

## Eightfold Path

**Eightfold Path**, in Buddhism, an early formulation of the path to enlightenment. The idea of the Eightfold Path appears in what is regarded as the first sermon of the founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha, which he delivered after his enlightenment. There he sets forth a middle way, the Eightfold Path, between the extremes of asceticism and sensual indulgence. Like the Sanskrit term *Chatvari-arya-satyani*, which is usually translated as Four Noble Truths, the term *Astangika-marga* also implies nobility and is often rendered as the "Eightfold Noble Path." Similarly, just as what is noble about the Four Noble Truths is not the truths themselves but those who understand them, what is noble about the Eightfold Noble Path is not the path itself but those who follow it. Accordingly, Astangika-marga might be more accurately translated as the "Eightfold Path of the [spiritually] noble." Later in the sermon, the Buddha sets forth the Four Noble Truths and identifies the fourth truth, the truth of the path, with the Eightfold Path. Each element of the path also is discussed at length in other texts.

In brief, the eight elements of the path are: (1) correct view, an accurate understanding of the nature of things, specifically the Four Noble Truths, (2) correct intention, avoiding thoughts of attachment, hatred, and harmful intent, (3) correct speech, refraining from verbal misdeeds such as lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and senseless speech, (4) correct action, refraining from physical misdeeds such as killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct, (5) correct livelihood, avoiding trades that directly or indirectly harm others, such as selling slaves, weapons, animals for slaughter, intoxicants, or poisons, (6) correct effort, abandoning negative states of mind that have already arisen, preventing negative states that have yet to arise, and sustaining positive states that have already arisen, (7) correct mindfulness, awareness of body, feelings, thought, and phenomena (the constituents of the existing world), and (8) correct concentration, single-mindedness.

The Eightfold Path receives less discussion in Buddhist literature than do the Four Noble Truths. In later formulations, the eight elements are portrayed not so much as prescriptions for behaviour but as qualities that are present in the mind of a person who has understood nirvana, the state of the cessation of suffering and the goal of Buddhism.

According to a more widely used conception, the path to enlightenment consists of a threefold training in ethics, in concentration, and in wisdom. Ethics refers to the avoidance of nonvirtuous deeds, concentration refers to the control of the mind, and wisdom refers to the development of insight into the nature of reality. The components of the Eightfold Path are divided among the three forms of training as follows: correct action, correct speech, and correct livelihood are part of the training in ethics; correct effort, correct mindfulness, and correct concentration are included in the training in concentration; and correct view and correct intention are associated with the training in wisdom.

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