

Right Livelihood

samma ajivo

Right Livelihood is the fifth of the eight path factors in the Noble Eightfold Path, and belongs to the virtue division of the path.

The definition

"And what is right livelihood? There is the case where a noble disciple, having abandoned dishonest livelihood, keeps his life going with right livelihood: This is called right livelihood."

-- SN XLV.8

A balanced livelihood

"Herein, Vyagghapajja, a householder knowing his income and expenses leads a balanced life, neither extravagant nor miserly, knowing that thus his income will stand in excess of his expenses, but not his expenses in excess of his income.

"Just as the goldsmith, or an apprentice of his, knows, on holding up a balance, that by so much it has dipped down, by so much it has tilted up; even so a householder, knowing his income and expenses leads a balanced life, neither extravagant nor miserly, knowing that thus his income will stand in excess of his expenses, but not his expenses in excess of his income."

-- AN VIII.54

Its relation to the other factors of the path

"And how is right view the forerunner? One discerns wrong livelihood as wrong livelihood, and right livelihood as right livelihood. And what is wrong livelihood? Scheming, persuading, hinting, belittling, & pursuing gain with gain. This is wrong livelihood..."

"One tries to abandon wrong livelihood & to enter into right livelihood: This is one's right effort. One is mindful to abandon wrong livelihood & to enter & remain in right livelihood: This is one's right mindfulness. Thus these three qualities -- right view, right effort, & right mindfulness -- run & circle around right livelihood."

-- MN 117

Wrong livelihood for lay followers

"These five trades, O monks, ought not to be taken up by a lay follower: trading with weapons, trading in living beings, trading in meat, trading in intoxicants, and trading in poison."

-- AN V.177 (Nyanatiloka, tr.; from *Path to Deliverance*, p. 16)

Wrong livelihood for contemplatives

reading marks on the limbs [e.g., palmistry];

reading omens and signs;

interpreting celestial events [falling stars, comets];

interpreting dreams;

reading marks on the body [e.g., phrenology];

reading marks on cloth gnawed by mice;

offering fire oblations, oblations from a ladle, oblations of husks, rice powder, rice grains, ghee, and oil;

offering oblations from the mouth;

offering blood-sacrifices;

making predictions based on the fingertips;

geomancy;

laying demons in a cemetery;

placing spells on spirits;

reciting house-protection charms;

snake charming, poison-lore, scorpion-lore, rat-lore, bird-lore, crow-lore;

fortune-telling based on visions;

giving protective charms;

interpreting the calls of birds and animals

...

[The list goes on and on] DN 2

Right Effort

samma vayamo

Right Effort is the sixth of the eight path factors in the Noble Eightfold Path, and belongs to the concentration division of the path.

The definition (the four Right Exertions):

"And what, monks, is right effort?"

[i] "There is the case where a monk generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen.

[ii] "He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the abandonment of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen.

[iii] "He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen.

[iv] "He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen: This, monks, is called right effort."

-- SN XLV.8

Abandoning the wrong factors of the path

"One tries to abandon wrong view & to enter into right view: This is one's right effort..."

"One tries to abandon wrong resolve & to enter into right resolve: This is one's right effort..."

"One tries to abandon wrong speech & to enter into right speech: This is one's right effort..."

"One tries to abandon wrong action & to enter into right action: This is one's right effort..."

"One tries to abandon wrong livelihood & to enter into right livelihood: This is one's right effort."

-- MN 117

Like fine-tuning a musical instrument

As Ven Sona was meditating in seclusion [after doing walking meditation until the skin of his soles was split & bleeding], this train of thought arose in his awareness: "Of the Blessed One's disciples who have aroused their persistence, I am one, but my mind is not released from the effluents through lack of clinging/sustenance. Now, my family has enough wealth that it would be possible to enjoy wealth & make merit. What if I were to disavow the training, return to the lower life, enjoy wealth, & make merit?"

Then the Blessed One, as soon as he perceived with his awareness the train of thought in Ven. Sona's awareness -- as a strong man might stretch out his bent arm or bend his outstretched arm -- disappeared from Vulture Peak Mountain, appeared in the Cool Wood right in front of Ven. Sona, and sat down on a prepared seat. Ven. Sona, after bowing down to the Blessed One, sat down to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, "Just now, as you were meditating in seclusion, didn't this train of thought appear to your awareness: 'Of the Blessed One's disciples who have aroused their persistence, I am one, but my mind is not released from the effluents...What if I were to disavow the training, return to the lower life, enjoy wealth, & make merit?'"

"Yes, lord."

"Now what do you think, Sona. Before, when you were a house-dweller, were you skilled at playing the vina?"

"Yes, lord."

"And what do you think: when the strings of your vina were too taut, was your vina in tune & playable?"

"No, lord."

"And what do you think: when the strings of your vina were too loose, was your vina in tune & playable?"

"No, lord."

"And what do you think: when the strings of your vina were neither too taut nor too loose, but tuned (lit: 'established') to be right on pitch, was your vina in tune & playable?"

"Yes, lord."

"In the same way, Sona, over-aroused persistence leads to restlessness, overly slack persistence leads to laziness. Thus you should determine the right pitch for your persistence, attune ('penetrate, 'ferret out') the pitch of the [five] faculties [to that], and there pick up your theme."

"Yes, lord," Ven. Sona answered the Blessed One. Then, having given this exhortation to Ven. Sona, the Blessed One -- as a strong man might stretch out his bent arm or bend his outstretched arm -- disappeared from the Cool Wood and appeared on Vulture Peak Mountain.

So after that, Ven. Sona determined the right pitch for his persistence, attuned the pitch of the [five] faculties [to that], and there picked up his theme. Dwelling alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, & resolute, he in no long time reached & remained in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for himself in the here & now. He knew: "Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this world." And thus Ven. Sona became another one of the Arahants.

AN VI.55