

Three Parts of Right View

August 1, 2012

In the Buddha's first sermon, which we chanted just now, he sets out four truths that he calls noble. The question is sometimes asked, "What's noble about them?" Part of the answer is found right there in the beginning of the sermon. These truths are part of a path that avoids two paths that are not noble: the pursuit of sensual pleasure, and self-torment.

The reason those paths are not noble relates to another passage where the Buddha talked about his motivation for setting out from the palace to begin with. He realized that he had been searching for happiness in things that would age, grow ill, and die. He himself was subject to aging, illness, and death, so that kind of search, he said, was not a noble search. It was harmful to himself, harmful to others, and he would end up with nothing to show for it.

A truly noble search would have to be one that would search for and find the deathless—something not subject to aging, not subject to illness, not subject to death—following a path that would harm no one.

That's what the eightfold path is, and that's why it's noble. It leads to the deathless—and all the activities that it enjoins are noble activities. They foster the highest qualities of the mind, and they harm no one at all.

The fruit of the path—that's the image the Buddha uses, the path yields fruit—was the deathless happiness that was the one thing that would be a noble thing to search for.

Now, in his presentation of these noble truths, there are three parts to the presentation, and the parts are important to keep in mind.

At the very beginning, the Buddha sets out the reasons for wanting to follow this path. In other words, he talks about the motivation: Why would you want to take on this path to begin with? Because it is noble. It leads to awakening, leads to unbinding, gives rise to vision, gives rise to knowledge: things that are really worth looking for.

You look at the world around us, and you'll see that there's a lot of unrest, a lot

of harm that people do to one another. And there's a lot of ignorance. People run around and are slaves to craving.

We ourselves are slaves to craving, and it's good to see it in other people—to remind ourselves that that's what drives us as well. Our cravings seem to be our friends, but when we look at other people acting under the influence of *their* cravings, it's a lot more obvious that craving leads to a lot of suffering. So we should learn to look at our own craving in the same light.

So here the Buddha's offering a motivation for following the path.

Then he sets out the path itself. He starts with the four truths, which are basically the terms of right view, the first factor of the path. There's stress or suffering—*dukkha* is the Pali word—the cause of stress, the cessation of stress, and the path leading to the cessation of stress. It's like a doctor's diagnosis: "These are the symptoms; these are the causes. It is possible to end this illness by attacking the causes, and here's the way you do it."

Notice in that first truth where he talks about suffering, he's not saying, "Life is suffering." You hear it again and again and again, but that's not what the Buddha's saying. Simply, there *is* suffering—that's something we can clearly see for ourselves. He gives some examples with which we're all familiar, but then he boils it down ultimately to what he calls the five clinging-aggregates.

At first glance, those aggregates seem less of an explanation, and more something that obscures what's going on. The other forms of suffering we recognize: There's birth, aging, illness, and death; separation from things you like, having to be with things you don't like, not getting what you want. These are all things we recognize. But when the Buddha boils all this down to the five clinging-aggregates, he's trying to point out something really important: something that's common to all these forms of suffering, so that we can see how the actual suffering, the suffering that weighs the mind down, is created by clinging to these five kinds of things.

Now, the names for these five things were well known before the Buddha's time, but he was the one who put them together as a set of five. There's form, feeling, perception, fabrications, and consciousness. He calls them clinging-aggregates. The word for clinging, *upadana*, can also mean taking food or taking

sustenance. This is where it's easy to see how the clinging-aggregates work together as a set, because they're activities that we engage in as we feed.

There's the form of the body, which needs to be sustained. Then there's the form of the food that we use to sustain it. This is feeding on the physical level, but a similar process works on the mental level as well.

There are the feelings of hunger, and the feelings of fullness that come after we've eaten.

There's the perception of what kind of hunger we're suffering from. Is it the kind of hunger that needs something liquid? Does it need something solid? Does it need something salty or sweet? And then there's the perception of what out there would satisfy the hunger, what qualifies as food, and what doesn't.

Fabrications deal with all the plans we for obtaining food and for fixing food once we've got it.

And then consciousness is our awareness of all these things.

It's in our activity of feeding that we see these five aggregates in action.

So the Buddha's essentially saying that we suffer because of the way we feed. He points out that the suffering of this feeding comes from our craving, and that it is possible to put an end to the craving by following the path.

So, he sets out the four truths, and then toward the end he points out the duties with regard to those four truths: Suffering is to be comprehended, its cause abandoned, its cessation realized, and the path developed. And it's important to keep these duties separate.

The whole reason we have four truths is because there are four different things to do. Particularly with the path: You've got to develop it; you've got to work at it. In the process of doing this, there are things to develop, and things to abandon.

We're making changes in the mind as we develop the path. All too often you hear people saying, "Well, I know my mind is supposed to be free of craving, but if you're trying to develop one thing in the mind and abandon something else, isn't that craving?"

The answer is: That's not the craving the Buddha was talking about in the second noble truth. The craving he was talking about covered three types: craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming. But the desire to

give rise to skillful things and the desire to abandon unskillful in the mind: Those desires are actually part of the path.

Now, the cessation of suffering is the point where there's nothing further that needs to be developed. You can't clone it by just sitting around and not developing things or abandoning things. You've got to keep your duties straight.

So, those are basically the three things the Buddha talked about in his first talk: a set of truths, the duties that go with those truths, and the motivation for why you want to follow those duties to begin with. Those are things you want to keep in mind. This is what right mindfulness is all about.

Like right now, we're focusing on the breath. That's part of developing the path. When it starts seeming fruitless or strange, you remember the motivation—this is why we're doing this.

Those ignoble paths the Buddha talked about—devotion to sensual pleasure, devotion to self-torment: We've been down those paths many times before. This one is something different. This, the Buddha promises, really does lead to the deathless.

And it's a path that develops noble qualities. As we're staying with the breath, we're fostering mindfulness and alertness. As we look at the process of fabrication in the breathing, and the perceptions that go around the breath, that's the beginning of discernment. We're showing compassion for ourselves and for others. We're looking for true happiness, and we're doing it in a way that doesn't harm anyone. As you're sitting here, you're not oppressing anybody at all.

When something comes up in the course of the meditation, you can ask yourself, "Which duty is appropriate here?" Which type of truth are you confronting—something to be developed, something to be abandoned, or something to be comprehended? This issue of comprehending stress is really important, because there's the stress in the three characteristics, and there's stress in the four noble truths—and they're two different things.

Stress in the three characteristics is something you learn to watch to see that this is simply the way things are. Anything that comes from being put together by causes is going to have an element of stress, but that's not the stress that weighs down the mind. The mind is weighed down by the stress that comes from craving

and clinging. So the four noble truths keep pointing us back into the mind itself. This is where the problems lie, but the solution lies here as well.

As we follow this path we're doing something noble. Ultimately it leads us to becoming noble ones, because it keeps us focused on the noble search for the deathless. That's where all this is aimed.

This is the essence of the Dhamma, as the Buddha said. It's something of essential value, and it's free for us to look for. This path is open to everyone who wants it—something of true value, something that really is noble in life. So try to make the most of this opportunity.