



The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering

Bhikkhu Bodhi

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This book offers a clear, concise account of the Eightfold Path prescribed to uproot and eliminate the deep underlying cause of suffering—ignorance. Each step of the path is believed to cultivate wisdom through mental training, and includes an enlightened and peaceful middle path that avoids extremes. The theoretical as well as practical angles of each of the paths—right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration—are illustrated through examples from contemporary life. The work's final chapter addresses the Buddhist path and its culmination in enlightenment.

The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering Details

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From Reader Review The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering for online ebook

Thymen van Scheppingen says

Great introduction to Buddhism, but as a non-native English speaker I found some parts really tough to get through. Still learned a lot from this book and it is definitely worth a re-read.

Would recommend

Andi says

This book is absolutely amazing and highly recommended for anyone interested in ending suffering. Bhikkhu Bodhi writes with clarity and concise language that the simplicity of the topic is easy to understand and apply to one's current life. I plan to refer to this text often and reread it throughout the rest of this life.

Ahmad Alhour says

Bhikkhu Bodhi does a great job at distilling the complete teachings of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path with a good amount of details. The book contains a fractal summary of the path that aids in remembering it. I especially liked the chapters on Right View, Right Intention and the Development of Wisdom as they put things into perspective and explained the seemingly circular and interconnected nature of the teachings. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to get a good grasp of the Eightfold Path, the heart of the Buddha's teaching.

Wt says

The Noble Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths constitute the heart of the Buddha's teaching. In this book, Bhikku Bodhi clarifies how the Noble Eightfold Path and the 4 Noble Truths contain each other to form the Doctrine and the Discipline (dhamma-vinaya). The 4 Noble Truths give the Doctrine, the Noble Eightfold Path the Discipline to be followed. To realize one is to realize the other. Bhikku Bodhi also clarifies how the Noble Eightfold Path is related to the Three-fold training (in morality or sila, concentration or samadhi, and wisdom or panna). Then he discusses each path factor in detail. Finally, he talks about how the Noble Eightfold Path, known also as the mundane path because it takes as its object of contemplation the conditioned world, gives rise to the 4 supramundane paths and fruits that constitute the 4 stages of Nibhaana.

Now don't be put off if you don't understand right now all these terms and schema (8, 4, 3 and so on). They are just different ways of presenting a reality that is inside you, right in your face, that confronts you every second in your existence, and that you can know through looking at your own everyday experiences. The Noble Eightfold Path is all about looking at your reality so that you can see it for what it really is, and not what you hope or suppose it to be. The thing is, we don't usually look at our realities carefully and properly, and because of this all manner of problems arise that cause us suffering. Therefore, the very first factor of the

Eightfold Path is Right View. Once we correct our view of reality, everything follows. The path arises naturally once we get our views right.

Our thought becomes right, our speech becomes right. Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration follow. So to understand and achieve the Noble Eightfold Path, we must first understand what is right from what is wrong. This rightness is not a moral rightness with judgement meted out by some God, it is a rightness that has to be determined in terms of suffering - i.e. what causes us to suffer is wrong, what leads to the cessation of our suffering is right. Now, who wants suffering, right? Yeah, bad pun, but to avoid suffering, we gotta get the right right, right in the beginning. Bhikku Bodhi explains what is right in terms of these 8 path factors.

Reading this book will help you to see more clearly into the heart of your own experience, and to gain freedom from its dis-satisfactoriness. As the author points out, while the dhamma and the vinaya must be comprehended through the direct seeing of reality in our own experiences, study of the dhamma and vinaya is also important as it can give rise to this direct seeing, guide the understanding of this revelation, and help further develop and perfect this direct apprehension, which is essentially an insight into the Truth of all life; a liberating wisdom.

This is a path that, in the Buddha's own words, runs contrary to the way of the world. This might sound difficult, daunting or unnatural to people, yet if they truly investigate their own reality (according to ways as suggested in the path), they will find that it is their wrong conceptions of reality that makes their life difficult, daunting and unnatural. Actually, the Noble Eightfold Path is the easy, pleasant and natural path to realize and to tread, and it leads to an easy, pleasant and natural abiding in the world. Anyone who wants to live a happy life free from anger, pain, frustration, dissatisfaction and suffering, and possess the ability to create happiness not only for oneself but also for others, now and always, this life and beyond, will do well to develop the Noble Eightfold Path. It is not hard to do, we just have to investigate our own reality and experiences to see the inherent dis-satisfactory side of it. Once the dis-satisfactory nature of experience (dukkha) is seen in one's own experience, the Path arises automatically, and can be developed naturally until it culminates in the fruit of complete liberation.

So, not only students of the dhamma and Buddhist meditators, but basically all seekers of happiness will find this book very useful.

Erin K says

It's a great book, but difficult for beginners, it is dry and very academic, which is not great for beginners of Buddhism - for true beginners I would recommend Thich Nhat Hanh or the Dalai Lama.

This is for someone who wants to learn more about the technical aspects of Buddhism after having some basic knowledge about it.

Not great for your average beginner as the wording & vocab is very exhausting - I emphasize this because this is used as a guide for many beginner students and can be off-putting as an intro to Buddhism.

Michael says

I've read through this short book over 4 times this year. I've also taught through it once. Anyone serious about a non-theistic, yet spiritual path should take a look. Warning, though; it's not "easy reading". It's not an "introduction to Buddhism" book, but a deep look at the Path, which is at the core of the Buddha's teaching. So, if you're into that kind of thing, it's a fantastic book.

Marco Pontual says

I guess this book is for those very familiar with the basics of the eightfold path and its subdivisions and would like a thorough review + some extra content.

As for myself I felt I could have profited more from it had I been just a couple steps further down the road, but it was nonetheless a pleasant and rewarding read.

Tim says

Dry is the word that comes to mind.

Clear and concise, says the blurb. Well, concise, sure. Clear is more questionable - if you have questions about the assertions made herein (and elsewhere in the Buddhist tradition), this is not where you will find them addressed.

I bought it out of curiosity about the notion of "right speech" (one of the folds of the noble 8x path), but to be honest (and not slanderous, harsh, idle or false), the Wikipedia entry on the noble eightfold path - my starting point - was possibly slightly less concise but more importantly was at least as clear.

It took me a long time to slog along this schematic outline of the path and I don't feel all that much enlightened, or satisfied (though I have now had it drummed into me that the notion of satisfaction is illusory).

I'd say this book is of limited value to readers seeking a felt understanding of Buddhism, but could be useful as a quick reference for some of the apparently numerous conceptual schemata of Buddhism - as in the eightfold path, the ten defilements, the four sublime states, etc. etc. (Incidentally, this numbering fixation itself seems to me a marked and intriguing feature of Buddhism. If anyone can point me at any thematic discussions of this, I'd be impermanently grateful.)

Zane says

This book happened to be on one of my shelves while I was looking for a quick read. At 133 pages, this book certainly looks like a lightweight. However, once I opened the book, it was a reminder to me to not judge any book by its cover or size. The book is about the Noble Eightfold Path, a practical discipline created by the Buddha to analyze suffering, dredge it up, and eliminate it entirely. Indeed, that sentence alone should make it safe for anyone to assume that the book will be packed with troves of information.

About the author, Bhikku Bodhi, he is, as far as I know, currently the editor at the Buddhist Publication Society of Sri Lanka. He grew up in New Jersey and eventually became a Buddhist monk in the Mahayana tradition (which is one of the lighter disciplines, somewhat similar to Zen if I remember correctly). He converted over to Theravada (one of the orthodox kinds of Buddhism).

That he is a monk practiced in a discipline not commonly seen in North America shows itself in the book. He digs deep into the Noble Eightfold Path and all of its eight factors while also trying to make it easy to understand for us Westerners. However, the issue here is that the reader basically have to be somewhat familiar with meditation and the idea of enlightenment for everything to make sense. The risk is also that the reader might take away too much from this book and start to overthink their meditations. Some words and phrases that Bodhi uses can seem quite esoteric, but it's important to keep in mind that Bodhi had to draw from a massive amount of doctrines and whatnot and also that the more familiar you become with Buddhism in general, the more you will get from the book.

It's no accident that all of the testimonials on the back are from the type of people that anyone would easily assume to be well-practiced meditators. Although I thought that the book was quite useful in helping me understand the aims of meditation, I would not recommend this book to fresh-faced beginners. People at this level would benefit much more if they attempted to start and maintain a meditation practice. Even after that point, a teacher would still probably be more beneficial. This is why I gave the book 3 stars here. It's actually 5 stars in my head.

Craig Shoemaker says

Bhikkhu Bodhi's little treatise on the constituents of the fourth noble truth is a quick, by the numbers (and letters) summary of orthodox Theravadan opinion on the subject. As such it is a useful resource especially for beginners to the field, or for someone who is interested in "brushing up" on the fundamentals. Factually, it is guaranteed accurate, though this is not to say it is particularly thought provoking or insightful. I'll give a few examples of what I'm talking about.

BB actually starts off with an intriguing conundrum: we ordinary people inevitably encounter suffering, and if we consider the nature of that suffering, we "seek a way to bring our disquietude to an end... But it is just then that we find ourselves facing a new difficulty. Once we come to recognize the need for a spiritual path we discover that spiritual teachings are by no means homogeneous and mutually compatible" (pp. 1-2).

The problem then becomes trying to "decide which [teaching] is truly liberative, a real solution to our needs, and which is a sidetrack beset with hidden flaws."

He then takes up the question of how to decide on a path (though we of course know what his ultimate answer will be), eventually concluding:

"To sum up, we find three requirements for a teaching proposing to offer a true path to the end of suffering: first, it has to set forth a full and accurate picture of the range of suffering; second, it must present a correct analysis of the causes of suffering; and third, it must give us the means to eradicate the causes of suffering" (p. 5).

But then Bhikkhu Bodhi cops out of the project he set up: "This is not the place to evaluate the various spiritual disciplines in terms of these criteria," he tells us. "Our concern is only with the Dhamma, the

teaching of the Buddha..."

To which I thought, "Well if that was the case, why did you lead me on this wild goose chase? Why didn't you just get to the point and not pretend you were going to philosophize about the serious challenge of how one goes about choosing a worldview for oneself?" In other words, BB acknowledges the challenge, but doesn't quite have the gumption (or perhaps the intellectual equipment) to really justify to us why we should bother picking up a book on the Buddha's teaching in the first place. Anyway, I find it irritating when a writer sets up an interesting problem but then refuses to try to solve it. An unsuccessful attempt is vastly more satisfying than no attempt at all.)

Another example of this kind of irritating superficiality in BB's discussion concerns kamma (=karma in Sanskrit). He writes:

"The most important feature of kamma is its capacity to produce results corresponding to the ethical quality of the action. An immanent universal law holds sway over volitional actions, bringing it about that these actions issue in retributive consequences, called vipaka, 'ripenings,' or phala, 'fruits'" (p.20).

He then assures us that

"the right view of kammic efficacy of action need not remain exclusively an article of belief... It can become a matter of direct seeing. Through the attainment of certain states of deep concentration it is possible to develop a special faculty called the "divine eye"... When this faculty is developed... one can then see for oneself, with immediate perception, how beings pass away and re-arise according to their kamma, how they meet happiness and suffering through the maturation of their good and evil deeds" (pp. 22-23).

My immediate response to reading this was to think, Okay Bhikkhu Bodhi, have you developed the divine eye? For anyone for whom the answer to this question is "no"--and unless you are a psychic such will always be the answer--there is no recourse except to faith, which may be true or not. Clearly, this is not a practicable test of this central tenet, but the mere fact BB discusses kamma in this fashion indicates how bound he is by a traditional, non-scientific understanding of his own tradition.

If you take the Buddha's teaching for what it is--as an applied psychology--kamma can be understood as simply conditioning, the shaping or molding of the mind by thoughts, words and actions. Whatever you think, say or do affects your state of consciousness and circumstances, and this is not a matter of faith but of direct observation here and now. This can be seen on gross levels or fine (e.g. working out makes you buff and depressed thoughts land you in the shrink's office); clearly our actions have consequences--they determine not only our characters but the course of our lives. Kamma is not magical and should not be considered as such; the word, after all, means "intentional action," and anyone can see the importance of both intentions and actions.

Bhikkhu Bodhi is best known for his translations, and the above examples make it clear why. He is not a first rate thinker or communicator; whenever he engages in drawn out exposition (as in the case of a book in his own words), what he writes tends to read like a technical manual written by someone who reads technical manuals for a living. I suspect this is a personality thing, but it also comes from him being first and foremost a "man of the texts"--a translator and scholar as opposed to practitioner.

This emerges too in the overall the feel of the book, and goes way beyond the quotes above. Though this short manual is fine for beginners interested in the basic "stuff" of Buddhism, there is little sense of living practice here. You don't get the stories a meditation teacher is likely to garner from sitting on the front

cushion, nor do you get glib, funny anecdotes from the author's everyday life experience. Everything is distant, formal, abstract, leavened with stilted phrases and multi-syllabic words...such as "concomitant."

Balaji Ramasubramanian says

Scholar monk Bhikkhu Bodhi had an American education and ordained in the Theravada order in Sri Lanka. Many of his translations and works on the Pali Canon as well as the classes on YouTube are gifts to the world for posterity. But this little volume is by no means negligible. A small and humble, inviting book on the Noble Eightfold Path as formulated in the Pali Canon, this book does great justice to the Dhamma.

Remember however that this is not meant for reading in a train journey or by your breakfast table. This is structured somewhat like a textbook, going from one topic to another in succession. It is not like Ajahn Thanissaro's treatises that do an in depth study, or like any of the essays that either of them have written. But it is a great place for any new person to start.

Ulf Wolf says

If you were to call this book a Buddhism Primer you would in a sense be correct. But this book is so much more than that. Although short and compact, Bhikkhu Bodhi makes every line sing, every word count.

I read this book some year ago, just as I set out on the Buddhist path, and found it very informative. Now, after ten or so years of study, reflection, and meditation I have read it again, and now (with a little less dust in my eyes) this book really sings. Bhikkhu Bodhi is both extremely insightful and erudite (he is a respected and renowned Pali scholar after all), and the way he now (reading with better eyes) outlines the path summarizes it so eloquently, and still in such depth, that I'd consider this book as a sole companion on that often-positated desert island.

Also, keep a dictionary handy, Bhikkhu Bodhi writes extremely well, and he will use unfamiliar words if it is the correct and best word to use. I looked many of them up, and he is always spot on. Sometimes his sentences explode with meaning.

Very highly recommended.

Leo Walsh says

A superb introduction to core Buddhist doctrines from the most notable contemporary translator of the Pali Canon. Because of this, I had expected it to be dry. It wasn't. Instead, Bodhi is a fabulous communicator. Better still, Bodhi's deep commitment to the Buddha's actual words makes give this exposition of core ideas a depth that introductory teachings often lack. My only objection is that it was too short.

Jo says

I read this book for a class, and our teacher told us that Bhikkhu Bodhi is one of the greatest living translators of the Buddha's teachings from the original Pali. That explains why the 120 pages of text are some of the most exquisitely precisely written I've ever read, illuminating the Buddha's philosophy with powerful clarity. Superb.

Rachel says

This one was very hard for me to get through (as you can see from my reading dates, it took me over four months). It's a very dense, Buddhist philosophy book that a book club I belong to chose. I had joked to my partner that there should be noble 8 fold path trading cards, but after having struggled through this book I don't think it's such a bad idea. Cards of some sort would have helped with my understanding and retention of this material. I guess I should have taken notes. Despite the length of time it took me get through it, I do think this book has a good message that's competently and concisely presented.
