

# Right View

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I'm in Belgium right now, having just returned from a month of sitting in Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha. There's something incredibly special about practicing in a place where it all began. Being there stirred many reflections on the simplicity of the path and what lies at the heart of the Buddha's teachings. Despite the many ways we can approach and practice the Dhamma, the core teachings remain universal: the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

We often want to skip over these foundational teachings in search of something more interesting, but truly, there's nothing more vital than understanding them. After a period of deep practice, I like to revisit the writings of Mahasi Sayadaw. Last night, something he wrote jumped out at me, and I felt compelled to share it. He spoke about how we see the world, noting that the mental and physical phenomena that make up our lives are ultimately unsatisfying, and attachment to them causes suffering. This truth, he says, is rooted in ignorance—ignorance of suffering and its cause.

This ignorance is so deeply embedded that it can't be overcome by mere study; it requires practice. Most people devote themselves to sensual pleasures, not realizing that this pursuit leads only to more suffering. The fear of Nibbana, or true freedom, is a reflection of this ignorance. We mistake what is ultimately suffering for pleasure, and we see freedom as something frightening.

This isn't a personal failing but rather human nature clouded by ignorance. The Buddha often spoke about how this manifests, emphasizing the importance of right view—the first step on the Eightfold Path. Right view involves understanding the Four Noble Truths and recognizing how our perceptions can be distorted. Without this understanding, we can easily mistake suffering for happiness and clinging for liberation.

The Buddha's teachings on right view also involve recognizing how distortion solidifies into mistaken views, which can then shape our entire experience. In the \*Digha Nikaya\*, there's a discussion about the 62 kinds of mistaken views, all centered around the self—how we see ourselves as permanent or essential in some way.

To counteract these distortions, the Buddha taught right view as understanding the Four Noble Truths: the truth of suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path leading to its cessation. Even a moment of clear seeing, where we recognize delusion, fulfills all aspects of right view. This moment of insight is crucial; it's the space where right view begins to unfold.

This insight naturally leads to right effort—the effort to incline towards what is wholesome and away from what is unwholesome. This effort is continuous, moment to moment. Even when we feel stuck in wrong view or caught in the sense of a solid self, it's essential to remember that this is part of the practice. The path from wrong view to right view is laid out clearly by the Buddha: it involves discernment, mindfulness, and wise attention.

The mind, however, can be tricky. It jumps around like a monkey, quickly moving from one thing to another. But what matters is not the external objects but what the mind does with them. This is where careful, kind attention comes in—understanding where the mind is inclining and pausing to reorient when necessary.

In our daily lives, this practice becomes even more critical. The world outside can be more challenging, with its constant stimulation and reactivity. But by paying careful attention, we can create space to pause and choose a different direction. This practice is subtle, like navigating a flat landscape with no clear landmarks, yet it's essential for finding our way.

Three key aspects support this practice: mindfulness, wise attention, and heedfulness. Mindfulness, or *\*Sati\** sees clearly, moment by moment. Wise attention, or *\*yoniso manasikāra\**, is a womb-like quality of attention that gives birth to wisdom. And heedfulness, or *\*appamāda\**, is the careful, vigilant attention that keeps us on the path to freedom.

The Buddha said that the way we frequently think shapes the inclination of our mind. By continuously reflecting and practicing right view and right effort, these qualities become second nature. This isn't something we achieve through force of will but rather by letting wisdom do its work naturally, step by step.

As we walk this path, we just keep moving forward, trusting in the process, and allowing wisdom to guide us.