

Lecture 1: Wiser, Kinder, Calmer

- For years now I've had a tagline on my YouTube channel: "wiser, kinder, calmer".
- This is an expression of what my channel and my work here in founding the Online Dharma Institute is all about.
- But one reasonable question is, "Why these three words in particular?"
- Part of the job of contemporary philosophy teachers in general and dharma teachers in particular is to bring the knowledge and wisdom of the past (even if it's the past two years) into the present, and make it accessible and interesting to us today.
- In the Buddha's teaching of the dharma, perhaps the most famous version of the path to practice is the Noble Eightfold Path. This is the way the Buddha recommends to gain awakening and nibbāna.
- Side note: nibbāna (Pāli) is an earlier form of the term than the more typical nirvāṇa (Sanskrit), at least within Buddhism, if Richard Gombrich is right that the Buddha spoke Pāli. This is however a controversial claim.
- Elsewhere in the early texts the nun Dhammadinā (sometimes spelled Dhammadinnā) makes the point that the Eightfold Path is organized in accordance with three key categories, not the reverse. That is, that three key categories are in a sense the real bedrock of the Buddha's practice.
- Those three key categories are: ethics, meditation, and wisdom. Some of you will be familiar with them.
- We begin with ethics: these are a number of behavioral practices we undertake in the world with our speech and our bodies that aim at setting aside anger and hatred, setting aside harm and cruelty, and becoming kinder and friendlier.

- This doesn't necessarily mean being "nicey nicey". Sometimes being kind requires us to be direct and even unpleasant. But it does mean being alert to when and how to be direct and unpleasant when it is necessary.
- Next is meditation. There are various forms of meditation undertaken for various reasons. But in a nutshell the aim of meditation is to calm the mind so that it can see clearly and understand the predicament we are in. A mind clouded by passion and worry is a mind that is prone to make unhealthy choices for us.
- Last is wisdom. This is a mind state that knows and sees the way things are and thereby allows us to make better, healthier, more skillful choices in our lives. Wisdom isn't something esoteric; for the most part it is simple to formulate but hard to really understand: such as the claim that all things change, which is perhaps the most bedrock piece of wisdom in the Buddha dharma.
- Ethics, meditation, wisdom. Ethics = kindness. Meditation = calm. Wisdom.
- The basis of all my teaching work here is to get across these three simple ideas that aren't so simple to put into practice. So join me for short pieces on my YouTube channel and here at the Online Dharma Institute for more intensive coursework.

Sutta mentioned:

The Shorter Series of Questions and Answers (Majjhima Nikāya 44). <https://suttacentral.net/mn44/en/sujato>

Book:

Richard Gombrich, Buddhism and Pāli. (<https://amzn.to/2GmPtv8>).