

Why the Eightfold Noble Path is necessary for benefiting others.

(lightly edited transcript)

by Ven. Thubten Chodron© at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle. 9 Sep 92

Previously, we talked about how the Eightfold Noble Path was necessary for our own practice, to attain liberation or free ourselves. Tonight, we are going to give it a Mahayana flavor, showing why it is necessary to practice the Eightfold Noble Path in order to benefit others.

To help others understand their life, the path and how to free themselves, first of all, we need to have the **correct or perfect view** ourselves. Having the correct view means that we understand the Four Noble Truths, emptiness and impermanence. It means that we generate these realizations in our meditation sessions. After we get up from our cushion, we retain them in our mind and help other sentient beings to develop the same understanding.

Also, we need to have the **correct or perfect thought** at that time, including having the proper motivation for sharing the correct view with others. If you remember, correct thought is characterized by the determination to be free, a kind of dispassionate attitude that doesn't cling to things. It is characterized by non-harmfulness and benevolence. With the correct or perfect thought as our motivation, then when we're off our meditation cushion, we want to share with others what we have learned in our meditation sessions about the right view.

I remember in the past when I heard teachings from my teachers about how bodhisattvas share this and the other with others and how they teach sentient beings the Dharma, I used to think: "Why are they telling me all these? These are for people who actually teach the Dharma and people who can do that kind of stuff." Little did I know...[laughter].

Don't listen to teachings with this attitude: "What is the point of teaching me about being in meditative equipoise and sharing my understanding with others after meditative equipoise? I have no meditative equipoise! Sharing it with others? I'm never going to teach the Dharma!" Instead of seeing it as unrelated to you, see it as something that is describing what you are going to do in the future. It is giving you some information now so that you can prime yourself, get yourself ready for that time in the future when you actually will be able to do it.

Similarly, when I took the bodhisattva vows, some of them sounded strange: "What is all this stuff? How could anybody possibly break this vow?" They seemed unusual. And then as you stay in the business, so to speak [laughter], you realize how it is very easy to break that vow. The vow that you thought doesn't pertain to you at all, because it has to do with things that you don't do, like teaching the Dharma, actually, it begins to pertain to you after all. Don't think that these things are unlikely to happen. See that they could become relevant some time in the future.

So, you need the correct view and the correct thought in order to generate understanding in others.

It isn't sufficient just to have understanding. To generate conviction in others, to be able to give understanding to others through having it ourselves, we have to be able to make other people believe what we say. It isn't sufficient just to have all the information and good advice; people have to trust you. They have to believe in you in order for what you say to be effective.

If you look in your life, most of the time, people don't listen to the advice that is given per se. Whether they take the advice or not depends more on who is saying it. You could tell them things that are absolutely correct, but if they don't have confidence in you, they aren't going to pay any attention. That's the way we are, isn't it? People can give us incredibly good advice, but we won't listen for two minutes if we don't trust them.

Therefore, if we want to benefit others, we have to do things that will generate others' trust in us. It's very important to be trustworthy for others to believe in us. To do this, we need to have **right or perfect action**. We need to abandon the three destructive actions of body and create the three positive ones. To practice right action, we emphasize the three physical actions, but really, we need to abandon all ten of the destructive actions and cultivate all the positive ones.

If we are always cheating people, fudging on things and not returning stuff that is given to us, and being very promiscuous, then people aren't going to trust us. Even if we have great wisdom, we aren't going to be of benefit to others. We need to practice correct action.

We also need the **correct livelihood** in order to be of benefit to others. In other words, we need to learn to live simply and not have many needs. If we have many needs and a very elaborate lifestyle, then our mind will be preoccupied with how to keep up our lifestyle. In the back of our mind, we will always be thinking: "How can I flatter somebody so that they will give me something? How can I give them a gift so that they will give me something else?" That will cause others to mistrust us.

When we don't have a good livelihood, we'll be sitting there trying to finagle things. We need to have a proper livelihood in order for others to trust us.

We also need to have the **correct or proper speech** for other people to believe what we say. Suppose we have all sorts of great views and great thoughts, but our speech is completely rotten. Then, even though this one time we might say the truth when we are teaching, other people aren't going to believe us. You have probably come across instances where people say very good things, but nobody believes them.

Sometimes, we've even been in that position. We are speaking the truth, but people don't listen or believe us. That is because of having created the karma of improper speech, the four destructive actions of speech. We need to have correct speech in order to convey the meaning of the Dharma to others, to have that kind of karmic energy so that our speech bears weight, is meaningful to others, and others listen.

We are building others' confidence and trust in us, not because we want to manipulate them. We are trying to have good speech, action and livelihood out of a real, genuine wish to be of benefit to them. We recognize that to be of benefit to others, it is necessary to have these.

This is actually quite important. Just look in your own life. Who do you listen to and who don't you listen to? What is the criteria we use? We will find that we listen to the people whom we trust and have confidence in; those who live properly and act properly. Somebody else may say something fantastic, but if we don't trust them, we will dismiss it. That does not say much for our discriminating wisdom. It shows that we are quite prejudiced, biased and partial – we listen to some people but not to others, instead of being open to learning from everybody. But we have to recognize that others operate under the same limitations as us, and if we want to help others, we have to work within these limitations.

It's still not sufficient to just do the above. We have to understand how people's minds work. We need to have sensitivity, even to the point of having advanced stages of clairvoyance, in order to understand people's dispositions, their karma, their interests, their temperament. For that, we need to develop correct concentration. To get rid of the afflictions [['afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitudes'](#)] that plague us, that interfere with our helping others to generate both conviction and understanding, we need to practice **correct mindfulness, concentration, and effort**. If we want to benefit others, we have to benefit ourselves first. We need mindfulness, concentration and effort as well.

This is a little bit about how we apply the Noble Eightfold Path to be of service to others: eliminating our own afflictions* with mindfulness, concentration and effort; gaining some kind of understanding of how the mind works, in particular gaining clairvoyant powers through mindfulness and especially concentration; generating understanding in others through deeply meditating on the view ourselves, remembering it in post-meditation and then with the correct thought, sharing it with others; and then generating others' trust and conviction in us through correct livelihood, action and speech.

This teaching is based on the *Lamrim* or *The Gradual Path to Enlightenment*. Please refer to the following web-page for its outline and other transcripts or to listen to the audio recording of these talks: <http://www.thubtenchodron.org/GradualPathToEnlightenment/outline.html>

*'Afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitudes.'