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## RIGHT EFFORT IN A NUTSHELL

The heart of the Buddha's teaching was only concerned with two things, as it says in the Pali sutras, the truth about

*dukkha* and how to end *dukkha*; two deceptively simple ideas. To aid us not only in remembering the teachings, but in knowing how to practice with them, the Buddha used a variety of what today would be called teaching strategies, such as numbered lists (a compendium of which can be found on page 14), and key phrases, like the four words that describe right effort: **ABANDON AND REFRAIN, DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN.**

This is right effort in a nutshell. It is variously called the four right exertions, the four proper exertions, the four right efforts, the four great efforts, the four right endeavors, and the four right strivings. In Pali it is *sammappadhana* and in Sanskrit it is *samyakprahana*.

The practice of right effort depends on the insight that all phenomena, arisen and not arisen, are causally conditioned. That being so, our practice is to endeavor to abandon unwholesome states and the conditions we produce that allow them to arise and to develop wholesome states that have not yet arisen. Once wholesome states do arise we maintain the conditions on which they are founded. In doing so we are lessening our *dukkha*, both in the short and long term.

We can see this simple teaching in action when we meditate. Each time we let go of a grasping, of a clinging to a thought and return to our breath, we are abandoning and refraining, developing and maintaining.

It is also the technique we use for following the eightfold noble path:

**ABANDONING** wrong speech, wrong action, and wrong livelihood; abandoning wrong effort, wrong mindfulness and wrong concentration; abandoning wrong effort, wrong concentration and wrong mindfulness.

**REFRAINING** from producing conditions that would encourage these abandoned states to arise.

**DEVELOPING** right view and right intention; right speech, action, and livelihood; and right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

**MAINTAINING** the conditions that encourage these "rights" to continue arising.

This is the middle way. This is the way to end "the whole mass of suffering" in our lives, as the Buddhadharm teaches.

But right effort is more than just an explanation of how we meditate or how we walk the path. It is, in practice, what we do in every moment of our lives, whether or not we are aware of it. Why? Because in every moment we are doing something and so in every moment we are cultivating conditions. Either we are abandoning unwholesome actions and developing new and more beneficial ones or we are continuing with what we were doing, whether it was beneficial or not. In either case, we are doing, we are acting intentionally, so effort is exerted. The question, then, is simply "is the effort right effort?"

Articles and stories in Rightview are centered around the core teachings of the Buddhadharm and are supplemented by supporting commentaries, essays, and poetry. They are selected from the teachings of all three major traditions: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. They are presented without judgment, and are not meant for comparison, wither with each other or with your own practice. They are meant simply to shed light on the path.

We believe there is only one Buddhadharm, and that no one person or teacher or sect or center has a monopoly on it. There are many ways to practice virtue, many ways to explain wisdom, and many ways to meditate in Buddhism. Our aim is simple to present these teachings of the Buddhadharm in a way that may be of benefit to our readers.

We encourage everyone to practice, in whatever tradition is most appropriate for them, for their own benefit and for the benefit of all sentient beings.