long are you sitting?" And I said, "Well, I go to bed at 11:00, I get up at 3:00, and I'm sitting the rest of the day--sitting and walking." "Well, what are you sleeping so much for?" So I said, "Okay, and I cut it down to two hours. And I did that for three months. I put in a lot of effort, but it wasn't the right kind of effort.

I changed the words so that the understanding is a little bit easier. I started calling right effort, "**Harmonious Practice.**" Now when you look at the definition of "effort," the way they give it in the text, the harmonious practice is recognizing when you have an unwholesome state, letting go of that unwholesome state and relaxing. Bringing up a wholesome state, keep that wholesome state going. That's what the practice is, isn't it? And it doesn't matter if you're sitting, or you're walking, or you're going to the bathroom, or you're eating, or you're taking your shower--it doesn't matter. You stay with your object of meditation as much as you possibly can. What's your object of meditation? Open heart. Making a wish for your spiritual friend. Smiling.

Having a sense of play with your meditation is invaluable. Now I've taken a lot of retreats over the years. A lot of Vipassana retreats, and you know, you never see anybody smiling in a Vipassana retreat, because they're trying so hard, and it is a difficult practice. I was telling you a little bit a few days ago that I did a loving-kindness retreat by myself at a Vipassana center where everybody else was walking around real serious, and I'm walking around with this great

big smile on my face because my heart is so open I can't believe it, and my mind is really uplifted. And you could say I stood out like a sore thumb. But I was using right effort. Any time any little tension or tightness started to come, I would recognize that, let it go, and relax, come back to my object of meditation and stay with my object of meditation as long as I could. Not forcing it, not trying too hard. Any time you try too hard, you will have tension arise in your head. Sometimes people practice loving-kindness, and they like to use the loving-kindness to beat away feelings. And it doesn't work. "Well, I'll force my mind to stay on this loving-kindness so this pain in my knee won't bother me anymore." It doesn't work.

Now when you have sensations arise, and you let go of the thoughts of that sensation, and you allow that sensation to be there, over a period of time--after coming back to your object of meditation--your mind starts to gain a sense of balance with that sensation. And then it just kind of--like it moves away, and there's more and more space until finally, it doesn't even pull your attention to it anymore.

I used to visit a lot of people in Asia that were close to dying. They don't have a thing like Hospice over there, but they have monks. And there was one lady in particular that I'm thinking of--that had cancer of the stomach, and she was really in a lot of pain. And I'd go visit her every couple of days and see how she was doing, and I started teaching her how to meditate--teach her how to relax into all of these weird things that were happening to her body and her mind. One day I walked into where she was, sitting in her home, and she was sitting in the chair, and she was going, "Oh-h-h-h-h" and moaning and groaning. And I thought, "There's somebody that's fighting that temptation."

Now, any time that you go into a place where there are people that are really suffering, you cannot take their pain away. Being sad because they're suffering makes you suffer and makes them feel worse. So, always before I would go visit anyone, I would start practicing loving-kindness, wishing that person well, and wishing myself well, and reaffirming the fact that whatever they are going through, it's okay for them to be there. "I'm going to love them no

matter what." So I walked into this room where this lady was moaning over and over and over again, and I said, "Well, how are you doing?" And she said, "Aw, this is terrible; it hurts so bad." And I said, "Well, just start relaxing a little bit," and I started radiating some loving-kindness to her, and then she stopped moaning so much. And I said, "Now, look at all those thoughts of dissatisfaction and start letting those thoughts go and relax. Now, let go of that tightness--all of those muscles around your stomach that are tightening and making that pain worse. Keep relaxing." Within five minutes she had a smile on her face. And the pain went from a true emergency to "oh, it's only this." And over the time that I was going to see her, she actually started taking less and less medication. It dulled her mind. As she started understanding more and more how to open up into this and allow that feeling to be there without resistance.

That's right effort. That's right perspective. That's right imaging. That's "right" all of this stuff. It's being in harmony with the present moment--not resisting and not fighting--opening up and accepting and loving the present moment for what it is.

## VII. Harmonious Attention

(Right Mindfulness)

Now the next factor is "**Right Mindfulness,**" and you've already had a talk about what "mindfulness" is. A lot of people use that word and don't have a clue. "Mindfulness" is your observing power. It's your attention. So you practice having "**Harmonious Attention.**" It means not resisting, not trying to control, not making things the way you want them to be. Opening up, relaxing, staying with your object of meditation, noticing when your mind moves and how it moves.

Now, every time you let go of any kind of thing that pulls your mind away from your object of meditation, and relax and come back, your mindfulness gets sharper. And then you'll start noticing little, tiny movements. Before long, you start noticing that your mind just starts to wobble--just begins to move a little bit--and you can relax right

there and let it go. And then you'll start noticing things that happen before the wobble. As you go deeper in your meditation, you'll start seeing these things much more clearly.

Now what's the advantage of doing that, having that kind of mindfulness? Because, when you take that into your everyday life, you won't get knocked off balance as easily. You're so familiar with how these processes work, that you'll see them, and you'll start letting them go because they're painful. And every time you let go and relax and come back to your object of meditation, that is the cessation of suffering.

## VIII. Harmonious Collectedness

(Right Concentration)

Now, the last factor--I've got a lot to say about that one--"**Right Concentration.**" One of the observations that Rhys Davies made about the word "concentration" (or "samadhi" in Pali) was that that word was never used in the time of the Buddha. The Buddha made this word up to describe a particular kind of mental development. But Rhys Davies, because of his ignorance, called it "concentration," and it's been called "concentration" ever since. And any time anybody thinks about "concentration," they think about one-pointedness of mind. Because there were a lot of practices that were being practiced during the time of the Buddha, a lot of different kinds of meditation, and they were all one-pointed concentration. The Buddha could have picked up one of those other Pali words that meant one-pointed concentration, but he didn't. He made up a word to describe something different. So my definition of "samadhi" is "collectedness." Collectedness has stillness, calm, and composure.

Now, the "**Harmonious Collectedness**" is letting go of these hindrances, and finally starting to get you to the jhanas. The "jhanas" mean different meditation levels, different stages of meditation. "Jhana" does not mean concentration. In the suttas, when asked what kind of meditation the Buddha taught, in Pali, he called it "samatha." Now, "samatha" has been translated as "concentration."

"Samatha" means tranquility, calm, peace. And sometimes--in the Pali, in the Digha Nikaya--he calls his meditation "Samatha vipassana": "tranquility insight." And he goes on to describe all of the different jhanas.

So there's some real misunderstanding of what happened after the Buddha died. About 230 years, 220 years after the Buddha died--there was, in India, there was a whole lot of Brahmins that started taking on the robes but then teaching their Brahmanism. They didn't know anything about what the Buddha taught at all. And they started using a lot of the words that the Buddha used. "Samadhi" is one of them. But they were describing the Vedas; they were describing what was in the Brahmin texts. Then along came King Asoka, and he wanted the sangha to be pure again. So he started disrobing anybody that didn't know what the four noble truths were.

But a lot of those [Brahmin] teachings still got stuck in with the Buddhist ideas. And then, five hundred years after the Buddha died, they had the fourth Buddhist council where they wrote everything down. Now this Brahminism had been handed down verbally, and there's a lot of things that got changed around in the Buddhist texts. And then when the first council came up, they took out some of the Brahminism, but some of it still got stuck in there. So there's still some Brahmin ideas--Hindu ideas--that are mixed up in the Buddhist texts. There's one in particular that really stands out. It's in the Anguttara Nikaya. Here, the Brahmins were very much against women being leaders of anything. In one of the texts it says that the Buddha said that women would never be able to run a country--be a President or whatever. And that's obviously nonsense, because there's a lot of women that are very capable and do run stuff. That's part of the Hindu texts, the Brahmin texts that got mixed up, and it's still there because nobody thought it was important enough to take it out.

Now, about a thousand years after the Buddha died, there was another Brahmin by the name of Buddhagosa, and he had memorized all of the Vedic texts. A Buddhist monk came around, and he started talking about Buddhism, and he became real enthusiastic

about Buddhism. Now Buddhagosa was an excellent scholar; he was really a top-notch scholar, very intellectual. He became so impressed with the Buddhist teaching that he took on the robes, and went to one of the Buddhist schools--they had colleges there at that time. But the only thing he really studied was the Pali language, and he became very proficient at that--very good Pali scholar. And he started getting a little bit prideful, and he started thinking, "You know, I bet I know Pali better than my teacher does now." And the teacher read his mind. And the teacher said, "Now you have to pay for that. Now, in Sri Lanka, they have been teaching and writing commentaries for five hundred years, but they're writing the commentaries in Sri Lankan; they're not writing them in Pali. I want you to go to Sri Lanka and change all those commentaries back into Pali."

Now he was a scholar and an intellectual and didn't know a thing about meditation. The first book he wrote when he went to Sri Lanka was the Visuddhimagga. The Visuddhimagga is called "The Path of Purification," and he wrote that the Buddha had forty different meditations. And this book was done in such a scholarly way. He divided it up into three different sections. First, is morality, and that's reasonably good. Then he wrote about concentration. Now here's a monk that doesn't know anything about meditation. And he starts thinking, "You know, I don't know what the Buddha taught about meditation, but I know what is says in the Vedas, and all meditation is the same, right? So he wrote about meditation by using the Vedas and mixing in Buddhist words. So it sounds right. He was very skillful at taking parts of a sutta that was just one line that made it sound perfect. Then he wrote another section on insight. And he divided the two kinds of meditation; he said, "This is one kind of meditation, this is another kind of meditation."

Now at the time, in Sri Lanka, the monks had been kind of lazy. They weren't very good at meditation; they didn't do it very much, and they didn't keep up their scholarship. Now he comes along with this book that's very scholarly, and they started reading that, and they started saying, "This is right! This is it!" And they went off, and they started practicing on their own. And because of the scholarship that he had and put in that book, they started picking up their scholarship

and after ten or fifteen years, they started going, "Wait a minute. This isn't right. It says this in the text, and it says this here, and this is definitely not the same thing." But this book had become so popular that they couldn't stop it.

About this time, there was a real corrupt time in Burma for the monks. They were--monks were doing all kinds of things that they shouldn't have been doing. So they wanted to purify the sangha, so they had two boatloads of monks go to Sri Lanka and disrobe and re-ordain. Now they happened to run across this Visuddhimagga, and they got real excited because their sangha had been real corrupt--they hadn't been keeping their practices pure, they hadn't been doing much in the way of meditation--so they run across this, and now they're all excited about this Visuddhimagga, and they brought it back to Burma. And they've kept it in Burma for a thousand years--1500 years, something like that--I don't know how long it was. A real long time. And they've used that book as the basis of all meditation in Burma. But when you start looking at that as compared with the original suttas, you start seeing that they're not quite the same. They're not teaching quite the same thing that the Buddha was teaching. This is why it's real important to go back to the original texts.

Now, how did I find out about this? I'm a dumb American. I wanted to find out about meditation, and the first book I read about meditation was a Burmese book on meditation. It was real clear--do it this way. So that's what I picked up, and that's what I stuck with. And I got real interested in the Burmese and all of their forms of meditation. And that's why I went to Burma. I spent almost three years in Burma, and I practiced their form of meditation. And I went to the end of their meditation, and I found out this doesn't lead to the same place that the Buddha was talking about. So I became real disheartened.

And about that time, I was invited to go to a real big monastery in Kuala Lumpur. The head monk there had been real old--he was 75 or 76 years old--and he was used to giving two or three talks to three or four hundred people every time--every day. Two or three talks a

week--I should say it that way. But every time he gave a talk, there was a lot of people that came, so he invited me to come there and to give dhamma talks and to teach meditation. And as it turned out, there was a Sri Lankan monk that came through, and he said, "Oh, I understand that you teach meditation. How do you teach it?" Now, I had given up on vipassana at that point, because I saw that it didn't lead to what I wanted it to lead to, or what I thought the Buddha was talking about. So I was teaching loving-kindness meditation, and I started telling him how I was teaching it, and he said, "You're teaching it just exactly right. The only thing you're doing is you're using the language of the Visuddhimagga. Throw the Visuddhimagga away. Just use the language of the suttas."

As soon as I did that--as soon as I let go of the Visuddhimagga--all of the suttas just--bang!--I could understand them. Now before, I was reading the Visuddhimagga, and I'd read the suttas, and I couldn't understand the suttas, so I put it down and went back to the Visuddhimagga. Now, I put down the Visuddhimagga and picked up the suttas, and it's plain what they're talking about. And I've tried to encourage as many teachers as possible to start using the original texts and let go of all of the ideas in the Visuddhimagga. Now Buddhagosa says that there's forty different meditations that the Buddha taught, and I've found fifty-two. So who am I going to believe?

So, I would very much like to encourage you to start practicing the way that the Buddha was talking about rather than people that have studied the Visuddhimagga. And there was a friend that came and listened to one of the dhamma talks, and I was going straight--it's not like we've talked tonight, it's like we talked last night when I was reading straight from the sutta. And they came to me--and they were a teacher--and they came to me after the dhamma talk, and they just kind of shook their head, and they said, "You know, I've been teaching a watered-down Buddhism." When you go back to the suttas themselves, and you start using the suttas, what happens is your teaching becomes much more systematic and easier to understand. And because of the attachment to the Visuddhimagga, that's hard for a lot of people to hear--unfortunately.

But as you become more successful in your meditation, and other people around you start seeing that you're smiling and you're laughing and you're not getting caught by such heavy emotional states and you have more balance in your life, you're the best advertisement that there is. And that is--don't do anything special, just be happy. Practice your meditation. Keep going on it, don't stop. If you experience one jhana, you have the potential to experience Nibbana--if you don't stop.

*transcribed by Ron Carney*

*San Diego, CA*

*June 2005*

May you reach Nibbana Quickly and easily in this very lifetime!  
Metta2U all. Bhante Vimalaramsi.

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Questions concerning this Dhamma talk transcript on the "Harmonious 8-Fold Path" should be directed to Bhante Vimalaramsi at [bhantev4u@yahoo.com](mailto:bhantev4u@yahoo.com) If you would like to request Bhante Vimalaramsi to give a Dhamma talk or retreat at your location, please contact [khantikhema2@gmail.com](mailto:khantikhema2@gmail.com) for setting time and place. Please put "Dhamma Talk – Retreat Info" in the subject line of your email when writing. Thanks, SK Edit- August 29, 2005

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