

BUDDHIST THEATER IN THE ROUND

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

1. The Truth of Suffering (Kutai)

The Buddha declared that this world is full of suffering; that actual existence including birth, decrepitude, sickness and death is suffering and sorrow. This is called the Truth of Suffering. Life is suffering: pain, frustration, agitation, jealousy. Even the most privileged lives involve suffering or dissatisfaction of some sort.

2. The Truth of the Cause of Suffering (Jutai)

The cause of human suffering lies in ignorance and Karma. Ignorance and its resulting Karma have often times been called "desire" or craving. The origin of suffering is ignorance, selfishness, craving. Suffering is caused by desire, specifically unenlightened desire.

3. The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (Mettai)

The extinguishing of all human ignorance and Karma results in a state known as Nirvana. This is the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering. The cessation of suffering, or perfect peace, can be achieved through the elimination of ignorance, selfishness and craving.

4. The Truth of the Path to the Cessation of Suffering (Dotai)

The Truth of the Path to the Cessation of Suffering is the Noble Eight-fold Path.

THE NOBLE EIGHT-FOLD PATH

1. Right Views - to keep ourselves free from prejudice, superstition and delusion and to see aright the true nature of life.
2. Right Thoughts - to turn away from the evils of this world and to direct our minds towards righteousness.
3. Right Speech - to refrain from pointless and harmful talk to speak kindly and courteously to all.
4. Right Conduct - to see that our deeds are peaceful, benevolent, compassionate and pure; to live the Teaching of the Buddha daily.
5. Right Livelihood - to earn our living in such a way as to entail no evil consequences.
6. Right Effort - to direct our efforts incessantly to the overcoming of ignorance and selfish desires.
7. Right Mindfulness - to cherish good and pure thoughts for all that we say and do arise from our thoughts.
8. Right Meditation - to concentrate our will on the Buddha, His Life and His Teaching

1. **Right Understanding:** The first step of the eightfold path is Right Understanding or Right View.

This is a significant step on the path as it relates to seeing the world and everything in it as it really is, not as we believe it to be or want it to be. Just as you may read the directions on a map, and then make the journey, studying, reading and examining the information is important, but only the preparation for the journey. At a deeper level, direct personal experience will then lead us to Right Understanding.

2. **Right Intent:** The second step on the Eightfold Path is Right Intent. This is the step where we become committed to the path. Right Understanding shows us what life really is and what life's problems are composed of, Right Intent urges us to decide what our heart wants.

Right Intent must come from the heart and involves recognizing the equality of all life and compassion for all that life, beginning with yourself. Right Intent means persistence and a passion for the journey. Setting out to climb a high mountain means you must understand the lay of the land and the pitfalls, the other team members, and the equipment you need. This is similar to Right Understanding. But you will only climb the mountain if you really want to and have a passion for the climb. This is Right Intent. The mountain we climb here is our journey through life.

3. **Right Speech:** Right Speech is the next step of the Path. We tend to underestimate the power of the spoken word, and often regret words said in haste.

Each of us has experienced the disappointment associated with harsh criticism, whether justified or not, and we also are likely to have felt good when kind words encouraged us. Right speech involves recognition of the truth, and also an awareness of the impact of idle gossip and of repeating rumours. Communicating thoughtfully helps to unite others, and can heal dissension. By resolving never to speak unkindly, or in anger, a spirit of consideration evolves which moves us closer to everyday compassionate living.

4. **Right Action:** Right Action recognises the need to take the ethical approach in life, to consider others and the world we live in. This includes not taking what is not given to us, and having respect for the agreements we make both in our private and business lives.

Right Action also encompasses the five precepts which were given by the Buddha, not to kill, steal, lie, to avoid sexual misconduct, and not to take drugs or other intoxicants. This step on the path also includes a whole approach to the environment, with Right Action being taken whenever possible to safeguard the world for future generations.

5. **Right Livelihood:** The next on the Eightfold Path follows on from Right Action, and this is Right Livelihood. If your work has a lack of respect for life, then it will be a barrier to progress on the spiritual path.

Buddhism promotes the principle of equality of all living beings and respect for all life. Certain types of work were discouraged by the Buddha, in particular those where you deal in harmful drugs and intoxicants, those dealing in weapons, and those harmful to animal or human life. His teaching stresses that the future is created by what we do today. Right Livelihood also implies that a Buddhist who is able, will undertake some work, either as part of a Buddhist community, or in the workplace, or, alternatively, do home based or community service. Many communities of monks ensure that each member has daily chores, which remind him of this step on the Eightfold Path.

6. **Right Effort:** Right Effort means cultivating an enthusiasm, a positive attitude in a balanced way.

Like the strings of a musical instrument, the amount of effort should not be too tense or too impatient, as well as not too slack or too laid back. Right Effort should produce an attitude of steady and cheerful determination. In order to produce Right Effort, clear and honest thoughts should be welcomed, and feelings of jealousy and anger left behind. Right Effort equates to positive thinking, followed by focused action.

7. **Right Mindfulness:** While Right Effort is a very easy concept for most of us,

Right Mindfulness means being aware of the moment, and being focused in that moment. When we travel somewhere, we are hearing noises, seeing buildings, trees, advertising, feeling the movement, thinking of those we left behind, thinking of our destination. So it is with most moments of our lives. Right Mindfulness asks us to be aware of the journey at that moment, and to be clear and undistracted at that moment. Right Mindfulness is closely linked with meditation and forms the basis of meditation.. By being aware, we are able to see how old patterns and habits control us. In this awareness, we may see how fears of possible futures limit our present actions.

8. **Right Concentration:** Once the mind is uncluttered, it may then be concentrated to achieve whatever is desired. Right Concentration is turning the mind to focus on an object, such as a flower, or a lit candle, or a concept such as loving compassion. The benefits of Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration are significant as they teach the mind to see things, not as we are conditioned to seeing them, but as they really are. At the same time, they also lead to a feeling of calm and peace with the world. By being in the moment and being able to concentrate effectively, a sense of joy in the moment is felt. Release from the control of past pains and future mind games takes us closer to freedom from suffering.