

Right Effort

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Intro

- Just as I introduced you to the ethical conduct section with Right Speech, Today I am going to introduce you to the concentration section by talking about Right Effort.
- Now the concentration part of the Eightfold path includes Right Effort and right Mindfulness. This is important because, in order to gain enlightenment you need to be calm and collected enough to learn from the world around you, which means you need to be able to concentrate.
- So today I will be talking about right effort. Now when I think about effort I see a farmer in the rice field working in the hot sun while sweating. That's not really what right effort is about. Instead, it has more to do with mental effort.
- But the farmer's example is relevant: Just as the farmer should exercise some care in deciding when he should exert himself to get the most out of his work, the seeker after enlightenment should take care in how he or she puts effort behind thoughts.
- So in a sense, Right effort is about economy of mental effort

Body

- So, what does the Buddha have to say? Well, he defines Right Effort as the collection of 4 things:
 - Preventing unarisen unwholesome mental states from arising
 - Abandoning arisen unwholesome mental states
 - Arousing unarisen wholesome mental states
 - Maintaining arisen wholesome mental states

As Ron is fond of mentioning, Buddhism is full of lists like this, which itemize things that pertain to salvation. Sadly for me, they don't tell me all that much. So let me share a bit about each of these things in turn, and hopefully they will make more sense.

- So first, let's talk about how to prevent unarisen unwholesome mental states from arising:
 - Wow, that rolled off the tongue well
 - So the buddha identified these things called the five hindrances which describe these 5 mental states which mess with you, particularly when you try to meditation.
 - While meditation helps with dealing with the hindrances, you can deal with them individually, but first you need to know what they are
 - * Sensual desire: You want to see nice things. Or you crave nice situations, like being powerful, or influential and so on. Like a pot of water with paint in it.

- * Ill Will: You are angry, at something, someone, or even a situation. You could hate them, resent them or just be plain angry. Like a pot of boiling water.
 - * Dullness and drowsiness: Like a pot choked with weeds
 - Dullness: This is like mental inertia - you feel like your thoughts are heavy and drag you along with them. This makes it difficult to concentrate
 - Drowsiness: This is being sleepy.
 - * Restlessness and worry: Like water made choppy by a strong wind
 - Restlessness: This is being agitated and excited
 - worry: This is having a crippling sense of remorse
 - * doubt: This is not about critical thought but instead about being unable to commit to following through with meditation because of nagging doubts about the path. Like water with a layer of pond scum on it
- Now the 5 hindrances tend to be stimulated by the senses, so to control them, you need to restrain the senses. This is not to the point of shutting out your senses and being deaf and blind to the world.
 - Even if you cut yourself off from the world you'd still have to deal with the hindrances that arise in your mind independently of the outside world. Only meditation can help you figure out when your train of thought leads to a hindrance, and only meditation can help you derail that train of thought in time¹
- Now the next step is about abandoning arisen unwholesome states
 - The thing is that even if you can restrain your thoughts to control all of the hindrances that appear, you still have to deal with the hindrances that are already embedded in your mind.
 - So to deal with these, the Buddha describes a way of dealing with each hindrance
 - * Desire: Remember impermanence. Meaningless to like something because it does not last forever
 - * Ill Will: Loving kindness.
 - * Dullness and Drowsiness: You need to invoke a sense of energy within yourself ². To do this you can either visualise a ball of bright light or get up and do walking meditation. Or, you could just ramp up your determination.
 - * Restlessness and worry: Focus on a calming object of meditation, such as your breath (Zazen, anyone?)
 - * Doubt: Investigate! Read things, ask people, ask questions until you figure things out.
 - Now to figure out how to arouse unarisen wholesome states:
 - You can either arouse wholesome states that are not arisen yet, or mature states that are arisen
 - But what are the states? Well the buddha describes these seven states of enlightenment, which are 7 stages that you go through when you are holding on to a wholesome thought
 - * Mindfulness: Focus on the present without being subjective; see the world as it is
 - * Investigation: Find more about what you learned through mindfulness. Be aware of characteristics, conditions and consequences
 - * Energy:
 - Inceptive energy: Initial enthusiasm
 - Perseverance: Not slacking

¹violent metaphor?

²Possibly the most Deepak Chopra I will let myself become

- Invincibility: The point at which you are so energetically behind the idea that the hindrances cannot stop it
 - * Rapture: State of pleasurable interest where the mind glows with joy and the body feels bliss. Warning, can lead to excitation which can derail the process
 - * Tranquility: The antidote to becoming overexcited - you still experience the rapture, but in a subdued way
 - * Equanimity: Your mind becomes a one-pointed awareness. You gain poise and balance. In a sense, you could comfortably and profitably watch the world go by, at this point.
- Now we come to the last stage, where we have to maintain arisen wholesome states.
 - This is mainly about making an effort to firmly think about whatever good thing you were concentrating on.
 - You need to guard this state to let your wholesome thoughts see themselves through the process that is the 7 factors of enlightenment
 - Now, Hopefully, all of that made sense. I want to finish with a story about how the Buddha encouraged his disciples to maintain right effort
 - There was once this monk named Sona who was a very dedicated man. He was so enthusiastic with meditation that he used to do walking meditation until his soles bled. Sadly his dedication did not pay off and he became disheartened.
 - One day he decided that he should give up the whole enlightenment thing and go take up the family business and make money.
 - The Buddha's spidey senses tingled, and he magically appears before Sona
 - The Buddha asks Sona, you used to play the vina, right? Could you play it when the strings were too tight? Or too loose?
 - You could play it when the strings were tuned to just the right pitch, yes?
 - If you are tuned to tightly, you become too restless. Tune yourself too loosely and you let yourself become lazy. But tune yourself just right and you are at the right pitch for persistence.
 - So Sona thinks about this, and becomes enlightened, and lives happily ever after.