

On Right Action

In this article, I would like to talk about right action: the fourth component of the Noble eightfold path.

What is right action? Right action refers to conduct that does not harm oneself or others. Conversely, any action that harms oneself or others is considered wrong action. As the Buddha once said, "I teach just this, freedom from suffering." The purpose of the Buddha's guidance on right action is to achieve freedom from suffering, both on an individual and collective level.

Within the framework of the Noble Eightfold Path, the Buddha teaches three types of right action: abstaining from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. These acts are evident sources of human suffering across all eras. It is clear that all human beings should adhere to these moral guidelines to maintain peace in life. However, right action is not simply a moral obligation to ensure a peaceful existence; it is an essential practice for true emancipation from suffering. Practicing right action is a form of mindfulness in real life and helps to eradicate the deep-rooted causes of suffering—greed, hatred, and delusion. Uprooting these three defilements is essential for achieving ultimate freedom, and the most effective antidote for these defilements is mindfulness, or Sati.

Mindfulness should be cultivated not just through formal meditation but also through everyday life situations. Practicing the three types of right action alongside right speech becomes a powerful form of living meditation.

To put these principles into practice, we can take the original teachings and apply them in practical ways:

Non-killing: We should show respect for all living creatures and make our best effort not to harm any living being.

Non-stealing: We should not only act with integrity in economic matters but also strive to be generous and help those in need.

Non-sexual misconduct: We should be mindful of the destructive effects of all forms of sexual misconduct and put this understanding into practice according to our

individual circumstances.

In essence, these practices embody loving-kindness and generosity.

Of course, we may forget or fail to follow the Buddha's guidelines on right action from time to time. It is important not to dwell too much on guilt or regret. We are all imperfect beings. By being cautious about self-justification and rationalization, acknowledging our missteps, and learning from them, we can continue on the path. The more we remember and practice right action, the easier it becomes. With practice, we move closer to the state of awakening—the state of freedom and peace.

We should not limit our practice to the traditional definitions and structures. Every moment of decision and choice is an opportunity to practice right action. Furthermore, understanding and trusting in kamma can naturally support right action. The literal meaning of kamma is "action." In our evening chanting, we often repeat the Buddha's teaching:

"I am the owner of my kamma, heir to my kamma, born of my kamma. Whatever kamma I shall do, for good or for ill, of that I will be the heir."

With metta,

Bhante Anuttara