



Wise and Unwise View

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As Tuere and I wrap up last year's exploration of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, I want to focus on arguably the single most important aspect of this whole teaching: wise view. This one aspect contains our understanding and integration of the Four Noble Truths and establishes each of the aspects of the Eightfold Path as noble, leading toward liberation.

View represents our core assumptions and premises that create our very perception of the world and ourselves. How we think, speak, and act is controlled by our view. We always have some view directing and controlling our actions, even if that view is unconscious. The view we operate from can be constantly shifting from circumstance to situation, and can range from being wise, leading toward liberation, or unwise, perpetuating suffering.

How we understand suffering and its cause is inherent in both wise and unwise view. As human beings, we face a shared fundamental issue. Our bodies hurt, age, and eventually pass into death. Our minds can be driven by worry and anxiety, filled with insecurity and judgment, and lost in fantasy and remorse. Our hearts break, feel closed, and long for love. If we have a physical body and human heart, some of this suffering is unavoidable. Yet, much of this suffering is "added on," created by our reactivity and self-identification with experience. Wise view understands the nature of this "second dart" and the enmeshment of view of self as taught in the first and second Noble Truths. Unwise view sees a single level of suffering and projects the cause externally on others or situations, or internally on who we are and our failings. We try to solve our suffering by manipulating the environment, other people, or ourselves.

The Thai Forest meditation master, Ajahn Chah described it this way:

Buddha once saw a jackal, a wild dog, run out of the forest where he was staying. It stood still for a while, then it ran into the underbrush, and then out again. Then it ran into a tree hollow, then out again. Then it went into a cave, only to run out again. One minute it stood, the next it ran, then it lay down, then it jumped up. The jackal had the mange. When it stood, the mange would eat into its skin, so it would run. Running, it was still uncomfortable, so it would stop. Standing, it was still uncomfortable, so it would lie down. Then it would jump up again, running to the underbrush, the tree hollow, never staying still. The Buddha said, "Monks, did you see that jackal this

afternoon? Standing, it suffered. Running, it suffered. Sitting, it suffered. Lying down, it suffered. It blamed standing for its discomfort. It blamed sitting. It blamed running and lying down. It blamed the tree, the underbrush, and the cave. In fact, the problem was with none of those things. The problem was with his mangle.”

*Our mangle is not understanding Right View — **Ajahn Chah***

Wise view centers on the second and third Noble Truths, the origination of dukkha (suffering) and the cessation of dukkha. In essence, the origin of dukkha is the thirst or hunger to become. This points to the drive to identify with experience as belonging to a discreet, isolated sense of “I.” Seeing through this illusion is the cessation of dukkha, the third Noble Truth. The sense of an isolated, separate self is the root of the added on suffering we seek to escape.

Although the view we are operating from may be unconscious, our actions are based and flow from the world order of that view. Therefore, our actions reveal our underlying view, especially if we include as actions our mental, verbal, and physical activity. We think, speak, and act from our view. If our view is that of an isolated, separate self, our actions focus on overcoming an essential insufficiency. We try to eliminate that lack through seeking pleasure, fame, gain, and avoiding pain and loss. Yet, the very view is the issue, the “mangle,” creating a world of separation and isolation. No relationship, situation, possession, award, or role can ultimately eliminate that core deficiency.

That deficiency is not based fundamentally on the circumstances of our lives, the roles we have or don’t, or the possessions we have or lack. It is based on our view of the separateness of self and other, of self and nature. Changing our view isn’t a matter of adopting a new set of beliefs and underlying assumptions. It involves going beyond all concept, all assumption, all thought, to a fundamental shift from the locus of perception. This goes beyond the capacity of language, where words can only point. This is the third Noble Truth, the cessation of dukkha.

A primary Buddhist map to this fundamental shift of view is the Noble Eightfold Path (the fourth Noble Truth.) We can group the folds into three sections: **wisdom** (view and intention), **action** (speech, action, livelihood), and **meditation** (mindfulness and concentration). The Eightfold Path is non-linear and dynamic. Wisdom informs and aligns our actions. Actions based in wisdom and non-harm quiet the restless, anxious mind. A still mind allows deeper levels of meditation to develop. As our meditation deepens, we have a more clear and direct knowing of the nature of life. From this seeing, wisdom grows. Ultimately this process cultivates, establishes and integrates wise view.

Often our individual path begins with meditation practice. If our mindfulness matures, we start to see gaps in the idea of an isolated and separate self, glimpsing what is beyond that view. This begins to establish an understanding of the process of selfing

inherent in the cause of suffering, the second Noble Truth. Wise view then begins to take root.

Then the Noble Eightfold Path is shaped and aligned with our understanding of the Four Noble Truths. Our intention, our actions, and our meditation practices then deepen and integrate wise view. As human beings, we constantly have some view operating behind the scenes. Dharma practice aligns us with wise view, so our lives move toward awakening.