

The Noble Eightfold Path

The first term of the Mitra course focuses on one of the most widely known formulations of the spiritual path found within Hinayana Buddhism (the Buddhism of South-east Asia). In view of the fundamental and comprehensive content of its teachings, it provides a classic introduction to Buddhist thought and practice. It is worth noting, however, that the series of lectures upon which it is based was given in 1968. The FWBO was barely in existence at this time and, consequently, Sangharakshita would almost certainly modify the content of some of the lectures were they to be given today. In particular, the lecture on Perfect Livelihood makes no reference to the development of team-based right livelihood businesses, which have become an important feature of spiritual life as practised within the FWBO.

Primary Study Material

The primary study material for this term is the series of lectures by Sangharakshita published in book-form as '*Vision and Transformation*' (available from Windhorse Publishing) or available in audio format from <http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/> .

Supplementary Reading for the Whole Series

A Guide to the Buddhist Path by Sangharakshita, Windhorse
What is the Dharma? by Sangharakshita, Windhorse

Supplementary Reading List for Term 1

Unit 2: *Ritual and Devotion in Buddhism* by Sangharakshita
Unit 4: *What is the Dharma?* C10
Unit 5: *Western Buddhist Review 1: 'Going Forth and Citizenship'* by Subhuti (available from <http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/index.html>).
Subhuti: *The New Society* (Padmaloka Books)
Subhuti: *Sangharakshita - A New Voice...* C9
Unit 7: Satipatthana sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 10.
Living with Awareness by Sangharakshita
The Heart of Buddhist Meditation by Nyanaponika Thera.
What is the Dharma? C11

Unit 8: *Meditation* by Kamalashila (Windhorse)

Study Questions

Unit 1: Perfect Vision

1. What is meant by a 'wrong view'? Illustrate your answer with examples.
2. What is meant by a 'right view'? Illustrate your answer with examples.
3. What is meant by the path of vision and the path of transformation?
4. How is 'perfect vision' distinguishable from 'right view'? *or* What is the difference between an intellectual understanding and a spiritual realisation?
5. Describe the relationship between the first limb of the 8-fold path and the other seven limbs.
6. Give a brief account of the meaning of shunyata. What practical relevance does it have as a teaching?
7. Give a brief account of the three marks of conditioned existence.

Unit 2: Perfect Emotion

1. What do you understand by the term Perfect Emotion?
2. What is the mundane counterpart of perfect Emotion?
3. How can we cultivate Perfect Emotion? Give examples from your experience.
4. Why are the emotions so important in spiritual life?
5. Why do you think renunciation is important in spiritual life? Describe how you are applying this principle in your life.
6. Give an account of **two** of the following spiritual emotions: generosity, devotion, gratitude, metta, karuna, mudita, upekkha.
7. How does the Sevenfold Puja help to develop perfect emotion? Answer from your personal experience.
8. Comment upon the relationship between desires and views.

Unit 3: Perfect Speech

1. Why do you think speech is a limb of the 8-fold path?
2. What does it mean to speak the truth?
3. Do you think it is ever appropriate to lie? If so, when?
4. Why don't we speak the truth more? Illustrate with personal examples.
5. How can we learn to become more truthful in communication?

6. Is criticism ever appropriate? If so, when?
7. How can silence function as a spiritual practice?
8. Identify some examples of useless speech. How might they be transformed?

Unit 4: Perfect Action

1. What makes something an ethical issue? (as opposed to a matter of personal preference).
2. Why should we be ethical?
3. How would you distinguish Buddhist ethics from Christianity? What is the criterion of Buddhist ethics?
4. Briefly explain the principle of Karma.
5. Sketch out some practical suggestions as to how we can increase our ethical sensitivity.
6. How would you distinguish between conventional and natural morality?
7. What constitutes sexual misconduct within Buddhism and why?
8. In your view, does the fifth precept imply complete abstention from all alcohol and drugs? Explain your answer.
9. How should we 'make good' our ethical breaches?

Unit 5: Perfect Livelihood

1. What is Right Livelihood? Why should we practise it?
2. How seriously do you take the idea of the transformation of society? Is it realistic?
3. How might we exert a positive influence on the socio-political sphere?
4. What benefits may be gained from working with other Buddhists?
5. Do you think Buddhism implies pacifism?
6. Should we work as little as possible? Please explain your response.
7. Should Buddhists be involved in ecological activism?
8. Give an account of some contemporary examples of wrong livelihood. Why are they wrong?

Unit 6: Perfect Effort

1. Why is it important that we 'know ourselves'? How can we achieve this?
2. Give some practical suggestions about how we might prevent unskillful states from arising.
3. How does Going for Refuge function as an antidote to the hindrances?

4. Expound, in your own words, the four antidotes to the hindrances.
5. Why is it valuable to cultivate the dhyanas?
6. Give some practical suggestions about how we might maintain skilful states of mind.
7. Is it possible to make too much effort (issue of wilfulness)?
8. How can we intensify our volition/will/effort?
9. What is laziness in the context of spiritual life?

Unit 7: Perfect Awareness

1. What is mindfulness? What is its opposite?
2. How can looking at art help us to become more aware of things?
3. What does it mean to be aware of reality?
4. How does continuity of purpose foster integration? Please give examples.
5. What does it mean to be aware of others?
6. Give some practical suggestions about how we might become more self-aware.
7. How does Sangharakshita's account of the Four Dimensions of Awareness relate to the 4 Foundations of Mindfulness found in the Satipatthana sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya?
8. Sangharakshita says that 'awareness is the most powerful transforming agent that we know.' (p.142) Please explain this statement.

Unit 8: Perfect Samadhi

1. What is samatha meditation? What is its purpose?
2. How does meditation foster personal transformation?
3. What is vipassana meditation? What is its purpose?
4. Give a brief account of the three asravas.
5. What is meant by the term samapatthi?
6. Give a brief description of the Imageless samadhi. How is it related to impermanence?
7. Give a brief description of the Directionless Samadhi. How does it relate to dukkha?
8. Give a brief description of the Voidness Samadhi. How does it relate to 'not-self'?

This material was originally compiled by Nagapriya for the distance-learning version of the Mitra Study Course and has subsequently been edited and updated by Saccanama.