

The Noble Eightfold Path As A Technology For The Cessation Of Dukkha

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Abstract

This article frames the Noble Eightfold Path as a rigorously engineered method, a "technology" for diagnosing, reducing, and ultimately ceasing dukkha (unsatisfactoriness). Drawing on early discourses, the Path's eight factors are mapped to a three-layer architecture: *sīla* (ethical reliability) supplies system stability; *samādhi* (collectedness) delivers performance optimization by unifying attention; and *paññā* (wisdom) functions as the interpretive engine that identifies and corrects root causes. Each factor is articulated as an actionable module with clear inputs (motivations, contexts), processes (skills, protocols), and outputs (observable shifts in reactivity, clarity, and care). The paper details the interdependence of these modules through feedback loops: ethical coherence lowers agitation, enabling sustained Concentration; Concentration clarifies perception, empowering insight; insight, in turn, strengthens ethical resolve. Adopting a practice-based lens, we propose minimal viable protocols, including ten to twenty minutes of daily breath meditation, hourly three-breath check-ins that emphasize *vedanā* (feeling tone), concise speech audits before high-stakes conversations, and brief *mettā* (goodwill) sessions to counteract ill will. Progress is operationalized through pragmatic proxies rather than mystical benchmarks: reductions in rumination time, conflict frequency, and recovery time from emotional perturbations; increases in prosocial Speech, attentional stability, and baseline goodwill under stress. Methodologically, the argument integrates a close reading of pivotal suttas with contemporary behavioral design principles, yielding an eight-week training plan that prioritizes small, repeatable behaviors and reflective review. The approach aims to preserve doctrinal fidelity while making classical insights portable and testable in ordinary life contexts, such as workplaces, families, and civic spaces, without relying on esoteric states. The article presents the Eightfold Path as an interconnected system rather than a sequential checklist, providing a practical framework for fostering enduring well-being (*sukha*) and the cessation of suffering (*dukkha*). This "technology of liberation" encourages systematic experimentation and meticulous evaluation, allowing practitioners to cultivate a dependable, empathetic, and sagacious manner of existence through rigorous practice.

Introduction

Across the early Buddhist discourses, the Noble Eightfold Path is presented not as a creed to be believed but as a method to be enacted. It tackles a universal problem, *dukkha*, the felt unsatisfactoriness that manifests as stress, disappointment, and the unstable nature of pleasure — and offers a practical route to its cessation. While "*sukha*" (well-being) is available in fleeting forms, the tradition points toward a more stable, skill-based well-being cultivated through training. This article adopts a deliberately pragmatic lens: The Path

is treated as a technology, a system of interoperable skills that can be learned, tested, and refined in everyday life.

The technology metaphor is helpful because it invites clarity about inputs, processes, and outputs. Ethics (sīla) stabilizes the operating environment by reducing remorse and interpersonal friction. Collectedness (samādhi) enhances the signal-to-noise ratio in attention, allowing for steadier and more usable states of mind. Wisdom (paññā) corrects the root-level misconceptions about permanence, ownership, and lasting satisfaction that keep the loop of craving and clinging in motion. Far from abstract ideals, the eight factors specify concrete capabilities: seeing clearly (Right View), intending harmlessly (Right Intention), communicating responsibly (Right Speech), acting with integrity (Right Action), earning a livelihood that does not harm (Right Livelihood), applying energy skillfully (Right Effort), paying mindful attention (Right Mindfulness), and unifying the mind (Right Concentration). The article proceeds in four moves. First, it frames the problem of dukkha and explains why a systems perspective helps. Second, it maps each Path factor to its "module," which describes what it takes in, how it transforms experience, and what measurable changes indicate progress. Third, it demonstrates how the modules interlock: ethical coherence enables Concentration; Concentration reveals patterns; insight reshapes motivations, which in turn sustain ethics. Finally, it proposes an eight-week implementation plan centred around small, repeatable behaviours, including brief daily meditation, speech and livelihood audits, hourly micro-check-ins with a feeling tone (vedanā), and short sessions of goodwill (mettā). This approach aims to preserve doctrinal fidelity while remaining testable in contemporary settings, such as homes, workplaces, classrooms, and civic life. By treating the Path as an applied technology of liberation, we invite readers to experiment, track outcomes, and iterate. The promise is modest yet profound: with disciplined practice, the conditions that sustain dukkha can be weakened, and a durable, compassionate well-being can be reliably cultivated.

Aim of the Article

This article aims to present the Noble Eightfold Path as a practical, testable approach for the cessation of dukkha. Its objectives are fivefold:

1. **Conceptual Clarification:** Rearticulate key terms dukkha, sukha, sīla, samādhi, and paññā so they function as operative concepts rather than abstractions, maintaining fidelity to early discourses while ensuring contemporary usability.
2. **Systems Mapping:** Model the Path as an interoperable architecture (three trainings; eight factors) with clear inputs, processes, and outputs, highlighting feedback loops by which ethics stabilizes, Concentration refines, and wisdom corrects root causes.
3. **Practice Operationalization:** Translate each factor into concrete, small-footprint protocols suitable for daily life (e.g., speech audits, livelihood reflections, breath practices, mettā micro-sessions, vedanā check-ins).
4. **Measurement & Evaluation:** Propose pragmatic indicators of progress, including reductions in rumination, conflict frequency, and recovery time, as well as increases in attentional stability, prosocial Speech, and baseline goodwill, favouring behavioural evidence over esoteric states.
5. **Implementation Guidance:** Offer an eight-week training plan with weekly focuses, common pitfalls, and "debugging" strategies to sustain adherence and prevent spiritual bypass or strain.

By integrating scriptural insight with behavioural design methodology, the article aims to provide practitioners, teachers, and researchers with a coherent blueprint that is faithful to the Dhamma, feasible in modern contexts, and oriented toward the measurable alleviation of suffering.

Framing the Problem

Before any method can be applied, the problem must be named precisely. In the early discourses, **dukkha** does not mean only "pain." It points to a pervasive **unsatisfactoriness**: the stress of wanting things to be other than they are, the fragility of pleasures we cannot hold on to, and the unease built into conditioned life. Its counterpoint, **sukha**, is not mere excitement or comfort, but a more reliable well-being—the ease that grows from ethical clarity, steady attention, and insight. The **Four Noble Truths** offer a clinical frame: (1) dukkha is present; (2) dukkha has causes—craving and clinging shaped by misperception; (3) dukkha can cease; (4) there is a path of practice that accomplishes this cessation.

The tradition further differentiates **three faces of dukkha**. **Dukkha-dukkha** refers to straightforward pain, illness, grief, or insult, as well as fatigue. **Vipariṇāma-dukkha** arises from **change**: pleasant experiences fade; roles, bodies, relationships shift; even success tastes slightly anxious because it can be lost. **Saṅkhāra-dukkha** points to the **conditioned nature** of phenomena: anything fabricated, such as thoughts, moods, and identities, lacks a stable core, so leaning on it for lasting security guarantees subtle strain. These three are not abstractions; they map onto daily life. The sting after criticism (pain), the deflation after a vacation (change), the quiet hum of "not quite enough" even on good days (conditionedness) are all workable data.

Why cast the Path as a **technology**? Because technologies make intentions **operational**. They specify **inputs, processes, and outputs**; they expose **feedback loops** and invite **iterative refinement**. When we approach the Eightfold Path in this manner, ethics (sīla) becomes a means of environmental stabilization, thereby reducing remorse and social friction as its inputs. Collectedness (samādhi) becomes an attentional processing layer that amplifies signals, dampens noise, and makes mind-states tractable. Wisdom (paññā) functions as a diagnostic and corrective engine, testing assumptions about permanence, ownership, and satisfaction, and revising them based on evidence. This framing helps avoid two standard errors. First, we do not confuse temporary relief **with** liberation; outputs are measured not only in soothing states but in reduced reactivity, kinder Speech, and faster recovery after upsets. Second, we do not treat the Path as a linear checklist. Instead, we leverage reciprocity: ethical coherence facilitates Concentration; Concentration reveals patterns that enable insight; insight reshapes motives, which further stabilize conduct. Practice becomes a **closed-loop system** that you can tune: observe, adjust, and observe again.

In sum, the problem is not merely that life contains pain; it is that our **habits of relating** to experience compound it. Naming dukkha precisely, understanding its three expressions, and adopting a technology mindset turns the Path into a **workable protocol**, something you can test, refine, and trust.

Right View (Sammā-diṭṭhi)

Right View establishes a correct definition of the problem and its solution. It clarifies the **Four Noble Truths**: there is dukkha (unsatisfactoriness); dukkha has causes (craving and clinging conditioned by ignorance); dukkha can cease; and there is a path that reliably leads to cessation. It also includes seeing dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda): experiences arise from conditions; when the conditions change, experiences change. This reframes life from fate or blame to conditions and consequences. Instead of "I am broken" or "They made me suffer," Right View notices sequences of contact, feeling, craving, and clinging, so intervention becomes possible at earlier, lighter links.

Practice begins with regular reflection on cause and effect. After any spike of stress or ease, ask: "What preceded this? What Intention, perception, or Action conditioned it?" Note small levers: sleep, tone of Speech, media diet, expectations. Pair this with direct contemplation of **impermanence** (anicca): observe

that sensations, moods, and thoughts are constantly changing. Brief daily sittings help: track a breath from start to finish; feel how each in-breath arises, peaks, dissolves. Off-cushion, scan pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral **feeling tones** (vedanā) and watch how craving or aversion tries to hijack them. Support experiential learning with **study**: read concise passages on the Four Truths and dependent origination, discuss them with competent teachers, and take notes by translating doctrine into your own words and providing examples. Finally, test the View against behaviour: does this view increase kindness, restraint, and clarity? If not, revise it.

Outputs of Right View are observable. First, increased clarity: fewer global judgments, more specific, conditional language ("When I'm tired, I react; when I sleep well, I listen"). Second, **less** blame and projection: you disentangle others' actions from your extra suffering, focusing on your responses rather than their defects. Third, earlier detection of links: you catch the shift from feeling to craving sooner, making gentle course corrections possible. Over time, Right View makes practice self-correcting: by seeing how suffering is fabricated, the mind naturally selects intentions and actions that prevent it from being manufactured.

Right Intention / Resolve (Sammā-saṅkappa)

Right Intention is where View becomes motive power: it turns an understanding of suffering and its causes into the steady aims that guide Speech, Action, and attention throughout the day. In the early discourses, this resolve has three strands: renunciation, goodwill, and harmlessness, and each function like a default routing rule for the mind when pressure rises. Renunciation is not grim self-denial; it is the wise refusal to spend energy on compulsive acquisition or stimulation when that expenditure crowds out clarity and care. Practically, it looks like declining loops that steal attention, such as another late-night scroll, another impulse buy, or another "one more episode" and replacing them with nourishing alternatives so the nervous system can rest and steadiness can grow. Goodwill is the felt Intention that beings, including oneself, be safe and at ease. It softens the reflex to judge and retaliate; two minutes of simple phrases morning and evening beginning with oneself and widening to benefactors, friends, neutral people, difficult people, and finally all beings can change the emotional climate in which choices are made. Harmlessness is the commitment to non-cruelty in thought, word, and deed; it does not mean passivity, but rather firmness without venom. A weekly harm audit gossip here, sarcasm there, a corner cut in haste, a boundary ignored, followed by one concrete repair or design tweak builds traction. The day moves better when it begins with a short-written resolve: what compulsion will I release, toward whom will I cultivate goodwill, and how will I avoid harm in one specific way? Evenings become kinder when the review is curious instead of prosecutorial, noticing what supported the Intention and what minor adjustment could support it tomorrow. A standard failure mode is to smuggle irritation under the guise of "tough love." The fix is simple and powerful: generate goodwill before critique; then deliver the feedback clearly, paired with a path forward. Over time, the outputs of Right Intention are visible: cravings lose their sheen, apologies come sooner, and motives feel cleaner. The mind discovers that letting go can be more satisfying than grasping, that goodwill serves as a practical lubricant for collaboration, and that non-harm gives the courage to set firm boundaries without leaving lasting harm.

Right Speech (Sammā-vācā)

Right Speech is the fastest lever for reducing suffering in relationships, because words generate consequences at the speed of a breath. The classical guidance is to refrain from falsehood, divisive talk,

harsh talk, and idle chatter, while cultivating Speech that is true, helpful, timely, and kind lived out means telling the truth without weaponizing it, refusing to pit people against one another for status or amusement, declining to lace sentences with contempt or barbed humour, and resisting the compulsion to fill silence simply to mute our own discomfort. A single breath before replying is a surprisingly powerful technique: it instils a moment of choice between stimulus and response, and it often turns a sharp retort into a measured request. Asking permission to offer feedback—"Is now a good time?" respects timing and increases receptivity. Precision also helps: one explicit request per sentence, a specific appreciation each day that names what helped and how, and a simple repair ritual when we miss owning impact without burying the other in justifications. When gossip beckons, a graceful refusal "I'd rather talk about next steps than about them" protects the social field without grandstanding. Deliberate windows of silence, even ten minutes, reset the habit of idle Speech and restore the taste for words that matter. The results can be measured in fewer conflicts, shorter recovery times after tense moments, and the slow accrual of trust as people relax around you and seek your input. The standard failure loops are predictable: sarcasm masquerading as wit, truth used as a club, filler poured into every pause. Each has a patch: replace sarcasm with specificity, pair truth with goodwill and a request, and let pauses breathe. With practice, Speech becomes a daily laboratory for compassion and clarity, and the mouth stops undoing what the heart and mind are trying to build.

Right Action (Sammā-kammanta)

Right Action organizes bodily conduct so that remorse subsides and attention can be settled. Its backbone is straightforward non-harming, honesty in conduct, and sexual responsibility but the spirit is less moralistic than it is engineering-minded: how can I reduce the background jitter in the nervous system so Concentration and insight can take root? Non-harming extends beyond the obvious injunction against physical injury to a broader attentiveness to how our routines harm ourselves and others: the way sleep deprivation makes us sharp-tongued, the way neglecting the body's signals compromises tomorrow's clarity, and the way small, careless acts accumulate to burdens someone else must carry. Honesty in conduct means not taking what is not given and not gaming the systems we inhabit; it includes returning overpayments, citing sources generously, meeting commitments or renegotiating early, and recognizing that "almost true" corrodes self-respect from the inside. Sexual responsibility asks for care with power, transparency with consent, and the refusal to leverage intimacy for manipulation or status. A weekly integrity review work, money, body, intimacy reveals where we are slightly off-kilter; choosing one small, swift corrective Action keeps momentum alive. Designing friction into our environments removing triggers, pre-committing to conditions in which wise choices are easier, postponing decisions when hungry or exhausted makes virtue less a test of willpower and more a matter of good architecture. The body itself can teach: notice the felt difference after aligned versus misaligned actions and let that clean feeling become its own reward. Right Action is not a license for self-violence; mistakes are inevitable, and repair is part of the Path. Nor does non-harming rule out firm boundaries; often the kindest move is a clear "no" that prevents larger harm later. The benefits appear quickly: calmer states, fewer ruminations about missteps, steadier relationships, and the quiet dignity of a reputation that no longer requires constant management.

Right Livelihood (Sammā-ājīva)

Right Livelihood is Right Action writ large across the systems and incentives of a working life. The aim

is to earn a living without harming others or compromising one's integrity, recognizing that the conditions of employment, including hours, pressures, and peers, as well as the products we use, shape the mind that meets the cushion and the people we interact with each day. A practical starting point is to map a job's externalities with honesty: who benefits from what we build or sell, who bears the risks or cleanup costs, and what downstream effects emerge when zooming out beyond the quarter? Pair this with an integrity inventory: where are you nudged to shade the truth, upsell what will not help, cut safety for speed, or exploit asymmetries in information or power? With a clear view, choose one lever for the next month: a more transparent disclosure, a nudge to replace a manipulative metric, a proposal for an ethical guideline, a rotation toward a product line that reduces harm and act. Advocate for metrics that track user well-being and harm-reduction alongside revenue or engagement; design documents and discussions framed in evidence and care tend to gain traction. Articulate a brief personal code for livelihood and reread it monthly. When a project or manager demands a violation, escalate respectfully, document decisions, and ask whether the environment remains a good fit. Sometimes the harm cannot be mitigated enough; then the Path forward may involve an honest transition plan, including upskilling, networking, saving a runway, and exiting cleanly. This is not a purity contest but a trajectory: fewer compromises, fewer stains that require rationalization, more alignment between what you believe and what you do from nine to five. The payoff is immediate and compounding: less cognitive dissonance, more energy for practice and family, and the quiet authority of someone whose day job does not undermine the values they teach their children or students.

Right Effort (Sammā-vāyāma)

Right Effort is the art of applying energy wisely enough to sustain practice and interrupt unwholesome patterns, not so much that the mind tightens into struggle. The classical framework distinguishes four kinds of Effort: preventing unwholesome states from arising, abandoning them when they have arisen, arousing wholesome states when they are absent, and maintaining or augmenting them when they are present. In daily life, this becomes a gentle loop: notice, label, nudge, and nurture. Noticing means catching early cues, such as tightness in the brow, the urge to check the phone, or the acceleration of thoughts before the chain has fully formed. Labelling names the state without drama: irritation, greed, sleepiness, or, on the wholesome side, steadiness, warmth, clarity. Nudging introduces a fitting micro-intervention: a posture shift, three slow breaths, widening attention to sounds, sipping a glass of water, taking a brief walk, opening the chest, or, conversely, brightening interest and sitting taller if you are slouching. Nurturing is the neglected half of the work: when calm, contentment, or kindness appears, linger a few breaths so the nervous system can learn the taste and find its way back more easily next time. Prevention often involves environmental design moving temptation out of sight, scheduling difficult conversations earlier in the day, and avoiding debates when hungry. Abandoning is a matter of interrupting momentum with embodied cues: feeling the feet, softening the belly, saying less when anger rises, or sensing craving as a wave of energy in the torso that crests and passes if you don't feed it with stories. Arousing wholesome states can be as simple as standing up, opening the eyes, breathing more fully, recalling your Intention, or contemplating gratitude and generosity. Maintenance is protection: reduce inputs when stillness appears; direct goodwill to more beings when warmth is flowing; keep the thread of the breath when focus lands. The primary anti-pattern is straining attempting to force the mind into quiet, which only creates more noise. Balance vigor with ease, like tuning a guitar string; operate at seventy per cent effort to leave flexibility in the system. A simple cadence helps: a brief morning primer to set Intention, a midday reset

to check and nudge, and an evening review that asks which Effort showed up and what design change would make it easier tomorrow. Measured outcomes include faster recovery from spikes of reactivity, longer spans of contentment and clarity, and a practice rhythm that avoids boom-and-bust cycles.

Right Mindfulness (Sammā-sati)

Mindfulness is the capacity to remember what matters and keep it in View: the immediate object of attention and the broader frame of the Dhamma. The traditional framework consists of four elements: body, feeling tone, mind states, and key patterns, such as the hindrances and the factors of awakening. It proves practical because it meets experience where it is happening. Beginning with the body anchors attention in something tangible; feeling the breath at the nostrils or the abdomen, then widening to a sense of the whole body breathing, gives the mind an honest, living reference point. The second establishment, feeling tone pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral is crucial because it is the hinge between stimulus and craving. If you can feel the tone cleanly as tone, you can let it be without grabbing or pushing away, and the chain from contact to clinging has fewer opportunities to hook you. The third, mind states, invites a friendly overview: is the mind contracted or open, sluggish or bright, scattered or collected? Noticing the mood without turning it into a self-story avoids self-storytelling and opens the room for skillful intervention. The fourth establishment, Dhammas, simply means attending to patterns: recognizing the hindrances when they arise, seeing how the aggregates form a sense of self, or tracking the awakening factors as they wax and wane. An hourly three-breath check-in keeps the practice alive off the cushion: relaxing the jaw, shoulders, and belly; naming the current tone; naming the dominant hindrance or factor and nudging accordingly lengthening the exhale for restlessness, sitting taller for dullness, and widening attention when gripped by desire or aversion. The traps are predictable: over-controlling experiences as if mindfulness were a clamp; devaluing neutral tones as boring and therefore hopping from one stimulation to another; confusing rumination with awareness by thinking about thoughts instead of feeling contact with breath, posture, and sound. The remedies are equally simple: receive first and adjust gently second; become curious about neutrality and discover its calm; return again and again to the straightforward sensations of breathing and being supported. As mindfulness matures, craving chains are seen earlier, steadiness under stress increases, and the relationship with one's own experience grows kinder and more interested.

Right Concentration (Sammā-samādhi)

Right Concentration is unification: the mind becoming coherent enough to rest on its chosen object without strain, with the classical endpoint modelled by the absorptive states called jhāna. It is not an escape from life, but rather the stabilization that allows insight to see without distortion. The prerequisites are as old as the Path itself: ethical ease that minimizes remorse, steady Effort that can be applied without whip or slackness, and mindfulness that knows when attention has wandered and can return without friction. There are many workable entry ramps. Noticing the breath at the nostrils offers crisp detail and invites precision; sensing whole-body breathing spreads attention in a way that reduces tightness; beginning with counting on the exhale for a few minutes can gather scattered attention, after which counting is dropped to allow an unbroken thread. Practice begins with a posture that is alert, comfortable, and dignified, then choosing one object and gently applying and sustaining attention. As the mind continues to focus on the object, joy and ease often arise on their own. The instruction then is to allow these qualities without grasping them, letting verbalisation quiet and attention become continuous. Obstacles arise and have straightforward antidotes. Restlessness responds to softening the belly, lengthening the exhale, briefly widening attention to include

ambient sound, then returning to the breath. Dullness responds to brightening: sitting up, breathing more fully, opening the eyes a little, and re-igniting curiosity about the fine texture of the breath. The craving for results can be noted as "wanting" and met with a return to the very next breath; samādhi improves when we stop checking the oven every minute to see if the cake is done. Concentration trained in formal sittings will express itself throughout the day as steadiness: in a line, on a walk, before a meeting, a few collected breaths unify attention and change the tone of Action that follows. Safeguards matter. Pair concentration with investigation of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self so that quiet does not become a hiding place from life's work; keep the heart warm with goodwill so the clarity does not turn cold. The signs of success are not only longer periods of uninterrupted attention but also reduced reactivity and a quiet sense of sufficiency pleasant and grounded, not dependent on external conditions.

Conclusion

The Noble Eightfold Path is not a set of beliefs to hold but a method to enact an implementable technology that, when practised, reliably reduces dukkha and cultivates durable well-being. To translate insight into evidence, try a 14-day minimum viable practice: each morning, set one Intention to release a specific craving loop, sit 10–15 minutes with the breath, and carry an hourly three-breath check-in to notice body, feeling tone, and mind state; add two minutes of mettā to warm the heart before hard conversations; in the evening, review the day kindly, repair where needed, and note one tiny design tweak for tomorrow. Before you begin, complete a brief reflective survey: rate (1–10) your baseline reactivity under stress, time to recover after upsets, frequency of unhelpful rumination, and the ease with which goodwill arises toward yourself and others; jot one or two situations that typically trigger you. Repeat the survey on day 14 with concrete examples. If reactivity softens, recovery shortens, and goodwill appears more readily even modestly you have empirical grounds to continue and deepen. The promise is pragmatic: through small, repeatable behaviors, the conditions that fabricate suffering are weakened, and a steadier, kinder way of being becomes your new default.

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