

Noble Eightfold Path

The path to nirvana, comprising eight aspects in which an aspirant must become practiced: right views, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration.

The **Noble Eightfold Path** (**Pali**: *ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*, **Sanskrit**: *āryāṣṭāṅgamārga*)^[1] is an early summary of the path of Buddhist practices leading to [liberation](#) from [samsara](#), the painful cycle of rebirth.^{[2][3]}

The Eightfold Path consists of eight practices: right view, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right "samadhi" (meditative absorption or union).^[4] In the earliest Buddhism these practices started with insight (right view), culminating in dhyana/samadhi as the core soteriological practice.^[5] In later Buddhism insight (*prajna*) became the central soteriological instrument, leading to a different concept and structure of the path.^{[5][6]}

The Eightfold Path teaches that by restraining oneself, cultivating discipline, and practicing [mindfulness](#) and meditation, house-leavers (monks and nuns) attain [nirvana](#) and stop their craving, clinging and [karmic](#) accumulations, thereby ending their rebirth and suffering.^{[7][8][9][3][10][11]}

The Noble Eightfold Path is one of the principal [teachings](#) of [Theravada Buddhism](#), leading to [Arhatship](#).^[12] In the Theravada tradition, this path is also summarized as sila (morals), samadhi (meditation) and prajna (insight). In [Mahayana](#) Buddhism it is contrasted with the [Bodhisattva](#) path, which culminates in full [Buddhahood](#).^[12]

In Buddhist symbolism, the Noble Eightfold Path is often represented by means of the [dharma wheel](#) (dharmachakra), whose eight spokes represent the eight elements of the path.

The eight divisions^[edit]

The eight Buddhist practices in the Noble Eightfold Path are:

1. **Right view**: The first of the 8 fold path, along with the second of Right Intention or Resolve are the Tathagata Wisdom or Buddha intellect portion of the 8 fold practice. The 8fold practice consists of dedicated meditation on these activities of Mind. All the activity in our mind is occurring at phenomenal and unknowable speeds all predicated on the causal chains created since the unknowable past, now manifesting in what the Buddha names the habit energy of our continuing perceptions. This is the vehicle of karma at work. In our

minds as thoughts, whether consciously aware or subconsciously driven are all to be understood as actions. Our actions have consequences as defined by the law of cause and effect. What we perceive as death is not the end, but the other side of birth in an endless process of life, and our actions and beliefs have also consequences after death in their dissipation into the quiescent whole; the Buddha followed and taught a successful path out of this world and [the other world](#) (quiescent energy). Right view came to explicitly include [karma](#) (*causal chains of Nidana*) and [rebirth](#), and the importance of the [Four Noble Truths](#), when "insight" became central to Buddhist soteriology. To understand AND to be constantly aware of the actions of the mind is to begin to understand one's karma, or habit energy. So, by understanding impermanence, our karma as habitual energy endlessly repeating itself from moment to moment, we are training ourselves to take control of our lives in a proactive way by influencing the habit energy in a life affirming way as well as to begin to quell that habit energy into a state of quiet removal of its habits. This process takes great effort and diligence, which, leads us to the next path...

2. **Right resolve or intention:** In early teachings, Buddha had to adopt a very strict practice to his early followers. For 21 years he taught this way in order to get his disciples and followers to greatly deepen the common understandings of his day. Rules of practice included the giving up of home and adopting the life of a religious mendicant in order to follow the path in a monastery. This concept aims at peaceful renunciation, into an environment of non-sensuality, non-ill-will (to loving kindness), away from cruelty (to compassion). Such an environment aids contemplation of [impermanence](#), [suffering](#), and [non-Self](#). For the layman, like **right view**, this factor has two levels. At the mundane level, the resolve includes being harmless ([ahimsa](#)) and refraining from ill will (*avyabadha*) to any being (life affirming behavior), as this accrues negative karma and leads to rebirth or non-cessation of the habit energy. At the supramundane level, the factor includes a resolve to consider everything and everyone as impermanent, a source of suffering and without a Self or intrinsic nature. You can now understand how intertwined the First and Second paths are. To learn the concepts of Buddha's teaching takes effort, but without constant resolve to witness and discover the underpinnings of karma, habit energy, one's practice cannot progress or produce meaningful results.
3. **Right speech:** From the third, fourth, and fifth paths we analyze the Morality of our life process. This concerns not only what comes out of our mouths, but how we think about what comes out of our mouths AND what we hear coming into our ears from other sources. Of course there are basic admonitions like no lying, no rude speech, no telling one person what another says about him, no gossip, only speaking that which leads to salvation or the understanding of life impermanence. Instead of the usual "abstention and refraining from wrong" terminology, a few texts such as the *Samaññaphala Sutta* and *Kevata Sutta*

in *Digha Nikaya* explain this virtue in an active sense, after stating it in the form of an abstention. For example, *Samaññaphala Sutta* states that a part of a monk's virtue is that "he abstains from false speech. He speaks the truth, holds to the truth, and is firm, reliable, no deceiver of the world." Similarly, the virtue of abstaining from divisive speech is explained as delighting in creating concord. The virtue of abstaining from abusive speech is explained in this *Sutta* to include affectionate and polite speech that is pleasing to people. The virtue of abstaining from idle chatter is explained as speaking what is connected with the Dhamma goal of his liberation (by definition this is the process of cessation of that habit energy). In the *Abhaya-rajakumara Sutta*, the Buddha explains the virtue of right speech in different scenarios, based on its truth value, utility value and emotive content. The *Tathagata*, states *Abhaya Sutta*, never speaks anything that is un-factual or factual, untrue or true, disagreeable or agreeable, if that is unbeneficial and un-connected to his goals. Further, adds *Abhaya Sutta*, the *Tathagata* speaks the factual, the true, if in case it is disagreeable and un-endearing, only if it is beneficial to his goals, but with a sense of proper time. Additionally, adds *Abhaya Sutta*, the *Tathagata*, only speaks with a sense of proper time even when what he speaks is the factual, the true, the agreeable, the endearing and what is beneficial to his goals. The Buddha thus explains right speech in the Pali Canon, according to Ganeri, as never speaking something that is not beneficial; and, only speaking what is true and beneficial, "when the circumstances are right, whether they are welcome or not". So, right speech consists not only in truth speech from the standpoint of the Buddha's teaching, but also from the standpoint of Bodhisattva behavior to train others in the Buddha's teaching in a way that is appropriate to the interlocutor's desires and abilities. There is also the suggestion that if neither of these is possible, keeping quiet is the best path.

4. **Right conduct or action:** Referring to the relationships we have intentionally or unintentionally with all phenomena in our environment. Admonitions include no killing or injuring, no taking what is not given, no sexual misconduct. The prohibition on stealing in the Pali Canon is an abstention from intentionally taking what is not voluntarily offered by the person to whom that property belongs. This includes, states *Bhikkhu Bodhi*, taking by stealth, by force, by fraud or by deceit. Both the intention and the act matter, as this precept is grounded on the impact on one's karma. In this manner, all other prohibitions can be derived by simply asking two questions; is my behavior motivated by selfish cravings, and/or is it possible for my actions to promote or precipitate ill will? One must think reflexively of one's own habit energy and its motivations or effects. To quell "automatic" responses is to capture the habit energy in its tracks and suspended long enough to cease its affects and suppress its influence on our thinking and cease it from acting.

5. **Right livelihood:** Logically, after wrestling with our actions at the karmic root, we can extend that observational skill to our more general behavioral habits in the world around us. This path of observation extends the understanding of our internal behavior to the interactions and influence we push into our surroundings (in Buddhist, the distinction of inner versus outer world is a frail and tenuous one as self and other duality is a perception of mind only). Here again there is a distinction between early Buddhist practitioners of the monastery life and the general practice included in later teaching for the monk in the population living as a “layman” but no less a Bodhisattva of the Earth. For the monastery monk, begging for food was a forced humility making the monk dependent upon the good nature of others, only possessing what is essential to sustain life also kept the monks desires in check; For lay Buddhists this precept requires that the livelihood avoid causing suffering to sentient or insentient beings by cheating them, or harming or killing them in any way, directly or indirectly, such as marketing weapons or intoxicants or businesses in human trade like prostitution or slavery. Intention is also very much at play here. At this point it may be helpful to notice that the deeper we investigate each of the 8fold path, there interrelationship is once again essential for comprehending the complete teaching. One could say that the 8fold path is really just one path of correct behaviors, internal, external, and meditative study.
6. **Right effort:** This and the seventh and eighth of the paths concern meditative practice or Samadhi. That which requires great focus and concentration as stated earlier is to guard against sensual thoughts; this concept aims at preventing unwholesome states that disrupt meditation. Here the monk arouses his will, puts forth effort, generates energy, exerts his mind, and strives to prevent the arising of evil and unwholesome mental states that have not yet arisen. He arouses his will... and strives to eliminate evil and unwholesome mental states that have already arisen. This is where and when we encounter the unwholesome habit energy as it begins to arise. This is where and when the effort must be made to cease or quell the unwholesome thought to stop and to disperse and to cease. He arouses his will... and strives to generate wholesome mental state that has not yet arisen. He arouses his will, puts forth effort, generates energy, exerts his mind, and strives to maintain wholesome mental states that have already arisen, to keep them free of delusion, to develop, increase, cultivate, and perfect them. This is called right effort. The unwholesome states (*akusala*) are described in the Buddhist texts, as those relating to thoughts, emotions, intentions, and these include *pancanivarana* (five hindrances) - sensual thoughts, doubts about the path, restlessness, drowsiness, and ill will of any kind. Of these, the Buddhist traditions consider sensual thoughts and ill will needing more right

effort. Sensual desire that must be eliminated by effort includes anything related to sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touch. Ill will that must be eliminated by effort includes any form of aversion including hatred, anger, or resentment towards anything or anyone.

7. **Right mindfulness:** To never be absent minded, being conscious of what one is doing; this encourages the mindfulness about impermanence of body, feeling and mind, as well as to experience the five aggregates (*skandhas*), the five hindrances, the four True Realities and seven factors of awakening. And what is right mindfulness? Here the monk remains contemplating the body as body, resolute, aware and mindful, having put aside worldly desire and sadness;
 - a. he remains contemplating feelings as feelings;
 - b. he remains contemplating mental states as mental states;
 - c. he remains contemplating mental objects as mental objects, resolute, aware and mindful, having put aside worldly desire and sadness;

This is called right mindfulness. This factor in the Noble Eightfold Path helps the monk to guard the mind, and not to crave and cling to any transitory state or thing, by complete and constant awareness of phenomena as impermanent, suffering and without self.^[40] The most detailed discussion of the right mindfulness in the Pali Canon is in the *Satipatthana Sutta*, where the emphasis is to consider the "four contemplations" – body, feelings, mind and phenomena – as just that and nothing more, and not ascribe to them any substantiality, nor self. According to modern Theravada orthodoxy, these "four contemplations" through right mindfulness lead to insight of the three characteristics of existence – *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*, and cover the five *skandhas* (aggregates, heaps)

8. **Right samadhi or Right Concentration:** practicing four stages of meditation (*dhyāna*) culminating into unification of the mind. **Samadhi** (*samyak-samādhi* / *sammā-samādhi*) is a common practice in Indian religions. Although often translated as "concentration," as in the limiting of the attention of the mind on one object, it also refers to the clearness and heightened alertness of mind which appears through prolonged practice of dhyana. The term Samadhi derives from the root *sam-a-dha*, which means 'to collect' or 'bring together', and thus it is often translated as 'concentration' or 'unification of mind'. In the early Buddhist texts, samadhi is also associated with the term *samatha* (calm abiding). In the suttas, samadhi is defined as one-pointedness of mind (*Cittass'ekaggatā*). **Buddhagosa** defines samadhi as "the centering of consciousness and consciousness concomitants evenly and rightly on a single object... the state in virtue of which consciousness and its concomitants remain evenly and rightly on a single object, undistracted and unscattered." Neither the Four Noble Truths nor the Noble Eightfold Path discourse, states Johannes Bronkhorst, provide details of right samadhi.^[90] The explanation is to be found in the Canonical texts of Buddhism, in several Suttas, such as the

following in Saccavibhanga Sutta: And what is right concentration? Here, the monk, detached from sense-desires, detached from unwholesome states, enters and remains in the first jhana (level of concentration, Sanskrit:dhyāna), in which there is applied and sustained thinking, together with joy and pleasure born of detachment;

- a. And through the subsiding of applied and sustained thinking, with the gaining of inner stillness and oneness of mind, he enters and remains in the second jhana, which is without applied and sustained thinking, and in which there are joy and pleasure born of concentration;
- b. And through the fading of joy, he remains equanimous, mindful and aware, and he experiences in his body the pleasure of which the Noble Ones say: "equanimous, mindful and dwelling in pleasure", and thus he enters and remains in the third jhana;
- c. And through the giving up of pleasure and pain, and through the previous disappearance of happiness and sadness, he enters and remains in the fourth jhana, which is without pleasure and pain, and in which there is pure equanimity and mindfulness.

This is called right concentration. According to Bhikkhu Bodhi, the right concentration factor is reaching a one-pointedness of mind and unifying all mental factors, but it is not the same as "a gourmet sitting down to a meal, or a soldier on the battlefield" who also experience one-pointed concentration. The difference is that the latter have a one-pointed object in focus with complete awareness directed to that object – the meal or the target, respectively. In contrast, right concentration meditative factor in Buddhism is a state of awareness without any object or subject, and ultimately unto nothingness and emptiness. Some scholars, such as Bronkhorst, question the historicity and chronology of these details. Bronkhorst states that this path may be similar to what Buddha taught, but the details and form of right concentration in particular, and possibly other factors, is likely of later scholasticism. Bronkhorst states this is likely because Buddha could not have assumed the third stage of jhana, which includes "Noble Ones say", since he is considered to be the first to reach the samadhi and enlightened state of nirvana, then turning the wheel of dhamma. It is likely that later Buddhist scholars incorporated this, and then attributed the details and the path, particularly the insights at the time of liberation, to have been discovered by the Buddha.

BuddhoNet Basic Buddhism Guide
The Eight-Fold Path

The Eight-Fold Path is the fourth of the Four Noble Truths - the first of the Buddha's teachings. All the teachings flow from this foundation.

The Four Noble Truths are

1. The Noble Truth of the reality of Dukkha as part of conditioned existence. Dukkha is a multi-faceted word. Its literal meaning is "that which is difficult to bear". It can mean suffering, stress, pain, anguish, affliction or unsatisfactoriness. Each of the English words is either too strong or too weak in their meaning to be a universally successful translation. Dukkha can be gross or very subtle. From extreme physical and mental pain and torment to subtle inner conflicts and existential malaise.

2. The Noble Truth that Dukkha has a causal arising. This cause is defined as grasping and clinging or aversion. On one hand it is trying to control anything and everything by grabbing onto or trying to pin them down, On the other hand it is control by pushing away or pushing down and running away or flinching away from things. It is the process of identification through which we try to make internal and external things and experiences into "me and mine" or wholly "other" than Me. This flies in the face of the three signs of existence - Anicca, Dukkha. Anatta - Impermanence. Stress or Suffering and No-Self. Because all conditioned existence is impermanent it gives rise to Dukkha, and this means that in conditioned existence there is no unchanging and permanent Self. There is nothing to grasp onto and also in reality, nothing or no 'one' to do the grasping! We grab onto or try to push away ever changing dynamic processes. These attempts to control, limit us to little definitions of who we are.

3. The Noble Truth of the end of Dukkha, which is Nirvana or Nibbana. Beyond grasping and control and conditional existence is Nirvana. "The mind like fire unbound." The realisation of Nirvana is supreme Bodhi or Awakening. It is waking up to the true nature of reality. It is waking up to our true nature. Buddha Nature. The Pali Canon of Theravada, the foundational Buddhist teachings, says little about Nirvana, using terms like the Unconditioned the Deathless, and the Unborn. Mahayana teachings speak more about the qualities of Nirvana and use terms like, True Nature, Original Mind, Infinite light and Infinite life. Beyond space and time. Nirvana defies definition.

Nirvana literally means "unbound" as in "Mind like fire unbound". This beautiful image is of a flame burning by itself. Just the flame, not something burning and giving off a flame. Picture a flame burning on a wick or stick, it seems to hover around or just above the thing burning. The flame seems to be independent of the thing burning but it clings to the stick and is bound to it. This sense of the flame being unbound has often been misunderstood to mean the flame is extinguished or blown out. This is completely opposite to the meaning of the symbol. The flame "burns" and gives light but is no longer bound to any combustible material. The flame is not blown out - the clinging and the clung to is extinguished. The flame of our true nature, which is awakening, burns independently. Ultimately Nirvana is beyond conception and intellectual understanding. Full understanding only comes through direct experience of this "state" which is beyond the limitations and definitions of space and time.

4. The Noble Truth of the Path that leads to Awakening. The path is a paradox. It is a conditioned thing that is said to help you to the unconditioned. Awakening is not "made" by anything: it is not a product of anything including the Buddha's teachings. Awakening, your true nature is already always present. We are just not awake to this reality. Clinging to limitation, and attempts to control the ceaseless flow of phenomena and process obscures our true nature.

The path is a process to help you remove or move beyond the conditioned responses that obscure your true nature. In this sense the Path is ultimately about unlearning rather than learning - another paradox. We learn so we can unlearn and uncover. The Buddha called his teaching a Raft. To cross a turbulent river we may need to

build a raft. When built, we single-mindedly and with great energy make our way across. Once across we don't need to cart the raft around with us. In other words don't cling to anything including the teachings. However, make sure you use them before you let them go. It's no use knowing everything about the raft and not getting on. The teachings are tools not dogma. The teachings are *Upaya*, which means skillful means or expedient method. It is fingers pointing at the moon - don't confuse the finger for the moon.

The Path

1. * **Samma-Ditthi — Complete or Perfect Vision**, also translated as right view or understanding. Vision of the nature of reality and the path of transformation.

2. **Samma-Sankappa — Perfected Emotion or Aspiration**, also translated as right thought or attitude. Liberating emotional intelligence in your life and acting from love and compassion. An informed heart and feeling mind that are free to practice letting go.

3. **Samma-Vaca — Perfected or whole Speech**. Also called right speech. Clear, truthful, uplifting and non-harmful communication.

4. **Samma-Kammanta — Integral Action**. Also called right action. An ethical foundation for life based on the principle of non-exploitation of oneself and others. The five precepts.

5. **Samma-Ajiva — Proper Livelihood**. Also called right livelihood. This is a livelihood based on correct action the ethical principal of non-exploitation. The basis of an Ideal society.

6. **Samma-Vayama — Complete or Full Effort, Energy or Vitality**. Also called right effort or diligence. Consciously directing our life energy to the transformative path of creative and healing action that fosters wholeness. Conscious evolution.

7. **Samma-Sati — Complete or Thorough Awareness**. Also called "right mindfulness". Developing awareness, "if you hold yourself dear watch yourself well". Levels of Awareness and mindfulness - of things, oneself, feelings, thought, people and Reality.

8. **Samma-Samadhi — Full, Integral or Holistic Samadhi**. This is often translated as concentration, meditation, absorption or one-pointedness of mind. None of these translations is adequate. Samadhi literally means to be fixed, absorbed in or established at one point, thus the first level of meaning is concentration when the mind is fixed on a single object. The second level of meaning goes further and represents the establishment, not just of the mind, but also of the whole being in various levels or modes of consciousness and awareness. This is Samadhi in the sense of enlightenment or Buddhahood.

* **The word Samma** means 'proper', 'whole', 'thorough', 'integral', 'complete', and 'perfect' - related to English 'summit' - It does not necessarily mean 'right', as opposed to 'wrong'. However it is often translated as "right" which can send a less than accurate message. For instance the opposite of 'Right Awareness' is not necessarily 'Wrong Awareness'. It may simply be incomplete. Use of the word 'right' may make for a neat or consistent list of qualities in translations. The down side is that it can give the impression that the Path is a narrow and moralistic approach to the spiritual life. I use variant interpretations so you consider the depth of meanings. What do these things mean in your life right now?

- John Allan