

Summary Notes – Class #13: Right Diligence (Deer Park Monastery – 40 Tenets Series)

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Context

- <https://youtu.be/Rns2qi9xqtY?si=LPAOA1rjGj4iYx1S>
- Based on the book *Plum Village Looks at Vulture's Peak* by Thich Nhat Hanh (Thay).
- Tenet discussed: "Precepts are mindfulness (Śīla is smṛti). Precepts and mindful manners are concrete expressions of mindfulness."
- Focus: Right Diligence (also called Right Effort), one factor of the Noble Eightfold Path.

1. Precepts as Mindfulness

- Traditional Buddhist precepts often read as prohibitions ("Do not kill," "Do not steal").
- Thay reframed them as **mindfulness trainings** rooted in **awareness of suffering**, not blind obedience.
- The aim is to understand the *why* behind ethical action—seeing interbeing and the consequences of harm on self and society.
- Precepts are not mere restraint; they are living expressions of mindfulness and compassion.

2. Right Diligence and the Eightfold Path

- Right Diligence cannot be separated from Right Mindfulness. It is mindfulness in action.
- Eightfold Path sequence: Right View → Right Thought → Right Speech → Right Action → Right Livelihood → Right Effort/Diligence → Right Mindfulness → Right Concentration.
- Right View means letting go of wrong perceptions and bias. Community feedback is essential to reveal hidden views.
- Mindfulness and concentration nourish insight (prajñā), which guides speech, action, and livelihood.

3. Right Livelihood

- More than avoiding obviously harmful work (e.g., selling weapons).
- Examine the ethics of the workplace, company products, and **how** one works (atmosphere, relationships).
- Even monasteries can drift into unwholesome livelihood if driven by wealth or status.
- Constant questioning keeps practice alive.

4. Four Aspects of Right Diligence

The Buddha taught four practices for cultivating the mind:

1. **Prevent unwholesome seeds from arising**
 - Recognize seeds of anger, despair, jealousy, craving.
 - Avoid feeding them through thoughts, media, conversations, or environments.
2. **Embrace and help unwholesome seeds return to dormancy**
 - When negative states arise, do not suppress them but remove their nutriment.
 - Like cooling a fire by removing logs rather than smothering with a carpet.
 - Mindfulness embraces and transforms.
3. **Invite wholesome seeds to arise**

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- Bring forward seeds of mindfulness, joy, love, understanding.
- Good conditions (community, nourishing activities) support this.
- 4. **Keep wholesome seeds present**
 - Maintain positive states by “serving tea and cookies”: nourishing joy, gratitude, peace so they stay longer.

5. Mind Consciousness and Store Consciousness

- **Store consciousness** holds all seeds (potential mental formations).
- **Mind consciousness** is what manifests in the present moment.
- Practice is about wise “gardening”: starving negative seeds and watering positive ones.

6. Community as Essential Practice

- Right diligence is not solitary.
- True refuge comes from **brotherhood, sisterhood, siblinghood**—mutual support and honest feedback.
- Stories of failed “perfect” projects (organic farms, green energy centers) show that without harmony and shared practice, even noble efforts collapse.

7. Dangers to Avoid

- **Spiritual bypassing:** using mindfulness as a feel-good escape (e.g., “mindfulness booths”) without addressing real suffering.
- **Despair:** overwhelming negative news (e.g., climate crisis) can paralyze.
- **Complacency:** assuming good intentions or “good” work equals right livelihood.

8. Practical Applications

- Be mindful of sense impressions and consumption (media, food, conversations).
- Recognize craving without hostility; understand its evolutionary roots but don’t let it dominate.
- Cultivate joy and trust so action flows from clarity, not fear or anger.
- Generate community and refuge to face global challenges with steadiness.

Key Takeaway

Right Diligence is the art of **mindful cultivation**:

- Prevent and transform negative seeds.
- Invite and sustain positive seeds.
- Practice in community.
- Remain grounded in joy and compassion even amidst suffering. Mindfulness is not a tool for escape but the living path itself.