

## The Noble Eightfold Path

### AryASTAGgamArga

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Arya = Noble or Saintly

Asta = Eight

Agam = Approach/ Achieve

Marga = Path / Search

**a. *Prajna*: Wisdom**

1. *Samyag-drsti*: Right View/ Understanding
2. *Samyak-samkalpa*: Right Intention

**b. *Sila*: Ethical Conduct**

3. *Samyag-vac*: Right Speech
4. *Samyak-karmanta*: Right Action
5. *Samyag-ājīva*: Right Livelihood/Lifestyle.

**c. *Samadhi*: Concentration**

6. *Samyang.vyayama*: Right Effort
7. *Samyak-smrti*: Right Mindfulness
8. *Samyak-samādhi*: Right Concentration

#### **Prajna, Wisdom**

The category of Wisdom is the process of self-observation or introspection. Both the right View and the right Intention begin within and towards ourselves to then be externalized. It is this internal process which makes us gain wisdom.

Here we find the 4 Noble Truths

#### **Sila, Ethical Conduct**

Once we have achieved this wisdom within ourselves, the process of interaction with the exterior begins, by way of the Ethical Conduct. It is the way we relate with all others

through our words, actions and our lives. The previously achieved right view and right intention are now projected in our lives and our surroundings.

It is here that we find the Buddhist Vows/Precepts.

## **Samadhi, Concentration**

In the end, it is the understanding of the interior and the exterior (the extremes) which allows us to achieve the middle way (Unity). With the Wisdom, we discover ourselves, with Ethical Conduct, the exterior and with the Concentration, we unify the interior with the exterior. It is to go within, where that “inside” is not within you, nor is it outside; it is “in” without a definition of inside what. When both interior and exterior are at peace, in harmony and unified, then Samadhi (Concentration) is possible

We use spiritual practice to achieve Samadhi

In each step of the eightfold path, the word “right” or sometimes “appropriate” appears. In Sanskrit, the word used is “Samyag”, which comes from “Samyak” (equality, balance”, or, on occasion, it may also appear as “Samyak”, which means “exact, precise”). Therefore, we are not using Right in terms of good or bad nor in terms of being well educated. It means exact and precise, equally for all. In other words, the “Right” here is not based on judgments, social conditioning or culture. It is based on that which avoids suffering and promotes wellbeing.

The Noble Eightfold Path is formed by the following 8 steps.

### **1. Samyag-dRSTi: RIGHT VIEW/UNDERSTANDING.**

(samyag = balanced/correct; dRSTi = view/vision)

It is often explained as a correct understanding of life, nature and the world. However, it all starts with us. It is impossible to achieve the right understanding of the exterior without first achieving it within ourselves.

It is the Right View of ourselves which, once achieved, we project to the exterior.

Our suffering (Dukka) derives from the 3 poisons of existence, these being Ignorance, Avarice and Hate. Whilst these poisons are present within us, it is not possible to have the Right Understanding of ourselves or the exterior. It is these poisons that make us perceive a difference between the interior and the exterior; between you and others.

Purifying ourselves of these poisons is what liberates us from suffering and from the erroneous perception of separation. However, Ignorance, Avarice and Hate are so deeply ingrained and subtle that it is difficult to access them directly. That is why in the Mahajrya, as an expedite means, we begin this purifying process from a more obvious point which is easier to observe, it’s what we call the 3 denials, which derive from the

Poisons. It is these denials (Pride, Shame and Fear) which prevent us from having the right understanding of ourselves. It's the way in which we deny both our suffering and the cause of it. It is therefore what stops us from going through the path of liberation.

Shame is to hide. It's not allowing for expansion. You hide so much, you end up hiding from yourself, preventing the achievement of the Right View of yourself, contracting instead of expanding. To achieve the Right View you need to discover yourself and that Pride convinces you that you already know the Truth, so how can you find it if you already know it? If you know everything about yourself and you know yourself, how do you go further in your evolution? In the spiritual plane, it's to pretend to control the way in which the infinite light of Amitabha organizes and contains itself instead of accepting that it is Amitabha who does this. In humans, it's wanting to be right; it's wanting to do things your way because otherwise it is not done well. Discovery is dependent on your expansion, not on your hiding.

The more you uphold the denials, the further you are from your own Right View, and from that of others.

How do we liberate ourselves from these denials?

Go through the path of the 4 Noble Truths, these being:

1. There is suffering
2. There is a cause / understanding of suffering
3. There is a path towards the liberation of suffering
4. There is no suffering

These 4 Noble Truths are what we practice in the Mahajrya, by way of Emotional Integration. Accepting suffering (any level of Dukka). Once you accept there is suffering, you begin your emotional integration, sitting to find the cause of suffering (21 masks of the ego). As you identify them, you are travelling on the path of liberation by feeling consciously and remaining in that feeling until it is dissolved. The moment those feelings are completely dissolved is when you will have discovered that there is no suffering, the 4 Noble Truths.

In the end, having a Right View of yourself will allow you a Right View of the exterior and of others.

## **2. *Samyak-samkalpa*: RIGHT INTENTION/THOUGHTS**

(Samyak = precise, exact, correct; Samkalpa = conception or idea in the mind/heart)

When you achieve the Right View, then all your thoughts reside within that vision, thereby leaving no room for incorrect thoughts.

What is an incorrect thought?

It's any intention or thought which focuses on the perpetuation of suffering. It's to be hard on yourself and to belittle yourself, as well as believing yourself to be more than others; it's not having a correct intention, it's a cause for suffering.

It's allowing dark intentions to take control over you.

Incorrect thought is giving way to shame or resentment in your mind and in your heart. Correct intention is to act in good faith. You must have a noble intention based on faith and not on violence towards the rest of existence.

In the Mahajrya we explain how we often project our suffering onto others; the root of these projections is not having a Right Thought.

Therefore, in the Right Thought there is responsibility. If something makes you suffer it is not the fault of anyone (or yours), it's due to an incorrect View. And your responsibility is to go back to the 4 Noble Truths in order to discover the cause of that incorrect View that provoked the incorrect Thought. In that way, you will return to the correct Intention.

Right Thought is to make plans. Incorrect Thought is to create expectations. The objective of a plan is not to achieve it, but to give you security. A plan focuses you, it helps you to know where you are headed; it's a light on a dark road. An expectation only focuses on the final outcome, generating disappointment and frustration when it doesn't occur. In a Plan there is liberty, in an expectation there is attachment (to the result)

To attain good intentions (plans) instead of expectations, you must let go of the three attachments (physical, emotional and mental). Relate to everything and release all attachments when the time comes as nothing is permanent.

### **3. *Samyag-vac*: RIGHT SPEECH**

(Samyag = balanced/correct; vac= speech)

If you have Right View and Right Thought, then all your intentions are good and you will have Right Speech. All you say is to bring joy to others. It's the level of the frequency and the interaction. It corresponds to Avalokiteshara's communication.

To achieve it we must avoid lies, criticism, avoid being disrespectful, sarcastic and judgmental. Always ask yourself if what you are going to say is the truth, if it's a fact or a judgment, if it's beneficial to others, if they will be able to understand it and, specially, the right time and best way in which to express it.

In the Abhaya Sutra, we find the following:

In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be unfactual, untrue, unbeneficial, unendearing and disagreeable to others, he does **not** say them.

In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, yet unbeneficial, unendearing and disagreeable to others, he does **not** say them.

In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, yet unendearing and disagreeable to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them.

In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be unfactual, untrue, unbeneficial, yet endearing and agreeable to others, he does **not** say them.

In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, but unbeneficial, yet endearing and agreeable to others, he does **not** say them.

In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, and endearing and agreeable to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them. Why is that? Because the Tathagata has sympathy for living beings.

It is, summarized, the Buddhist vow: "I take the vow to abstain from incorrect conversations"

#### 4. *Samyak-karmanta*: CORRECT ACTIONS

(Samyak = precise, exact, correct; karmanta = management/action)

Just as in the Correct Intention you do not allow the darkness to inhabit your mind and heart, just as in your Correct Speech you do not allow the darkness to inhabit in your words, so in your correct Actions, you must not allow that darkness to taint your actions.

Of course, it's to not making an attempt on the life of a living creature.

It's avoiding sexual behaviors that generate suffering. It doesn't mean not partaking in sexuality, but rather understanding that allowing oneself to be led by sexual instincts can generate suffering. It's remembering that sexuality must always be consensual and always practiced in a way in which no one suffers physically, emotionally or mentally.

It's not stealing. In Buddhism we understand that nothing belongs to us, that nothing has an owner, no one owns anything. But we also have compassion for those who do believe in ownership. Stealing provokes suffering to the one who feels robbed and prevents the proper functioning of relationships, of structures and of the society in which we live.

If you have a Right View, Right Intentions and Right Speech, then all of your actions will be correct, you will be noble in all aspects of your actions.

These Right Actions will generate a beneficial karma in you and in others.

We summarize it in the following Buddhist vows:

“I take the vote of abstaining from taking what is not given to me”

“I take the vote of abstaining from inadequate sexual conducts”

“I take the vote of abstaining from harming or destroying living creatures”

### **5. *Samyag-ajiva*: RIGHT LIVELIHOOD/LIFESTYLE**

(Samyag = balanced/correct; Ajiva= livelihood)

It is the lifestyle at every level, the way in which you live, therefore the experiences that you live and generate. It's Karma itself. It also means not making a living in any profession that directly or indirectly provokes suffering to others. A Right Lifestyle inevitably provokes Harmony.

We can also say that your Right Lifestyle is the collective sum of all your Right Actions.

### **6. *Samyag-vyayama*: RIGHT EFFORT**

(Samyag = balanced/correct; vyAyAma= effort/exercise)

With the Right Effort, the process of the Concentration focused on the achievement of Samadhi is initiated. Therefore, the Right Effort is your Passion for spirituality; your Passion for wanting to be a better person, for evolving; it's your Passion for desiring that others also attain liberation. It's what allows you to remain in virtue in difficult moments.

It's what moves you and how you handle everything. It's the value when you appreciate things. Having the appropriate will power shows your wisdom. It's the determination to accomplish your spiritual practice.

This Right Effort is what allows us to remain in rejection of harmful thoughts, words and actions.

With the Right Effort one will:

1. Prevent the unwholesome that has not yet arisen in oneself.
2. Let go of the unwholesome that has arisen in oneself.
3. Bring up the wholesome that has not yet arisen in oneself.
4. Maintain the wholesome that has arisen in oneself.

## **7. *Samyak-smrti*: RIGHT MINDFULNESS**

(Samyak = precise, exact, correct; smRti =desire/mindfulness)

It's the way to be conscious, to be conscious that you are conscious.

It's the 4 steps of Emotional Integration at the same time

It's the 4 states of attention:

- Breathe
- Inhabit
- Feel
- Observe/Contemplate

These 4 states are contemplated in the mind, the emotions, the body and the surroundings. Thanks to the previous effort, you decide to be conscious of yourself and the exterior at the same time, always conscious and always focused.

If you understand it as paying attention to yourself, your surroundings, the others in your life..... as separate things, then it is impossible, as your nervous system has its limitations.

To Be Mindful, you must cease seeing All as separated, then you will stop paying attention to separate things but instead to the All, it's to pay attention without having to consider what it is we are paying attention to; it's to be conscious without saying what of.

## **8. *Samyak-samadhi*: RIGHT CONCENTRATION**

(Samyak = precise, exact, correct; samAdhi =intense contemplation/concentration)

Right Concentration is a profound state of meditation.

Thanks to the previous 7 steps of the Eightfold Path, now the mind has returned to its natural state of existence; of stillness, of nothingness. It's like a container of water that created waves so we leave it undisturbed in order for the waves to subside, so now the mind surrenders to consciousness and concentration.

In this state of Samadhi there is nothing that can trigger an emotional reaction or thought. There is no effort to be made, it is simply happening.

It is existence when there are no longer mental or emotional motivations, when pain and pleasure have disappeared and yet Something still exists.

*"May Amitabha inundate and enlighten the existence of all sentient beings, leading them to the liberation of Samsara"* Shivagam