

The Eightfold Path

Introductory Note

Zen Master Soeng Hyang (Bobby Rhodes)

The eightfold path was taught by the Buddha to help us find the way out of our our confusion. This way can be explained, but will never be perceived unless we are able to grab the great question "What am I?" and not let go. Our human consciousness is very complicated; the path is right in front of us; WAKE UP!

As we read the teachings from some of our teachers, let us bow to the tremendous effort, care and sincerity that went into each offering. The Kwan Um School's process, which can eventually put a student in the position of having the title Ji Do Poep Sa or Zen Master is long and arduous. Once the responsibility to teach at those levels is given, the appointed teachers are required to sign something we call the teachers' compact. This compact is unique in the realm of Zen institutions. The teachers, regardless of where they live in the world, agree to be a part of a whole. We agree to act together, to follow the forms and teaching tools that were were taught to us by our founding teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn. Any significant changes are made together. Acting and staying together in this way requires a large amount of trust. Without practice, this trust can erode, and our ability to listen to each other can erode.

As I write this, I realize how tremendously grateful I am to our founding teacher, who set up this model of what he called "put it all down and act with others." Our international Zen school is a product of sincere practice. This practice opens up our ability to truly understand the eightfold path not through words but through our true selves. So as you read these teachings offered from around the world, realize how precious is the vehicle that brings them to you. May we always walk the path with courage and gratitude.

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Right View

Zen Master Bon Hae (Judy Roitman)

The first step on the eightfold path is right view. *Right*, of course, doesn't mean the opposite of left. It means correct. *View* here doesn't mean "oh what a pretty view." It means viewpoint, how you organize your perceptions.

In the Theravada tradition, correct viewpoint means to see everything through the lens of impermanence. Things arise, they stick around for a while, they disappear. Everything is changing all the time. No matter what you are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, you are aware of its impermanence. No matter what your situation, you are aware of its impermanence. Whatever you are thinking about, you are aware of its impermanence. Your thoughts themselves are impermanent, and you are aware of this. Ideologies are impermanent. Relationships are impermanent. War is impermanent. Peace is impermanent. Your life is impermanent. The sky is impermanent. Even earth. Even space. Time, by definition, is definitely impermanent.

That's the Theravada version of correct viewpoint: everything is impermanent.

A long time ago I read an exchange in which someone began to ask Zen Master Seung Sahn a question by saying, "Since everything is impermanent . . ." and Zen Master Seung Sahn immediately interrupted, "Where did you hear that? Everything is originally emptiness!" Which brings us to the Mahayana view of correct viewpoint.



Photo: Nick Gershberg