



Welcome to week four. Let's take a breath together, breathing in and becoming aware of the body as you breathe out.

In the next breath, breathe in and become aware of feeling: pleasant, unpleasant, neutral or a mixture of all three.

In the next breath, when we breathe in, connect to the body and when you breathe out, become aware of thoughts.

This week, we focus on staying on the path of recovery: the fourth Noble Truth, the path leading away from suffering. It is the eightfold path, the path of vision, emotion, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. You can see the eightfold path as two sections: vision and transformation. We have and need the vision to know that it's possible to break from this cycle of addiction, that it's possible to end the suffering. Once we have the vision, we can step onto the path of transformation and transform ourselves through the emotions, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration.

Sometimes the eightfold path is broken into the threefold path, one part of which is the path of ethics, which includes speech, action, and livelihood. We explore how our speech can be harmful, frivolous, or false and we work on our speech. Regarding action, this is where we do our moral inventory and begin to pay attention to the five training principles to help train the mind and purify our body. We undertake to abstain from harming life with deeds of lovingkindness. We undertake to abstain from taking what is not given with openhanded generosity. We undertake to abstain from sexual misconduct with stillness, simplicity and contentment. We undertake to abstain from false speech with truthful communication. We undertake to abstain from taking intoxicants, with mindfulness clear and radiant.

The next part of ethics is livelihood. Whether we're working or not working, we need to look at our livelihood and see how sometimes it can keep us trapped in the life of addiction. It may mean



we need to change our job, do something to occupy our time more skillfully in order to cultivate a more positive livelihood that can support our recovery and help us stay on the path.

The next part of the eightfold path is meditation, where we apply more effort and energy in staying on the path, where we explore mindfulness and reflect on its four foundations. Then, of course, is concentration. This is the place where hopefully we can enter *samadhi*. Concentration is followed by wisdom, where we have vision and emotion. Emotion is the place where we begin to change our attitudes and our thinking.

The eightfold path is one of the ways we stay on the path of recovery. We need to remember that it is a gradual development. Sometimes, when we step onto the path of recovery, we think that we'll never have a thought of craving again, but of course, thoughts of craving may still arise. Last week, I spoke about how the prince was able to sit and turn towards all the craving that was arising and face it. When he stayed with the craving, its pull became weaker. We have to remember that in order to stay on the path of recovery, we have to face thoughts of craving and aversion, and trust that these thoughts will not have the same gravitational pull on us.

Let's go back to the legend of the prince and see how he stayed on the path of recovery. The prince first steps onto the path of recovery when he is disturbed by the first three sights. When he goes beyond the walls of the palace, he sees an elderly person, and says to his attendant, "What's that?" His attendant says, "That is an aging person." The prince asks, "Am I going to age?" and the attendant responds, "Yes, sir."

Then the prince looks the other way and sees someone ailing on the street, someone sick. "Am I going to get sick?" "Yes, sir."

Then the prince looks ahead of him and sees a dead person being carried through the streets, and he flinches. "Am I going to die?" he asks. "Yes, sir," says the attendant.



When the prince is disturbed by these sights, he steps onto the path of recovery. We know that he stays on the path of recovery because he goes forth from the palace. But he also had help to stay on the path of recovery, because there is the fourth sight. After the prince is so disturbed at seeing aging, sickness, and death, he looks around, grasping, hoping that someone can provide an answer. When he looks around, he sees a mendicant, a beggar, radiating peace. He thinks that this person may have the answer. This mendicant will never know that he inspired the prince to stay on the path of recovery—he was just living recovery by walking around radiating peace and begging for alms. This is what inspires the prince to go forth and cut his hair, renouncing the life of the palace.

We can look at this story on a literal level or on a metaphorical level. Literally we could say that we need to look around in our lives and see who inspires us, who we've come across in the past who has radiated peace and stillness. We only need one person to inspire us to go forth and to stay on the path of recovery. On a metaphorical level, you could say that what we need to do is to go forth from the prison of our minds. The palace represents a prison: a five-star prison, with a plasma TV and a hot tub. Some of us live in these five-star prisons where it seems blissful but we're still suffering, there's still *dukkha*. Some of live in the one-star prisons where it's *dukkha*, *dukkha*, *dukkha*.

These prisons represent the mind, and we have to go forth from the mind. We have to let go of believing all the stories and thoughts arising in the mind. This is the ego, and we have to see through the ego. I call the ego “Energy Going Overboard.” We have to let go of it if we are to stay on the path of recovery.

There is an old teaching called “Going for Refuge.” It's a teaching that has lost priority in many Buddhist traditions. My teacher, the Venerable Sangharakshita says, “You can let go of any teaching, but the one teaching you cannot slip away is the practice of going for refuge: the centrality of going for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.”



You may be saying, “Hell no, that’s like turning my life over to a god of my understanding.” Firstly, Buddhism is not a theistic religion—there is no god in Buddhism. Secondly, if you’ve had addictions, you’ve spent a lifetime turning your life over to drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, to a whole multitude, a whole array of distractions and habitual behaviors. Why not turn your life over to something more positive, placing positive values at the center of your thoughts and of your life?

When go refuge, we place the Buddha at the center of our thoughts. Not the Buddha the human being, but what the Buddha attained. We place the value of the Buddha’s waking up to the truth at the center of our lives, and centering this value will help us stay on the path of recovery. Secondly, we place the dharma—which is the path that points to the truth and leads us away from suffering—at the center of our lives. Thirdly, we place the sangha—the spiritual community, people who are likeminded—at the center of our lives, because the sangha accompanies us on the path and supports us to stay on the path. More importantly we place the *arya* sangha, the noble sangha, at the center of our lives. The noble sangha is the sangha of those who have attained enlightenment, who have woken up to the truth, who have found liberation.

We place all of this at the center of our lives and our thoughts. When we do this, the eightfold path will be the flowering of us going for refuge to the three jewels, or the triple gem. When we do this, we will be on the path that leads us away from suffering.

Today we explore cultivating positive values within the mind through the four basic needs of the heart: attention, affection, appreciation, and acceptance.

Pay attention to your body.

Pay attention to feeling: pleasant, unpleasant, neutral or a mixture of all three.

Pay attention to thought.



Cultivate affection towards yourself. Bring an image to mind of yourself that you like. Look at yourself with warm, kind, loving eyes.

Cultivate appreciation towards yourself. You can appreciate yourself for sitting here and practicing with me.

Cultivate acceptance towards yourself.

Accept yourself in the now. If you find your mind wandering into the past, bring it back to the breath and the body. If you find your mind wandering into the future, bring it back to the breath and to the body—acceptance is in the now.

Now.

Now.

Now.

Take a deep breath in and scan your body from head to toe when you breathe out.

If you want to explore staying on the path of recovery more, you can look at step four of the eight-step model: being willing to step onto the path of recovery and discover freedom.

May all blessings be yours.