



## Study and reflection as Dharma practice

**Study (Hear):** Listen to Dharma teachings or read a Dharma text to gain a basic conceptual understanding.

**Reflect (Contemplate):** Integrating a Dharma teaching into direct experience.

One method: Stabilize attention resting attention in the sensations of breathing, and then pose a simple question or phrase -- for example, "*Everything changes, nothing stays the same.*"

☸ How does the physical body respond to the phrase?

☸ What pleasant or unpleasant feelings arise?

☸ What impulses, thoughts, or self-images arise?

Without encouraging judgement or control, notice sensations, feelings, and thoughts as they arise and subside.

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## Four Noble Truths

**Dukkha (stress):** the arising of stress, dissatisfaction, discontent, suffering, and struggle.

**Samudaya (cause):** the cause of dukkha is craving (aversion, jealousy, pride, etc -- all rooted in delusion: not knowing the true nature of things).

**Nirodha (end):** the end of dukkha is possible, by letting go of its causes.

**Magga (path):** there is a path to the end of suffering: the **Noble Eightfold Path**.

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## The Eightfold Path

The Eightfold Path is the original "stages of the path" taught by the Buddha Shakyamuni.

*Right* is what leads to wisdom, compassion, and freedom. *Wrong* is what leads to delusion, self-centeredness, and entanglement.

Here's a thumbnail diagram of the Eightfold Path as described in the Pali Suttas:

Three Trainings	Eightfold Path	Major Aspects
<b>Prajna</b> (wisdom)	Right View	Four Noble Truths, three marks, karma
	Right Intention	Renouncing the causes of dukkha: craving, ill-will, and harming
<b>Sila</b> (discipline or ethics)	Right Speech	Refraining from lying, gossip, harsh speech, and idle chatter
	Right Action	Refraining from taking life, stealing, and sexual misconduct
	Right Livelihood	Refraining from trading in weapons, living beings, meat, intoxicants, or poison
<b>Samadhi</b> (attention)	Right Effort	Avoiding and abandoning unwholesome qualities; cultivating and maintaining wholesome qualities
	Right Mindfulness	Mindful awareness of sensations, feelings, mind, and phenomena
	Right Attention	Cultivating stable unified attention

#### Further study of the Eightfold Path:

- Analysis of the Path (*Magga-vibhanga Sutta*) at [SN 45.8](#).
- *A Whole-Life Path*, by Gregory Kramer. A thorough, contemplative exploration of the Noble Eightfold Path. It is both a fairly traditional interpretation with citations to the suttas, as well as a look at relationships and society in the modern world.

## Eightfold Path: Right View

**View** (Pali *ditthi*, Sanskrit *dr̥shti*) is how we experience the world -- our experience. View includes what we pay attention to, what we value, and how we construct meaning and purpose. There are three classic aspects to Right View:

**The four noble truths:** dissatisfaction exists; its origin is craving; struggle and suffering can end; there is a path leading to the end of suffering.

**The three marks** of all internal and external phenomena: impermanent, dependent upon and not separate from causes and conditions, and therefore ultimately not reliable.

**The truth of karma:** actions evolve into experienced results. Happiness and unhappiness are not without causes.

## Reflect on Right View:

- ☸ Is there anything in your experience or the world that appears to be permanent?
  - ☸ Do things seem to arise randomly, or do they depend on causes and conditions?
  - ☸ What views might you be carrying that influence how the world appears to you?
  - ☸ Do you also carry multiple senses of self that hold different views?
  - ☸ Which views tend toward grasping and confusion? Which tend toward freedom and clarity?
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## Eightfold Path: Right Intention

"Whatever one frequently thinks about becomes the heart's inclination..." ([MN 19](#))

**Samkalpa** is variously translated as intention, thought, aim, and resolve. **Right intention** is to *abandon* the causes of dukkha: clinging, ill-will, and harming, and to *adopt* the causes of happiness and freedom: generosity, good-will, and harmlessness. ([SN 45.8](#))

"Whatever we determine, whatever we intend to do, and whatever we are occupied with: this is the base for consciousness to be maintained on." ([SN 12.38](#))

### Recall again the three capacities or motivations:

- The *least capacity* strives for personal happiness; is often self-protective and easily motivated by fear or discomfort.
- The *middling capacity* seeks to abandon fixation on pleasure and negative actions, and makes an effort to free oneself from the endless pursuit of happiness.
- The *great capacity* seeks the freedom of all beings, using one's own experience of suffering to identify with others' suffering, and is motivated to help all beings be free from suffering and its causes.

### Reflect on Right Intention:

- ☸ Can you feel physical-emotional-mental energies arise that blossom into thoughts and feelings and actions?
- ☸ When does it feel you are choosing directions? When being impelled in certain directions?
- ☸ Is there a felt sense of the difference between an *impulse* and an *intention*?  
Where do impulses arise in the body?  
Where do intentions come from?
- ☸ How do different impulses and intentions affect your view of yourself? Your view of others?