

Have You Seen This Before? Three Essentials

The core ideas of the First Turning have never been declared obsolete, even after 2500 years. Of these, 3 groups are considered sufficient for a complete path: The 4 Foundations of Mindfulness, the Noble 8-fold Path and the 7 Limbs of Enlightenment.

Mindfulness is the foundation for all Buddhist practice, and has a universal application to all spiritual practice. Here, it is an item on all 3 lists, going deeper each time.

I. The 4 Foundations of Mindfulness

“A spiritual practitioner remains established in the observation of the body, in the body, diligent, with clear understanding, mindful, having abandoned every craving and every distaste for this life.”

“A spiritual practitioner remains established in the observation of the feelings, in the feelings, diligent, with clear understanding, mindful, having abandoned every craving and every distaste for this life.”

“A spiritual practitioner remains established in the observation of the mind, in the mind, diligent, with clear understanding, mindful, having abandoned every craving and every distaste for this life.”

“A spiritual practitioner remains established in the observation of the objects of the mind, in the objects of the mind, diligent, with clear understanding, mindful, having abandoned every craving and every distaste for this life.”

To practice well, one needs to remain conscious of the body, which exists only in the present moment; of the feelings (vedana, the 3rd skandha). Feelings here are embodied, and refer to the positive, negative, or neutral reactions to each momentary sense impression.

The mind (citta) then tries to push away an unpleasant sense object, pull in a positive one, and remains indifferent to a neutral object. Citta comprises thoughts and emotions both.

The ‘objects of the mind’ refer to phenomena of experience.

Technically, these are the ‘dharma’s’, which are difficult to observe. Sense impressions, however, are observable. The phenomena of mind are readily observable.

‘In the body, in the feelings’, etc. probably means ‘the body as such’, etc.

II. the Noble 8-fold Path

1. Right View (Samyak Drishti ‘Right Seeing’, ‘Understanding’)
Understanding the interdependent nature of all phenomena.
2. Right Intention (Samyak Sam.kalpa ‘Right Discernment’)
Developing the right attitude and motivation
3. Right Speech (Samyak Vak)
Not lying, not gossiping; avoiding harsh or divisive speech.
4. Right Action (Samyak Karmanta)

Engaging virtuous action & avoiding non-virtue

5. Right Livelihood (Samyak Ajiva)

Following a line of work that does no harm, but is of benefit.

6. Right Effort (Samyak Vyayama)

Developing a perseverance that is maintained over time.

7. Right Mindfulness (Samyak Smriti)

Continuous awareness of one's inner state & surroundings

8. Right Concentration (Samyak Samadhi)

Mental stabilization and focus.

The Noble 8-fold Path is summarized in the 3 trainings:
In Ethics (Vinaya), in Concentration and in Wisdom. They can be thought of as 3 stepping stones across the torrent of samsara.

The foundation of these 3 trainings, the bedrock, consists of Right Mindfulness and Right Effort. These should be as constant as possible, and can be gradually extended in duration. Regular sitting meditation is recommended.

Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood constitute the training in Ethics.

Right Concentration is the training in Samadhi.

Right View and Right Intention are the training in Wisdom

The result of fully practicing the 8-fold path is liberation from the suffering of samsara.

At the path of seeing, the 16 defining characteristics of the 4 Noble Truths are thoroughly understood. Emptiness is realized:

I. Suffering:

Impermanence- causes momentary arising and ceasing

Suffering- all feelings do not go beyond suffering

Emptiness-there is no owner of entities clung to as being me

No separate self existence-no basis for designating a person

II. Origin of Suffering:

Cause-the root of all suffering

Origin- all suffering originates from it

Arising-intense suffering arises suddenly

Condition-it connects with experiencing suffering

III. Cessation of Suffering

Cessation-future suffering and its causes have ceased

Peace-all afflictions are at peace

Excellence-it is the dharma of supreme magnificence

Final Deliverance-from samsara; no falling back

IV. Path

Path-on which one is to progress

Being Appropriate-it functions as the remedy for all afflictions

Accomplishment-it accomplishes unmistaken states of mind

Conducive to Deliverance-it leads to the state of stable liberation, Nirvana

III.

The seven Branches of Enlightenment can be developed simultaneously. They lead to and are the emanations of Sam.Bodhi- 'Full Enlightenment'

1. Mindfulness (smriti)
2. Investigation of Dharmas (dharma pravicya)
examining & reflecting on the teachings and numerical lists;
investigation of the phenomena of mind.
3. Effort (virya), joyful diligence.
4. Joy (priti), rapture, all pervading happiness, bliss.
5. Pliancy (prashrabi), serenity, tranquility.
6. Concentration of Mind (samadhi)
7. Equanimity (upeksha) ‘sublime indifference’, ‘evenmind’

As the true nature of Reality becomes clear, these Seven Branches of Enlightenment manifest in their fullest. Although these seven have existed all along, at the ‘Path of Seeing’, they operate in a pure and total fashion. After this first glimpse of Enlightenment, they are fully developed on the ‘Path of Meditation’.

The quality and duration of the mindfulness has increased hugely since the first efforts. The Awakening of meditation is extended into the daily life. The Path of Seeing has been reached as has the first of the 10 Bodhisattva Bhumis, “the Joyful”.

Prepared for Nalanda Institute, Olympia by Bob Harris.