



# The Noble Eightfold Path

## I. The Name “Noble Eightfold Path”

When the Buddha first turned the Dharma wheel to preach, He taught the Noble Eightfold Path. It represents eight of the elements in the *Thirty Seven Elements of Enlightenment*, and it is the fourth truth of the Four Noble Truths. It is the way which transcends the ordinary to attain the sacred; it is the essential path that leads away from suffering and to happiness. It is the raft that takes one from this shore to the other shore. It is the journey that all those who take refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha) must ultimately travel. It is the fundamental Buddhist method of practice that leads one from delusion to enlightenment.

The Noble Eightfold Path is not an unwholesome path, and it is not a wrong path. It is most definitely not a path that leads one astray. Rather, it is a path that is capable of extinguishing all worldly vexation and distress. It is indeed the path that illuminates and paves the way to the holy realm. Therefore it is called the perfect, right and holy path. There are eight constituents of the Noble Eightfold Path, which together, provide the method that leads one in towards

the Buddhist saints—stream-attainers, once-returners, non-returners, arhats, and Bodhisattvas—and ultimately to Buddhahood.

These eight items of the path are as follows:

1.	Right view	Rightful and just understanding
2.	Right intention	Rightful and just thinking
3.	Right speech	Rightful and just talk
4.	Right action	Rightful and just conduct
5.	Right livelihood	Rightful and just means of living
6.	Right effort	Rightful and just effort
7.	Right mindfulness	Rightful and just contemplation
8.	Right concentration	Rightful and just meditation

## II. The purpose of the Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path gives guidance and direction on how to live everyday life. It leads Buddhist practice towards the liberation that is *nirvana*. How does one realistically put this into

practice and experience? According to the *Abhidharma-mahā-vibhāsā-śāstra* (*Treatise on the Great Commentary on the Abhidharma*):

Right view causes and conditions right intention;

Right intention causes and conditions right speech;

Right speech causes and conditions right action;

Right action causes and conditions right livelihood;

Right livelihood causes and conditions right effort;

Right effort causes and conditions right mindfulness;

Right mindfulness causes and conditions right concentration.

If in daily life, one can teach and inspire oneself in this way, to earnestly implement and strive to experience these eight practices, then one can reach the ultimate realm of liberation.

### III. The meaning of the Noble Eightfold Path

This section provides an explanation of the Noble Eightfold Path. This is a brief and simple illustration of the meaning of the eightfold path according to sutras, precepts and treatises collectively. To know how to correctly apply the Noble Eightfold Path in daily life is absolutely essential.

#### 1) Right view

All people should follow right views and thoughts, but for those who practice and follow the Buddhist path, it is that much more important. According to the *Srimala-devi-simhanada Sutra (Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala Sutra)*, “views that are not subverted are thus named right views.” If people have deluded, distracted, inverted thoughts all day, this is called having an inverted mind. The primary point here is the lack of right view. According to the *Avatamsaka Sutra (Flower Garland Sutra)*, “when right view is sturdy and secured, all deluded thoughts are relinquished.” As said in the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sastra (Great Wisdom Discourse)*, “right view is wisdom.” Indeed, right view is just true wisdom. But what is true wisdom? From the perspective of the

saints, who take Buddhist study and practice to achieve the fruit of enlightenment, true wisdom is to attain the wisdom that is without attachment, without differentiation, and capable of revealing the true principles of the Four Noble Truths. Then, it may be called right view. Only with the wisdom attained through right view can one investigate and see through the countless phenomena and karma of this world. These countless phenomena and karma all arise due to the coming together and joining of causes and conditions. All follow the aggregation and dissolution, the originating and ceasing, of causes and conditions. This is the reality of the impermanence, suffering and emptiness of human existence.

## 2) Right intention

With the understanding of the Four Noble Truths, comes the understanding of the reality of this world. Namely, that everything is nothing but impermanence, suffering and emptiness. By further committing to practice right intention, true wisdom will flourish. According to the *Yogacara-bhumi (Discourse on the Stages of Concentration Practice)*, “The non-hatred and non-evil thoughts which originate through the strengthening power of right view are called right

intention." The practice of mercy is capable of stopping hatred while the practice of kindness and compassion is capable of stopping evil thoughts of wrong doing towards others. If one is capable of doing this, the mind will become pure and clear, completely calm and flexible. This must be done through the power of right view and right intention.

### 3) Right Speech

This is simply honest, truthful, and kind-hearted speech. Namely, it is neither false, nor flattering, nor divisive, nor hurtful speech. One must speak with truth, honesty, integrity, modesty, and commendation when appropriate. Together, these constitute right speech. Practicing right speech in this manner is capable of initiating faith, happiness, and overall advantageous qualities to the Buddhist follower.

### 4) Right action

Right action means behavior and daily activities should follow proper conduct. According to the *Yogacara-bhumi (Discourse on the Stages of Concentration Practice)*, "To not only understand but abide by and actually apply right knowledge in daily life, whether in the process of striving for clothes and all manners of material matters, while

walking, sitting, lying down or getting up, is called right action."

To make a habit out of good conduct in daily life is right action. The following practices from among the Ten Good Practices—abstaining from taking life, abstaining from taking what is not given, and abstaining from sexual misconduct etc.—constitute right action.

#### 5) Right livelihood

This guides and directs the way to right and appropriate livelihood and keeps people from straying to the wrong way of life. Means of livelihood should be in accordance with Buddhist Dharma. For example, people should conduct their business in a fair and honest way, placing importance on virtue and ethics. In this way, society could be more harmonious and human relationships and emotions could be more pure. Such professions are called right livelihood. In chapter twenty-nine of the *Yogacara-bhumi*, (*Discourse on the Stages of Concentration Practice*), "To abide by the Buddhist Dharma in seeking clothing, food and drink and all matters of the material world, to be away from all unwholesome means of livelihood, that is right livelihood." For example, professions such as owning or working in a gambling house, casino, or

slaughterhouse, selling or trafficking weapons for the purpose of injuring living beings, are all wrong livelihoods.

#### 6) Right effort

This is also called right efficiency. Effort like this is described as refined and not distracted, allowing one to proceed forward, not backing down. This is the exact effort required to extinguish unwholesome qualities and to cultivate wholesome, good qualities. As the sutras say, “To dally at home is to miss out on material profit. To dally on going forth from the home [entering monastic life] is to miss out on the treasures of the Buddhist Dharma.” Furthermore, in chapter forty three, the *Mindfulness of the Right Dharma Sutra* emphasizes: “To be remiss [in right effort] is the origin of all wrong ways. It is the seed of the cycles of life and death, the cause of all worldly vexations and distress.” Those who wish to break out and escape from the fetters of life and death must wholeheartedly apply right effort and avoid laziness.

## 7) Right mindfulness

This also means truthfulness, or in other words, pure and clear mindfulness of the noble path through which there is no arising of unpure, attached or false mindfulness. Right mindfulness is employed to truthfully contemplate the four contemplations with respect to body, feelings, mind and mental phenomenon:

- i. Contemplation on the impurity of the body ~ contemplate that the body is filled with dung, urine, mucus, all around impure, collecting dirt all over, and thus one should not be greedy and attached to it. One must strive to abandon and extinguish all sense of attachment to the body as self. With this insight, it becomes clear that the Buddhist practice is the clean and pure path.
- ii. Contemplation on the suffering of all life ~ contemplate the happiness and suffering of the world and see that it is, in essence, all suffering. Birth, old age, ailments and death—of course that is all suffering. But when happiness and merriment change and fade—this is also suffering because it is impermanent. Therefore the Buddha said: “The fading of happiness can also be called the suffering from impermanence or fading.”

This is contemplation on the suffering of the world.

- iii. Contemplation on the impermanence of the mind ~ contemplate the mind, thoughts upon thoughts originating and ceasing, constantly changing and fluctuating as fleeting as monkeys and wild horses, hard to predict and control. The mind is changing and impermanent, one moment in heaven and the next in hell, one minute a hungry ghost, the next a wild animal. This is contemplation on the impermanence of the mind.
- iv. Contemplation on the non-self of all physical and mental phenomena ~ contemplate all worldly phenomena, which are the outcome of dependent arising and are all devoid of any inherent nature. All worldly phenomena are fantasy and creation, without fundamental embodiment—the toils of the five aggregates. Of all sentient beings in this world, not one is its own master. This is contemplation on the non-self of all phenomena.

## 8) Right concentration

Namely, this is the right and proper way to practice Buddhist meditation. Take the distracted, unfocused mind and body, and focus the mind one-pointedly; this is the way to cultivate and develop the capacity for Buddhist wisdom. This enhances and enriches the way to enlightenment. Therefore this is called right concentration.

## IV. The effectiveness of the Noble Eightfold Path

The practice and accomplishment of the Noble Eightfold Path can effectively extinguish the eight false paths. For example:

1.	Right view	Is capable of extinguishing false view
2.	Right intention	Is capable of extinguishing false intention
3.	Right speech	Is capable of extinguishing false, divisive, hurtful and idle speech
4.	Right action	Is capable of extinguishing all manners of misconduct
5.	Right livelihood	Is capable of extinguishing all unreasonable, immoral and unwholesome livelihoods
6.	Right effort	Is capable of extinguishing all

		unreasonable, immoral, unwholesome effort
7.	Right mindfulness	Is capable of extinguishing all false mindfulness
8.	Right concentration	Is capable of extinguishing all false concentration that stray from the Buddhist path

Generally the eight false paths can be effectively extinguished through the daily practice of all elements of the right path.

The Noble Eightfold Path is the great road that should be followed in daily life. This is the journey that must be traveled by all those who take refuge in the Three Jewels. This is the path walked by all of the Buddhist saints—stream-attainers, once-returners, non-returners, arhats, and Bodhisattvas. Therefore, the Noble Eightfold Path is the great illuminated way that all Buddhist followers should understand and practice.



# The Three Jewels

## I. Introduction

Living in this world, it is helpful to study Buddhism, for it can guide people to understanding the truth of human existence. Only by understanding does human existence have meaning. The following are ten aspects towards understanding human existence:

- 1) Holding an honest occupation in order to maintain an honest, wholesome lifestyle
- 2) Understanding the cause and effect (karma) of wholesome and unwholesome actions and thoughts in order to cultivate an upright character
- 3) Valuing morals and ethics in order to abide harmoniously with society
- 4) Gain understanding of one's mind in order to investigate the truth of human existence
- 5) How does one understand the mind? Through the study of Buddhism.
- 6) To study Buddhism, it is essential to have faith

- 7) When faith is clear, thorough and ready, the first action is to take refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha)
- 8) To take refuge in the Three Jewels, it is necessary to first select a wise master
- 9) When selecting a wise master, it is essential to choose a monastic (one who has gone forth from home)
- 10) Stay close to one's Buddhist master, listening often to the Buddhist Dharma

The cultivation of a deep relationship with and understanding of the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) is a refuge in and of itself. This provides a way towards understanding the meaning of human existence, as well as the starting point of Buddhist wisdom.

## II. Explanation of the Three Jewels (*tri-ratna*)

### 1) Jewel of Buddha

What does it mean to be a Buddha? A great enlightened Buddha is one who has practiced Buddhism for a long time, who has obtained the deepest calm and concentration through meditation, who at the last moment, in a blink of an eye, has attained all-equalizing wisdom, who is thoroughly enlightened to the truth of human existence in this world, who has experienced great joy of the Dharma, who has henceforth transcended the cycles of lifetimes in the *saha* world, who is forever emancipated from the suffering of life and death, and, who has achieved unequalled Buddhahood. Such a one is a great enlightened Buddha. The Buddha has great mercy and resolve. Therefore with great compassion for the state of human existence, the Buddha shows the truth of the world, using convenient means to teach and lead all sentient beings. Therefore the Buddha is called the great teacher.

Over 2,500 years ago, Sakyamuni Buddha, gave up his position as heir to a kingdom in order to pursue the truth of the world. He

sought many masters to teach him the way. At long last, after six years of severe ascetic practice, at the foot of a Bodhi tree, while looking up at a bright star, He came to a direct understanding of the way, and attained real Bodhi, or Buddhahood. This is the treasure of the Buddha.

## 2) Jewel of Dharma

The Dharma literally represents the mouth and words of the Buddha. This comprises the Buddha's teachings on the six realms of rebirth, the four noble truths, twelve links of dependent origination, the six perfections (*paramita*) of the Bodhisattva, the one-vehicle path and etc. These teachings, spanning the 49 years of the Buddha's career as a teacher, are aggregated in the Tripitaka (Buddhist canon), which consists of twelve volumes. These treasures of wisdom, handed down through generations, will always be the guide to practice and meditation, and thereby to the ultimate truth. With these, mankind will always have a way to transcend suffering and attain real happiness. Therefore, the Dharma is called the treasure of the Dharma.

### 3) Jewel of Sangha

The Sangha are those men and women who, for the sake of following the Buddha, go forth from home, shave their heads and don monastic robes. The Sangha are the community of monastics who pursue, inherit and pass on the teachings of the Buddha. The Sangha exist in harmony with lay people. There are two types of Sangha: monastics focused more exclusively on practice and monastics more focused on administrative duties. The first group of monastics constitutes those holy ones who have walked far on the sacred path to true understanding. They seek to reach the unconditioned truth. The latter group of monastics constitutes those Sangha who have yet to travel far on the sacred path to true understanding. The following are the six principles of the Sangha:

- i. To live as a group ~ to get along with and live harmoniously with each other
- ii. To practice kind speech ~ speech is friendly and harmonious
- iii. To cultivate right intention ~ to share similar goals and insights along the Sangha path

- iv. To practice the precepts together ~ follow the precepts together in daily practice
- v. To cultivate right view together~ to uniformly cultivate right view and perspective
- vi. To benefit equally together ~ equality in clothes and food leads to harmony among the Sangha

To uniformly abide by the above six principles together is the basic foundation of the establishment of Sangha. This is the treasure of the Sangha.

#### 4) Jewel

Jewel—like worldly treasures, are respected and precious. As such, they are rare and hard to come by. Similarly, so are the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, which in this *saha* world of suffering, are rarely encountered by everyday sentient beings not endowed with great merits. On the one hand, worldly treasures have great value in this lifetime. But such material treasures can be stolen by thieves and robbers. Moreover, at the end of a lifetime, that worldly value cannot

follow a person. On the other hand, the Three Jewels cannot be destroyed or stolen by thieves or robbers, but indeed can follow a person. Material treasures only have value in this lifetime but no advantages for the next lifetime. However, the power of the Three Jewels can extinguish all doubts, fears, distressing passions and delusions in this lifetime, and in the next lifetime, can lead one to rebirth in a Buddha land and wholesome realms. Material treasures take physical form while the Three Jewels do not. Material treasures provoke and manifest people's greed, creating impurity in the mind while the other-worldly Three Jewels dispel people's greed, creating purity in the mind. If people indulge in material treasures, they are likely to be corrupted by greed, hatred and lust. If people embrace the merits of the Three Jewels, they are likely to transcend worldly existence. Given this comparison, it should be obvious that the Three Jewels surpass material treasures in value, and should, indeed be treasured and respected.

When Sakyamuni Buddha was in the world, the above Three Jewels were referred to as the Three Jewels that represent three distinct entities (Buddha—the Sakyamuni Buddha

Himself, Dharma—what the Buddha taught, Sangha—His first disciples). From the day Buddha entered nirvana until today, these Three Jewels have been referred to as the Three Jewels that uphold and carry on the Buddhist tradition. In this context, the Jewel of the Buddha refers to the Buddha's image in paintings and statues, the Jewel of the Dharma refers to all of the Buddha's teachings in writing (sutras, treatises etc.), and the Jewel of the Sangha refers to Buddhist monks and nuns. Because neither the Buddha's image nor scriptures can speak aloud, all depends on the Sangha to teach and turn the wheel of the Dharma. The Sangha represents and embodies Buddhism. When there are many Sangha in the world, Buddhism is flourishing. When there are few Sangha in the world, Buddhism is in decline. Therefore within the Three Jewels, the Sangha's role is essential.

### **III. Why should one take refuge in the Three Jewels?**

The Three Jewels are the starting point for becoming a Buddhist. They represent the bridge leading away from the saha world of suffering. The Three Jewels are the bright light that dispels the darkness of ignorance. The Three Jewels represent the ship of compassion in the sea of suffering. The Three Jewels are the path leading to *arhatship*. The Three Jewels can extinguish the dust and dirt of the body and mind. The Three Jewels can enrich the poverty of the mind caused by greed. The Three Jewels can extinguish the sea of flames of hatred. The Three Jewels are the foremost effective guides to the attainment of Buddhahood. Therefore the Three Jewels are a place of refuge for the mind and body.

### **IV. What does it mean to take refuge in the Three Jewels?**

The Chinese phrase for “take refuge” consists of these characters: “皈依”. The “皈” stands for “皈投” which means to follow. The “依” stands for “依靠” which means to depend on. Mankind can indeed follow and depend on the

Three Jewels. In childhood, people depend on their parents. In school, they depend on teachers and textbooks. In working life, they depend on colleagues. In old age, they depend on walking sticks, medicine, their children and family. However, in that moment before the end of a lifetime, one cannot depend on any of these. None of these can take one across and away from the world of suffering, nor can one take any of these along with them to the next world. What follows, instead, are the *effects* of one's karmic deeds in this lifetime.

Only steadfast and confident faith in the Three Jewels cultivated throughout this lifetime can be of use in that moment. This is because Buddhist wisdom speaks of cause and effect, karma, which is the deciding factor of the world. Taking refuge in the Three Jewels does not mean disrespect to other beliefs, deities or ancestors. Rather, it helps to cultivate whole-hearted faith in an individual, which extinguishes ignorance and superstition. Furthermore, if circumstances permit, it could cultivate in one the vow to abstain from taking life in the most basic of ways—by becoming vegetarian. Although those who take refuge in the Three Jewels are not required to be

vegetarian, as the ordained Sangha are, it would definitely be great. One should make an effort to be close to wise Buddhist teachers, listen to and read the sutras and scriptures, and use the Dharma to guide all thoughts and actions. Only through practice like this can one attain the true advantages of Buddhist wisdom.

## V. **Clarifying confusions about taking refuge in the Three Jewels**

Taking refuge in the Three Jewels is not equivalent to praying to deities for blessings and protection. Regarding one's own conduct and deeds, if one hands this all over to deities to arrange, then one does not take responsibility or blame for one's own actions. People even go as far as offering sacrifices of other lives to the deities in order to gain fulfillment and blessing for one's own ambitions and desires. Indeed, this kind of practice is unequal in that poor well-meaning people do not have the same opportunity to seek salvation. To begin the study of Buddhism by taking refuge in the Three Jewels is to rely on the merits of the Three Jewels. The Three Jewels are superior external helping conditions to one's practice. In addition to relying on the Three Jewels, what is most essential is to use one's own mind to diligently cultivate merits and wisdom. The karmic union of one's practice and refuge in the Three Jewels—as cause and condition—will give rise to a powerful endowment to one's future good karma. In the *Lotus Sutra*, The Buddha says: "Helping conditions give rise to Buddhahood." Therefore, external helping

conditions—like the Three Jewels—are essential.

## **VI. Advantages of taking refuge in the Three Jewels**

The advantages of taking refuge in the Three Jewels are inexhaustible. In the twelve volumes of the Tripitaka (Buddhist Canon), the majority is explaining and praising the Three Jewels, recounting stories of the merits of the Three Jewels or introducing the advantages of taking refuge in the Three Jewels. For example, some oft-used metaphors used to describe the advantages of the Three Jewels are: “bright light in the long night,” “the ship of compassion in the sea of suffering,” “the refreshing rain in the house of fire,” “the bridge to cross over to the other shore.” In addition, below are ten points which every learning Buddhist should know:

- 1) Those who take refuge in the Three Jewels ~ are officially disciples of the Buddha
- 2) Those who take refuge in the Three Jewels ~ will no longer fall into unwholesome paths or worlds of suffering

- 3) Those who take refuge in the Three Jewels ~ will cultivate a more upright character
- 4) Those who take refuge in the Three Jewels ~ will forever be under the protection of good deities, Buddhist saints—stream attainers, once-returners, non-returners, arhats and Bodhisattvas—and Buddhas
- 5) Those who take refuge in the Three Jewels ~ will be able to easily attain the respect of people
- 6) Those who take refuge in the Three Jewels ~ will be able to make wholesome, true friends
- 7) Those who take refuge in the Three Jewels ~ will easily cultivate and accumulate good merits
- 8) Those who take refuge in the Three Jewels ~ will extinguish unwholesome karma, while wholesome and insightful wisdom will shine brightly and auspiciously
- 9) Those who take refuge in the Three Jewels ~ are ready to receive the Buddhist precepts
- 10) Those who take refuge in the Three Jewels ~ will attain enlightenment in the future

The very act of taking refuge in the Three Jewels provides so many advantages and virtues. Those who are sincerely interested in learning about Buddhism should find their way to a Buddhist monastery and get to know a Dharma Master. From there, aspire to take refuge in the Three Jewels, listen to the sutras, and practice the Dharma. In this way, seize these precious opportunities afforded in this lifetime to begin a journey on the path to Buddhahood.

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