

The Noble Eightfold Path

by: Annie Besant & C.W. Leadbeater

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A lecture delivered by **ANNIE BESANT**
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Twenty-three hundred years have passed since the great Buddhist Emperor, Ashoka, sent to the Island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) his son and his daughter, to plant in this island not only the material slip from the sacred tree of Buddha Gaya, but also to plant here a slip of that Tree of Wisdom which, since that day, has spread abroad over the island, as it has spread far over the nations, over the world - that Tree of Wisdom which you call the faith of the Buddha. We are to take this afternoon one of His great teachings for our study. You remember how, when He had left His father's house, when He had left His wife and His infant son, when He had sought, by the help of instructors in the jungle, to win His way to life, when He had sought by asceticism to find the path which others had failed to teach Him, that He finally, sitting under that famous tree, having conquered every temptation, having thrown back all the illusions of Mara, when at last illumination reached Him, when He had entered into perfect knowledge - then He saw, for the first time in this life - the Four Noble Truths: sorrow, its roots, the cessation of sorrow, the path out of it - the Noble Eightfold Path. And it is that Noble Eightfold Path to which I ask your attention this afternoon.

Characterized as are all the teachings of the Blessed One by brevity, they are instinct with wisdom: for just as on each one of the Four Noble Truths, volumes of exposition may be written, so in the phrases of this Noble Eightfold Path, the whole law of life, the whole rule of conduct, is definitely expressed; and if a man should follow that Eightfold path, if a man should carry out the eight directions that are given, *then* that man would bridge the threshold of Arhatship, and he would prepare himself for liberation.

Now, what is this Noble Eightfold Path? It consists of eight precepts, or as we may call them, eight great truths, each one of which applies to human life, each one of which is intended to shape human destiny; and taken one by one, and understood and practised, human evolution would be rapid and secure. The first of these great truths is Right Knowledge; the second, Right Thought; then the third and fourth, that grow out of Right Thought - Right Speech and Right Activity; then, with regard to the outer world, Right Means of Livelihood; then, Right Exertion; then Right Memory; and, lastly, that highest achievement, Right Concentration.

Those are the eight steps, as we may call them, of the Path - these eight great truths for the guidance of human life.

Let us take these eight truths one by one, and see how a true Buddhist may shape his life thereby. The first, then, is Right Knowledge, as sometimes we find it translated; for often, in translating from Sanskrit or from Pali into English, the original word is fuller and larger than the English word, and so two words are given to explain one. So sometimes this word is also translated as Right Belief. But, truly, all belief

should be based on knowledge. That which a man rightly knows, that only can he rightly believe: all else is credulity and folly. Now, in the modern world, right belief has not been thought to be so very important that it should be placed at the outset of this Noble Eightfold Path. But right belief or right knowledge - this is really the most vital and essential thing of all. It is the foundation upon which all thought and speech and action are built. And if your foundation be rotten, how, on that rotten foundation, shall a safe house be built for the living of man?

Now what is Right Knowledge? It is knowledge based on, and in accordance with, the facts of life, the facts of the universe, the Law which surrounds us, and which no effort of ours may change or alter; it is knowledge of the laws on which the universe is built, laws which do not change, laws which do not vary, which cannot be broken, but which may be disregarded. But if those laws are disregarded, even if we have no right knowledge concerning them, even if, instead of knowledge, we are left in avidya, the absence of knowledge, then it is impossible, when we are without that knowledge, to guide our life to any useful end.

Now, it would be impossible for me to go into the whole realm of right knowledge; but there are two great laws stated, which a man must know if he is to guide his life aright, and if he knows these two rightly, and walks by them then his life will be ennobling for himself, will be beneficial to all among whom he lives. One of those laws is the Law of Cause and Effect, that which we call the Law of Action, of Karma; the other is the Law of Opposites, the law which expresses itself in the fact that if you meet a vibration of one kind with a vibration of the same kind, then the vibration grows stronger, larger, wider; but if you meet that vibration with a vibration of the opposite kind, then the one extinguishes the other, looked at from the ethical standpoint. That is, the great principle of returning good for evil.

Let us see how the Blessed One taught this Law of Karma, for it is noticeable that He taught it in a way that all men could understand, by admirably choosing a symbol, by pointing the attention of the hearer to familiar things and out of them expressing profound truth. This Law of Cause and Effect, this Law of Karma - how did He teach it? Thus: if a man acts from an evil thought, then pain follows that action as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the cart. There is not a peasant walking in the street, there is not a cultivator delving in the soil, who could not follow that graphic image; as the wheel must follow the foot of the ox, so must pain follow the evil thought or evil action; inevitable is the action of the law; you cannot break it. Again, if a man acts from a pure thought, happiness attends him inseparably as his shadow. Not a child who has walked in the sunshine, but knows that his shadow cannot be separated from himself; as inevitable as is the union between shadow and body, so is the union between righteousness and happiness.

Now, supposing you have realized this piece of Right Knowledge: supposing, whenever temptation comes to you, you cast it back by the thought of the attendant pain; supposing you have realized that no one can save you from the result of your own actions, but that you must inevitably bear the result yourself; then there is something else you would want to know in order to guide your conduct aright, and that is what I have called the Law of Opposites. Let us see how the Lord Buddha taught this other great doctrine, so that every man and woman could understand it and guide their lives thereby.

There is one story, familiar, but so beautiful that familiarity only seems to lend it a touch of fresh grace. There was a King of Kashi and he fought with the King of Koshala, and conquered him. Thereupon the

King of Koshala and his wife fled away and took refuge in a certain place, and there remained in hiding. But they were betrayed into the hands of the victorious King, and they were taken and condemned to execution. Then, their son, pressing through the crowd to his father and mother to bid them farewell, received from his father's lips this last teaching: "Son, be not long; be not short; hatred ceases not by hatred; by non-hatred does hatred cease." The son could not understand these words. He was much puzzled by them. But life explained them, as life often explains wise teaching, which at first seems dark, obscure. This son of the murdered King became the servant of the King who had slain his father and mother. The King, his master, grew to love him, and he would often sleep with his head upon the knees of the son of the murdered man and woman. And one day, as the King slept thus, the youth remembered his father and mother, who had been executed by the sleeper. Moved by the thought and by hatred, he drew his sword, and thought to slay his father's slayer. But his father's words came back to his mind: "Be not short," be not hasty in action. That was the message that came out of the years to him, and back into the sheath he put the sword. Presently, the King waked, and he drew his sword again, as though he threatened to slay the King. The King begging for his life, the young man answered him that he would not slay him, but that by threatening to slay, he had really forfeited his own life, and for this he craved pardon from the King. The King pardoned the youth, as he had pardoned the King, and then the youth said to the King that he had remembered his father's words: "Be not long"; that is, keep not hatred long in the heart. "Be not short"; that is, be not precipitate in action. Hatred ceases not by hatred at any time; hatred ceases by love.

"If I, O King, had slain you, your friends would have slain me. My friends would have slain them – and so, backwards and forwards, the evil progeny of hate would have gone on. You have given me my life, and I have given you yours. Hence, hatred ceases by love, and we are friends."

That, then, is the Law of Opposites, explained in a way that no one who has heard the story can ever forget. It was summed up by the Lord Buddha in four phrases. You may expand them to every emotion which you can feel, to all your acts towards your fellow creatures: "Let a man overcome anger by love; let him overcome hatred by kindness; let him overcome the greedy by liberality; the liar by truth." See how, in each, the one is put over against its opposite; against the vice, the virtue that is exactly opposite to it. A man is angry with you; answer him back with anger, and anger will carry you both away; but answer with love, and the anger vanishes, and peace rules over the two who would otherwise have been foes. If a man does you a wrong, repay him not with the wrong he has done you, in the short-sighted fashion of the world, which strikes back and so perpetuates the evil. If a man is greedy, do not be greedy towards him; be liberal. If he is miserly, pour out upon him of what you have; teach him by the opposite virtue, and not by showing him the mirror of his own vice repeated. If a man lies to you, do not you lie back to him. There are so many who say: "He spoke untruths to me, and I only paid him back in his own coin." This is the wisdom of the Buddha; if a man speaks falsehood to you, answer him with truth, and the liar shall become truthful, and so shall truth reign supreme. Now, carry out these noble truths, this noble wisdom, this teaching, carry it out in your lives, carry it out in your business, in your own homes, wherever you meet your fellowmen. If one does you wrong, answer him by the opposite virtue, and then, you will have the right to call yourself a follower of the Blessed One.

Having thus laid the foundation of Right Knowledge, knowledge at least of the two chief facts, of the two fundamental laws, the next thing that is necessary is Right Thought. That is, that your thought should be as good, as perfect, as you can make it. Out of thought grows speech. Out of thought grows action. A man who thinks wrongly, speaks wrongly, acts wrongly. The man who thinks rightly, his speech is right,

his action is also right. Thought, that is so often disregarded, is far more important than either speech or action. Take care that your thoughts are right, and the others inevitably will be right; be careless in your thought and inevitably you will fall into evil ways. Therefore, on the great foundation of Right Knowledge, Right Thinking is to be builded, and you are to endeavour that your thought shall be serious, accurate, as perfect as you are able to make it. "Earnestness," said the Buddha, "is life; thoughtlessness is death"; for the thoughtless and the careless man slips inevitably into many evils. The earnest man, who is careful, who is thoughtful, that man will guide aright his speech and his action. So that the next thing that you have to consider in treading this Noble Eightfold Path, is Right Thinking. Your thought builds your future: your thought makes your character. As you think today, so tomorrow, inevitably, you will act. The thought-forms that you leave behind you when death touches you, the tendencies that have grown out of your life, those will be re-embodied in your next incarnation, and thus out of your tendencies of this life will be created the lives of the future. Therefore, Right Thinking is the second of your steps.

The next step is Right Speech. Now, what is Right Speech? First, it is speech which is true. All the everyday falsehoods of ordinary life are condemned by Right Speech. All the empty falsehoods which people so lightly utter - these are all condemned and shut out from Right Speech. Right Speech is true to the uttermost. Right Speech is also kind and courteous. Harsh language, cruel words, bitter attacks - none of these is possible to the true Buddhist who is endeavouring to walk upon the Noble Eightfold Path, who is striving to follow out the rule of Right Speech; and concerning that virtue the Buddha again gives us a splendid example. A certain man was railing at him, using wrong speech and not right; the Blessed One listened patiently until the man finished all the abuse that he had to pour upon Him, and then He answered gently and said:

"Son! when a man gives a present without regard to the rules of politeness, the fashion is to say, 'Keep your present.' Son! I cannot take your railing. Keep it and take it back to yourself. The wicked man who attacks a virtuous one, is like a man who looks up to high heaven and spits at it. The heaven is not soiled thereby, but the spittle falls upon his own person and defiles him. The man who scatters mud does not soil others; on the contrary the mud, flies back and soils his own clothes. The virtuous man cannot be injured by the evil a wicked man does against him: the evil goes back to the wrong-doer." That is the great teaching with regard to right and wrong speech. Evil words spoken to you do you no harm, unless you answer them with evil speech. If a man abuse you, he does you no harm, unless you take up his abuse and answer him with abuse; then his abuse comes to you and remains with you, and he is free from it. But if you answer not with abuse, his evil speech goes back to him and remains with him, and you are unharmed by it. So the law works out. If a man abuse you, you are not injured thereby, unless you answer him in the same way; if you answer his abuse by love, by compassion, by silence or by gentle words, then his evil words go back to him, he is not able to throw them upon you, and only he suffers harm from the evil he has wrought; his evil returns to him.

Carry that out in daily life. This law is a law for life and not only for talk. The next time a man reviles you, answer him by silence or by love, and his abuse will remain with him and you will go on your way uninjured.

And after these three, we come to the fourth: Right Action. Right Action is almost sure to follow where Right Knowledge, Right Thought and Right Speech have paved the way. The tongue is the hardest thing to control. Have control over your mind and thoughts, have control over your mind and tongue; then, Right Action will inevitably follow - the actions of the body will inevitably follow the right road. Some other

aids in this you have been given in the Five Precepts, marking out for you the wrong actions which you should avoid. You may not evade the law, like the Buddhist who says day after day, "I will not take life," yet sometimes sustains his own life upon the meat which is only to be obtained by the slaughter of one life by another. The man who sustains his own life, who feeds his own life on the slaughtered life of the beasts, that man contributes to the taking of life as much as if he took life himself. If those who desire to practice Right Action would all abstain from sustaining their own lives upon the life which is slaughtered by another, the slaughter would cease. Then, you must abstain from all sex-evil: from all illegal, unlawful, sensual indulgence - you must strive after purity of the body. You must also abstain from intoxicating liquor. This vice is, I am glad to know, abating in Ceylon at the present time, for happily, with the revival of Buddhism, there has come a reaction against the taking of intoxicating liquors, which was unfortunately copied from others who have come amongst you. And as your own ancient religion asserts itself again, with its supreme authority, drunkenness will become a thing of the past - for a drunken Buddhist is impossible to think of, it is utterly against the law whereby he lives. Right Action, then, is the fourth of the steps upon this Noble Eightfold Path.

Then we come to Right Means of Livelihood - a very practical thing, and a thing that perhaps, in these modern days, needs stress to be laid upon in a very special way. What are Right Means of Livelihood? They are the gaining of a living by means that do not injure your fellow-men, that serve your family and your community - your neighbours as well as yourself. So that in mingling in this modern life, in which so much of struggle is now unhappily to be found, the law for the Buddhist is, that in all business, in the gaining of his own livelihood, he shall neither injure nor wrong those amongst whom he lives; that is forgotten unhappily, in most modern minds. A man earns his livelihood, but he does not stay to ask himself, "Do I earn it in a right way?" We see and hear of men making great fortunes; if we go behind that fortune, what do we find? Ruined homes, desperate men, broken-hearted women, starving children. The fortune of one man has been built upon the sufferings of others. That is a wrong fortune, a wrong wealth, a wrong enriching of one man, at the cost and the misery of many. Such means of livelihood are unworthy of the man who realizes the unity of mankind and the common Brotherhood of all. Beware, then, how you work and win your livelihood. As the modern methods spread amongst you, as you take part in the race of the world, if you would not lose more than you gain, if you would not forfeit more than you achieve, if you take to modern methods, if you are careless as to the means by which you gather wealth for yourself, if you trample on the weak, if you cheat the stupid, respecting no law but that which can be enforced by the policeman or administered by the judge, and setting at naught the law which is imposed upon your heart, forsaking the path disclosed to you by the Blessed One - then you will grow wealthier in gold, indeed, but you will grow poorer in honour and virtue; and virtue is more precious than gold, pure character is greater wealth than the gains of this world. Take this rule to heart then. See that you choose Right Means to Livelihood, and remember ever that such means alone is permissible for the follower of the Buddha.

And after that comes Right Exertion. Now, many, not unnaturally, often ask, "Why should right exertion or right effort come so late in this outline of human conduct? Surely, right effort is the very first thing that we want? And until a man makes a right effort, how can he expect that he will make progress of a valuable kind?" Well, the answer is, that effort cannot be rightly directed, unless it is guided by Right Knowledge and Right Thought. Effort which has ignorance behind it, however well-intentioned it be, does more harm than good. The well-intentioned stupid man is really more dangerous to the community and to himself than the man who does not live by right will or right thought. If you do a thing which is against the law, against that which Right Knowledge teaches, your intentions will not make it come out right. Stern as is the lesson, it is a lesson that you must needs learn and practice. For supposing a man plunges into a

burning house to save the life of a child who is in danger of perishing amidst the flames, does his good intention prevent the fire from burning him, unless to his courage he adds wisdom also? The man who knows the danger, takes precautions against it; he binds a cloth about his mouth and so is able to save the child and himself from suffocating. So the man who deliberately does right, using Right Knowledge, and guiding his exertion by Right Thought, that man does twice as well as the headlong man who desires to do right but does not think rightly. So your effort must have Right Knowledge and Right Thought behind it. You must be wise as well as good and prudent, as well as anxious to do right. You must realize that half the harm and misery in the world grows out of ignorant good intentions, unguided by knowledge; that good intentions without Right Knowledge and Right Thought are a fruitful source of mischief. Right effort and right endeavour are endeavour and effort guided by Right Knowledge; that alone should be the kind of effort, that alone should be the endeavour, of all who are of the Buddhist faith.

Then we come to the seventh step upon the Path, Right Memory. There are two meanings that may be given in explanation of that phrase, Right Memory. In the fullest meaning, it is memory of all the past births of a man, such as you find in the Lord Buddha Himself. You remember how, over and over again, when He met men for the first time - for the first time in that life - and when, perhaps, the man treated Him in an evil way, the Blessed One explained it to the disciples around Him, by saying how in some one or other of His previous lives He had met that man, and how then a wrong had been done which bore fruit in the way that they saw. You remember how, over and over again, He illustrates incidents of the present by stories drawn from His perfect memory of the past.

But, in that sense, it is not of very much value to the ordinary man or woman who has no memory of the stories of the past, of his or her previous lives. But there is a sense in which, for all, Right Memory is truly a valuable thing: when a wrong that is done is forgotten as soon as it is committed, when a kindness that is done to you is treasured and remembered for the rest of your life in gratitude, then you have the Right Memory which is of highest use to the ordinary man and woman. It was written of the great Hindu King that a thousand wrongs were done to Him and He forgot them all before He lay down to rest; one kindness was done to Him and He remembered it for the rest of His life. That is Right Memory. Keep a useful forgetfulness for all unkindnesses that touch you; but keep a perfect memory for every kindness that is done you. Forget everything that may have caused you pain - shut your eyes to it; shut it out of your mind, for your memory must not be burdened with the memory of injuries. Let them go. None can injure you, save you had made injury inevitable by your own past - and what folly to remember the injury when to remember it is really to keep it alive? Put away from you all that pains you, forget all that hurts you, all that gives you sorrow, all that seems to wrong you - but keep as your most precious memory all that good you have received. Right Memory is that which treasures up all the joy, goodness and help in grateful remembrance; that memory which cherishes kind thoughts of all who have helped you, however trifling that help may have been. So shall peace and joy be yours for ever, and so shall memory have lost its power to torment.

Right Concentration - this is the last of the steps on the Noble Eightfold Path. Here again, a double meaning is given. For one who has trodden that Path in many lives, to him there is possibility of the highest form of concentration - the concentration by which you may know anything which you *will* to know, by simply fixing upon it a well-trained and well-pointed mind - that is Right Concentration. Every mind may be so trained to obedience, may be so steady, so one-pointed, that you can fix on any object of knowledge and know that object without and within. But that is a high attainment, led up to by lives of meditation. But for the man of the world, the road to Right Concentration is training your mind in ordinary

life. Practice it day by day, hour by hour, fixing your whole attention on the thing you are doing, and do that thing as perfectly as it is possible for you to do it. Do not let your mind wander, do not let it drift. Keep it under your own control, rule it well and firmly. You will not be able at first to close your mind to the distractions, and the disturbances around you, until you have practiced the concentration for many years. Then your mind will become obedient to your will. If you do that, you may begin to meditate with some success. Then the mind which has been trained to concentrate upon outer objects, will become obedient when you begin to fix it upon lofty principles of life. Therefore, see that you practice Right Concentration. Practice it in everything that you do, and you will gain a mind that is cultivated for the gaining of every kind of knowledge in life, and in that fashion you will prepare yourself gradually for the concentration, for the meditation, that opens the gates of true knowledge and lifts you above the passing troubles of the world.

Thus we have traced the steps of the Noble Eightfold Path. If in our lives and in our hearts we try to realize the truths of that Path, then shall the future hold for us all knowledge, all wisdom, and all peace.

Let me say to you in closing this brief description of the right principles that you have had in this Island for the last twenty-three centuries - so that you have had time to test each of them whether it be truly wise or not - that, if you would restore the palmy days of Sri Lanka, if you would make the Sinhalese people great once more, you must build the future upon this foundation. You must put the feet of your nation on this ancient path once more, and teach the nation to tread it once again. On Buddhism you must build your nationality. On the teachings of the Blessed One you must train up your people, and you must so teach your children. Your boys as they grow up to manhood must sit at the feet of the Buddha and listen to the teaching which in His dying words He left to all mankind, when He said: "I will be with you in the teaching I have given you. I will live with you in the Law which I have declared to you." In that way you may have the Lord Buddha with you - in the Law that He proclaimed, in the teaching that He gave. Then there will be life still for you, and in the guidance of that teaching you may live again and may build your future; otherwise, there is no future for you in the history of the world. If you will do that, you will be true to the faith and to the great heritage left you by those who have gone before you. If you do that, you will help not only yourselves, you will use the teaching not only for yourselves, but you will keep alive that which is part of the heritage of the world, and thus serve your fellow-men, while you follow the teaching of the Blessed One, the Lord of Compassion and of Mercy. And you will realize the truth of the words of one of your own wise Ones: "Bow down with folded hands: for hard, hard is a Buddha to be met with in a thousand generations."

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

[A lecture delivered by **C. W. LEADBEATER** through the medium of an interpreter to the Burmese Ladies at Moulmein, Burma, in March, 1914.]

You ask me to tell you the way to Nirvana; the way to Nirvana is to follow the teachings of our Lord Buddha. It is not enough only to talk about following the Precepts, it is not enough to go to the Temples, to take Pancha Sila and offer flowers. The great thing is to live your lives as the Lord Buddha wished you to live. He has given certain Precepts which we are to follow. Each morning many Buddhists repeat those Precepts, but often they immediately forget all about them, and do not think about them until next morning. That is useless, because the Lord Buddha when He gave these Precepts meant people to carry

them out day by day. He gave you, for example, the Noble Eightfold Path. Now I suppose every one of you has heard from childhood all about the Noble Eightfold Path. You may repeat its steps in a moment, but the question is not to be able to repeat them, but to carry them out; because, unless you carry them out, they are useless to you. You know the first Step in that Noble Eightfold Path is Right Belief. Now what are the things that we ought to believe and those that we ought not to believe? The first thing is to believe in the Law of Karma. That is, that whatever you do brings corresponding results. If you do good things, good will come; if you do bad things, evil will come. We should all say that that was so, if anyone asked us, but the question is, do you live all the time as though it were true? Sometimes people say they believe things, but they do not behave accordingly. In such cases their belief is only form. There are some things you *do* believe. You believe fire will burn you, so you are careful not to put your hand in the fire, lest it might get hurt. You know that if you fall from a height your arms or legs may be broken, so you are careful in walking up a dangerously steep hill. Also if you believe that for every evil thought or word or act, evil will come to you, you will be careful. But if you say that you believe in that, and still sometimes speak evil of another person, then you do *not* believe that really.

You see some people think of religion as something to believe in with their minds, and that is all. They think of religion when they go to the Temples, or when they offer flowers, but forget that religion should be in their minds at all times and not only when they go to the Temples. You know a religious person not by the loudness of her prayers or by the frequency of her appearance at the Temples, but by the uprightness and kindness of her daily life. So if you have Right Belief in the Law of Karma, you will be careful as to what you say or think. Then we must believe that to follow the Path of Holiness will lead us to Nirvana. That I am sure we are not only to believe; but to act accordingly is also meant thereby.

The second step is, you know, Right Thought. Now Right Thought means two separate things, about which I am going to tell you presently. First it means thought about right things and not about wrong things. You can have in your mind always beautiful religious thoughts or thoughts of common ordinary everyday matters. Some people fill their minds all day long with little thoughts that do not matter. You, ladies, have your household work or other duties in connection with your house. When you are doing that, you must see that everything is done properly and nothing is neglected; but when your work is done, you can turn aside and think of something else. You do not need to have your minds filled at all times with the price of rice - or dhal, or whether there is any reduction in the cost of ghee, etc. All these things have to be thought of at the proper time, but as soon as you are free from household work, you can turn your thoughts to religious matters. And when I say "religious matters", I mean to include many good things. When you speak of good meditation, you usually mean meditating on the virtues of our great Lord. That is indeed a wonderful and fertile subject upon which you can think for ever without exhausting it, but there are also two other divisions of thought suited to religion, and useful. You may think, since our Lord is a great example: "What can I do to make my life similar to His own? How can I improve myself so that I can show forth the beauty of the Lord to those around me?" That is one thing. Another thing is: "What can I do to help other people?" Remember when the Lord attained Buddhahood He was perfectly free to pass away without coming back. Why did He not do that? Simply because of His great Love and Compassion for the world - because He saw it needed help. Now, I say that a good Buddhist must not take his refuge in the Lord Buddha and trust in His teachings only, but he must also do what the Lord Buddha did. We cannot teach as the Lord Buddha taught, we cannot live the glorious life He lived; but at least it is our duty to try to imitate His Life as closely as we can. After attaining freedom, for five-and-forty years He spent His Life in wandering along the Ganges Valley and preaching the Law. All this He did, not for Himself, but wholly, absolutely for the people. You cannot perhaps give your whole time to this work, because you have household duties. But even those household duties are work for others, not for

yourself. When they are done you must think what else you can do to help somebody. Perhaps you can help the poor, the sick, and those who are in sorrow or suffering, to whom you can bear friendly sympathy. Remember, it is not only by giving food or other physical things that you can help people. If you give sympathy, that is also one way of helping. Often a few kind words and hearty sympathy will do more for a person in suffering than any money you can give. Everybody, even the poorest, can help others. So one form of religious thought would be to help others, and see what you can do for them. That is one kind of Right Thought, to think of the right thing and keep out useless things.

There is another meaning of Right Thought, and that is *correct* thought - to think truth. Often we think untruly and badly of persons when we should think well of them. You know when people meet together they talk of their friends and relations. There is no harm in that if what they say is good; but you know how often people think rather of the wrong things done by a person than of the good things he has done. When you are thinking of some wrong, that is not Right Thought. Often people have prejudices in their minds. You get an opinion that such and such a person is bad, and that what he does must be bad. Generally that is quite wrong; and in that case, that is an untrue thought. No person is all bad. There will be something at least that is good in him. So a prejudice is not Right Thought. Remember then that not only must you think of good things, but you must also think truly and correctly.

Now the next step is Right Speech. Here again there are the same two divisions. First you should always speak of good things. It is not your business to speak of the evil deeds of other people. In most cases what is said in gossip is not true. So if the man has not done what you are saying, your words are not true, and you are doing him harm. Even supposing it is true that he has done the thing, even then you ought not to talk about it. You cannot do any good to him by saying over and over again that he has done wrong. The kindest thing you could do is to say nothing about it. Supposing the person who did the bad thing was your husband, your son or your brother, I am sure you would feel you did not want to talk about it and to advertise it to many people who would not otherwise know about it. You would say: "He will not do it again; let it be forgotten." In the same way you should not talk about the wrong done by another person, even though he is not your brother by birth. We all make mistakes some time or other, and you know that the less you say about them the better, in order that there should be no fear of their spreading. You would know that, if it were your husband, or your brother or your son. We are all brothers and sisters, and so you have no right to speak so, even when the man is not related to you by birth. You should speak with regard to other people as you would like them to speak with regard to you. If you do something wrong, you do not wish to tell everybody about it and spread it abroad; so do not do that in the case of other people also. I said one side of Right Speech is to talk about good things and not bad things; but do not forget about the other side. You should be careful that your speech is exactly true. Often people speak inaccurately and exaggerate. They make little things into enormous stories; that is not Right Speech.

Now we come to Right Action. You see how these three things follow one from another. If you think of good things, you will not speak of bad things, because you speak what is in your mind; and if thought and speech are good, the action that follows is good. So one needs to be careful of what he thinks. One should think of the results of an action before doing it. Nowadays no person lives by himself alone like a monk. He lives among others, so that every time you think, your thought will affect a great many people. You should have unselfishness, and should be thinking of others more than of yourself. A person who thinks of himself only is constantly doing harm, even though he does not know it; so it is necessary to get into the attitude of mind that we think always of others, not of ourselves. The most unselfish life was that

of our Lord Gautama Buddha because He thought never of Himself, never of Nirvana, but always of the world. Let us in our small way try to imitate Him by helping others. If we do that, then we may be sure that our thoughts, words, and actions will be right. Before you speak anything think: "Is it true, is it a kind thing, will it hurt anybody?" and then: "Is it useful, will it be helpful to somebody?" And unless you can answer these questions in the affirmative, and say that your words will be true, kind and useful, it is better not to speak. I know quite well that if this rule was followed there would be less conversation than now; but perhaps that would leave more time for Right Thought.

These then are the four steps. The fifth step is Right Means of Livelihood. The Right Means of Livelihood is that which causes no harm to any living thing. We can see at once that that rules out certain men such as butchers, fishermen; but remember it reaches much further than that. You shall not obtain your livelihood by harming any creature, therefore you can see that such a profession as toddy-selling is not a Right Means of Livelihood. The seller of alcohol does not necessarily kill people, but he is doing harm, and living on the harm he does to the people. Take the case of a merchant who in the course of his trade is dishonest; that is not Right Means of Livelihood, for his trading is not fair, he is cheating the people. If a merchant deals fairly, if he buys his articles wholesale and sells in retail at a reasonable price and gains thereby - that is a Right Means of Livelihood. But the moment he begins to mislead people and sells a poor article for a good one, he is cheating them. A Right Means of Livelihood becomes a wrong means, if treated in a wrong way. We must deal as honestly with people as we wish them to deal with us. If a person is a trader in a certain class of goods, he has special knowledge of those goods. The customer trusts himself in the hands of the trader, because he himself has not that special knowledge. When you trust a doctor or lawyer, you expect to be treated fairly. Remember, it is in the same way that the customer comes to the trader, and therefore he ought to be as honest with his customer as a lawyer or a doctor is with his client or his patient. When a man trusts you in that way, he puts you on your honour to do your best for him. You have a right to make a reasonable profit in the course of your bargain, but you must also look to your duty.

Then we come to the sixth step, which is called Right Exertion, or Right Endeavour. That is a very important step. Sometimes people studying Buddhism say that it advocates only meditation and quietness, and nothing else need be done. It has been held as a reproach against Buddhism that it taught men to keep quiet and not to do anything for other people. This step, taught by the Lord, contains a full and complete answer to this reproach. Here the Lord Himself tells you: "It is not enough to meditate, but you must also have Right Exertion." What that means is that every person has a certain amount of strength and power. You know you have a certain amount of physical strength. When you have a day's work before you, you put aside that which you could not do, and do that work which the strength of your muscles permits. Also you have a certain amount of strength as to your mind and will, and you can perform only a certain amount of work in that way. Only so much work can be done, not more. Therefore you must take care how you spend that power. Every person has some influence among his friends and relations. That influence means power, and you are responsible for making good use of that power. You have many children, relations and servants, and you must be careful about what you do and say, because they will copy you; and so you are to remember that the influence you are spreading should be good and not bad. Right Exertion means putting your work into useful lines, not useless. There are many things that can be done, but some are immediate and more urgent than others. One of the things done here as a work of merit is the building of a pagoda or a monastery. These are very good things to do but there may be two or three people who would do them. Instead of two or three people doing the same thing, one might do it and the others might undertake other religious work. The most important part of your religious work is the education of your children. This matter should be seriously taken into your

consideration in this country. I do not say you will not obtain merit by building pagodas; but there are many people to do that, and one who gives a school for Buddhist children is making just as much merit as he who builds a pagoda. Instead of all doing the same thing, divide the work among yourselves; and see where your exertion is most useful. In all cases our Lord Buddha expects us to use our own reason and common sense. We should not only believe in His teachings, but we should also carry them into effect. There are many good things to do; but do only at the moment that which is most useful; and see that your strength is used in the right direction, and not wasted.

Then you come to the seventh step, Right Memory, Right Remembrance. There again you may take it in two senses. The Right Memory of which the Lord Buddha spoke was memory of past incarnations. He Himself possessed that fully. You will note this in different Jataka stories. In one of these stories a person comes and speaks ill of Him. He turns to His disciples and says: "I have insulted him in a previous life and therefore he does it now." No doubt if we remembered everything that happened before, we could arrange our present life better now. But we have not most of us the power of remembering our past lives. We must not, however therefore, think that this Right Memory has nothing to do with us. There is a real sense in which we can all of us have Right Memory. To all of us in our lives come pleasant things, and also unpleasant things. A wise person will remember the good things and put out of his mind the bad things. Suppose someone comes and speaks rudely to us. A foolish person will remember it for weeks, months and years, and continue to say that such and such a person spoke unkindly. It will rankle in his mind. What good will it do? None at all. It will annoy him, if he keeps it always fresh in his mind. That is not Right Memory. He should forget an evil thing done to him then and there. In that way you can exercise Right Memory. Always think of kind things that will stir up feelings of love and gratitude, but forget the unkind things.

Once there came before the Lord Buddha two cousins, one of whom had injured the other greatly and tried to supplant him as an officer of a temple; also his wife had poisoned the child of the other cousin, that her own child might inherit the office. These two came before the Lord Buddha wishing to become His disciples and hear His preaching. So the Lord Buddha said to the elder: "Is your mind absolutely free from any resentment against anyone? If you wish to become my disciple, your mind must be utterly free from any ill-will. Here is your cousin's wife who poisoned your child; are you utterly free from resentment against them?" The elder cousin said: "Yes, Lord; if they have injured me, I have already forgotten it." The Lord said: "You have done well; and one day you shall become Buddha, even as I have done." So there are some things that you must forget, and Right Memory consists not only in remembering the right things, but also in putting away the wrong things.

The last step is Right Meditation, or Right Concentration. Once more, Right Meditation is that which takes you away to higher planes. Such meditation is for Arhats, and for those monks who devote a whole life to it. When you begin to meditate on our Lord, you can hardly expect such results; but what you can do is to keep for yourself right things in your mind. Another meaning is Right Concentration - fixing your mind on the right thing. See to it that the thing around which your thoughts turn as a centre is a right thing. Do you not know how a person may have a thought in the background of his mind, which does not show itself when he is otherwise engaged, but, when he has nothing special to think of, it comes again? People treasure up the memory of some fancied wrong done to them by someone else. Such persons sometimes keep it in the background of their minds for years, and when they have nothing to think of, that thought comes up again. That is not Right Remembrance but foolish remembrance. If you have in the background the thought of the greatness and goodness of our Lord, at every time when you are not

engaged in physical plane work, your thought, goes back to such ideas automatically and you will be surrounded with a holy atmosphere. There is a proverb in Europe that "like attracts like". People of the same sort come together. You know that is true in the physical plane, but that is also true about thoughts. You think good thoughts and you will attract good thoughts. There are many nats and nature-spirits about us, though you cannot see them with your physical eyes. They have no physical bodies, but mental and astral bodies. You must not think those creatures are less real because you do not see them. Some of them are good, some bad. Those creatures are attracted by your thoughts. If your thoughts are good, high and holy, you will be surrounded by good influences and creatures of good type. On the other hand, if you have bad thoughts you will draw unpleasant creatures to you.

There are many men who can feel the atmosphere surrounding another. Sometimes when you meet a person, you feel instinctively that he is holy and good. Why is that? Because that person's thoughts are good and there is a pleasant devotional atmosphere surrounding him. You meet another person, and you know that there is a feeling of unrest and horror around him because that person has allowed himself to be influenced by stupid thoughts, and has drawn unpleasant surroundings to himself. Probably some of you have experienced that after talking to certain persons you feel tired. That is because his thought is unrestful. If you have Right concentration, you will draw around you right surroundings. Most of all our Lord drew splendid influences to Himself. If you go to Buddha Gaya, where 2,500 years ago our Lord attained Illumination, you will feel there how strong are the influences pouring down. You cannot call down such influence as our Lord did, but each one of you can fill a little circle round yourself with influences good and holy; so let me ask you to be careful about Right Concentration.

If in this way you take this Noble Eightfold Path, and try to lead a practical life, it will indeed be well for you. These are the steps leading to liberation. They will bring you to liberation only when you walk along those lines. It is useless to sit at the bottom of a staircase and say that the steps are beautiful, without climbing it. Try to make the teaching of our dear Lord practical in that way; so will you be true followers of Him, true and good Buddhists; and in this way may you attain Nirvana.