

Wise Action

By Rebecca Dixon

Alameda Sangha, February 3, 2019

4th part of Eightfold Path, 2nd of Ethics section (Speech, Action, Livelihood)

The usual word for this section of the Path is Ethics. Might be integrity (whole, integrated)

Acts driven by hate, greed & sex to the point of theft or violence threaten the integrity of every being influenced by them.

Fracture the lives of victims & social cohesion, as well as the perpetrator's integrity & relationship to all other beings

We are all interconnected; we can't follow this Path just for ourselves. Must be for the benefit of all. What we are, & do, affects many others in ways we may never know.

All Buddhist Ethics teachings meant to protect connection, within us, & throughout society

The central concern with practicing Wise Action is the intention not to harm – ending dukkha for 1) ourselves & 2) others

Review: dukkha is internal, not inherent in external conditions

Caused by clinging (craving/aversion) – we each do this to ourselves

Almost all humans have dukkha & compassion is needed to meet it

End of dukkha = letting go, eventually to point of nibanna

Safety is a key issue for all animals. Feeling threatened with harm is some serious dukkha.

Women often live with it. If persistent, it can de-stabilize any sentient being.

- Physical attack leaves psychic scars, and serious injury reduces quality of life.
- Losing someone to murder is traumatic, and the social fabric is torn by the loss of that person.
- Sexual violence has an added dimension of trauma bcs it attacks the person's dignity and can harm their future comfort with sexuality.
- Having things stolen attacks people's sense of security and can feel like an invasion or an assault. Plus, they face the cost of replacing what's been taken or the impairment of doing without.

This part of the Path, and the Precepts, help all beings feel safer. Stabilizes societies.

Approaching this as non-harming vs kindness (if we have metta for all, we automatically don't want to harm)

After Stream Entry, B says we're incapable of breaking the precepts; just not feelin' it

Meanwhile, often easier to recognize behaviors as not injuring, stealing or sexual misconduct than to decide how to be compassionate, generous & respectful

In Wise Action, we avoid creating conditions known to cause dukkha = injury, theft, sexual misconduct, all powerfully affect lives of victims & their communities

But principle still = to care about all beings & avoid setting them up for dukkha

le, when we know where their buttons are, don't push them... Especially not with intent of making them suffer

Intention to cause harm is totally contrary to the condition of the heart the Path leads to & acting on it inclines us further away from Liberation (or 'karma')

Unlikely we'll want to murder a human, or pull a heist, or rape someone. The value, then, is in grappling with lesser versions of these modes of harming.

This course is about practicing with the parts of the Path, so it's great when we're not sure what to do in these areas. Struggling with it is the best way to learn, ala Practice Guides.

Killing – physical harm, or in Pali *panatipata*, also means to attack (assault) or injure (battery)

Injuring any conscious, breathing being (live animal) -- including pests;

slaughter of animals for food. Monks forbidden to allow others to kill specifically for them to eat (grocery?)

some teachers broaden this to any violence: a slap, grab, etc.

destrux of ppty in a rage? ...when it sets up fear of attack (dukkha)

Theft – take, borrow, use belongings of others unless specifically offered to us

Accepting benefit of someone's mistake (wrong price, change)

Innuit – OK to take tools if we know owner's not going to use

On reflection, tho fastidious about this, realized I do use apps I haven't paid for – valuable to examine 'justifications' & views underlying them

Sexuality – great care not to harm sexual partner; fantasies of others, ogling, etc

also respect all relationship commitments (ours & others')

we're learning there are many forms of sexual abuse, tho victims knew all along

Value of non-harming:

No dukkha from clinging: greed, hate, delusion (leading to intent to harm) All may be entangled with fear

No painful conscience – Bliss of blamelessness – no remorse, fear & censure of others

Mind well suited for mindfulness prax & life on the Path

Keeps impulses in check until metta strong enough to eliminate them

Maybe greatest value of Ethics = studying feelings & motives behind our actions

Going deeper & deeper, developing ever greater mindfulness, self-knowledge and strengthening Wise Intention of ending dukkha

There's more benefit in grappling with the exercises than in grasping what I say or anything you read. These are not intellectual teachings, but visceral ones, which need to be *felt* to be truly understood.