**The Four Noble truths:**
So called, because as yet, there has been nothing said or written since that can undermine or contradict them with any definitive counter-discussion....
One could certainly dispute them. Many argue against them, because they don't Wish them to be true! I have done so myself, to no avail.

**1:** Life is Difficult. (You will sometimes see this also termed as, suffering, unsatisfactory, unpredictable, irritating or - quite simply - shitty! This gives many, the impression that Buddhism is a devotion founded on pessimism and depressive discourse, but nothing could be further from the...Truth - !)

**2:** It is difficult (or the rest of it) because of our attachment and grasping, or clinging, to the vicious circle of good/bad, happy/sad, yes/no, up/down, in/out nature of our existence (Samsara).

**3:** There is a simple and effective means of escaping this vicious circle.

**4:** That means of escape is The Eightfold Path.

in order to be able to understand, accept and live by the Eightfold Path, one has to, first and foremost, do the same with the Four Noble truths.
it cannot simply be a question of reading them and agreeing with them. You (and I'm using "you" in the generic sense, not the specifically personal sense, here) really have to take them in, explore them, understand them profoundly, from the centre of your Being.

1: There are two kinds of difficulty, or suffering:
One is physical, in the sense that our bodies in many ways, and at many times, are subject to faults and frailties... sometimes temporary, sometimes prolonged, acute or chronic... and that ultimately, they will 'give up the ghost' (!) altogether....
The other is psychological suffering; loneliness, frustration, fear, embarrassment, despair during illness, disappointment and of course, often, anger.
These are irrefutable facts that cannot be denied. Rather than being pessimistic or negative, it is realistic, because pessimism or negativity focuses on the expectation of things always being bad, or going wrong.
Buddhism however, points out that suffering can be avoided, and that we can be truly, genuinely centrally happy.

2: The second Noble Truth is that 'Suffering' is caused by Attachment, Craving or Clinging, and aversion.
We will suffer if we expect other people to conform to our expectations, if we want others to like us, if we do not get something we want, if we feel out of control of a situation, etc.etc. etc.... In other words, not getting what you want guarantees unhappiness, but getting what you want does not, in turn, guarantee happiness. Because whatever we want - and get - is by very nature of its existence, temporary and transitory... so we know, even when we have it, that this too, shall pass.
Craving, grasping and Aversion (to the temporary transitory nature of everything) leads to suffering, because unable to shed ourselves of this vicious cycle, we are reborn into Samsara. Every moment, of every day.

3: The Third Noble Truth is that this perpetual cycle of Suffering and Difficulty, can be broken. True happiness and contentment are possible - we give up useless craving and learn to live each day (each hour, each minute, each second) at a time (neither dwelling in the past, nor in the imagined future). Only then, can we become Happy and Free.... By Seeing Things Exactly As They Are.

4: The Fourth Noble Truth is that the way out of this perpetual cycle of Suffering and Difficulty - is The Eightfold Path.

When one uses the word ‘Right’ in this context, it does not imply the opposite of ‘Wrong’, precisely. Rather, it indicates that the factor in question should be engaged in skilfully, in a considered and appropriate manner, with Wisdom and discernment.....

The way in which I taught myself to memorise the different factors – or as I called them, the “signposts” – of the Eightfold Path, was to give them a Mnemonic: (Curiously, the word “mnemonic” originates from the Greek root, ‘*Mnemon*’ – meaning ‘mindful’.....)

I came up with Right **VISABEAM** –

**V**iew

**I**ntention

**S**peech

**A**ction

**B**usiness (more often referred to as 'Livelihood)

**E**ffort

**A**wareness (Mindfulness)

**M**editation (or Concentration)

...Or as many have put it - 'Right Everything' - !

View and Intention' are Right *Wisdom Training.*
Speech, Action and Business/Livelihood are *Ethics Training,* and
Effort, Awareness and Meditation/Concentration, are *Meditation Training*.

The Eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path are not steps to be followed in sequence, one after another. They can be more aptly described as components rather than as steps, comparable to the intertwining strands of a single cable that requires the contributions of all the strands for maximum strength.

The Buddha's teachings are known as "The Wheel" and the symbol of an eight-spoked wheel has long been used as an indication of the Buddha's presence in a person's life, just as the fish is a symbol of a Christian's devotion....

The following further analogy of the spokes of the wheel has also long been popular:

The Hub being the Buddha himself, who radiates all this knowledge, and connects with us through this Path… the spokes, are the Eight Right Signposts… the Dharma condensed into digestible and noteworthy lessons, one following the other in perpetual cyclical flow. The outer hoop, the brace, is the Sangha – the close, local and global community upon which we rely for companionship, support, comfort and unity…. The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha are the Three Jewels – The Triple Gem in which we, as Buddhists, take refuge when first vowing to follow the Buddhist path… recitation of these three marks our dedication and devotion to Buddhism.

To go back to our cable, or wheel….With a certain degree of progress, all eight factors can and should be present simultaneously, each supporting the others. However, until that point is reached, some sequence in the unfolding of the path is inevitable.

The **first** point is called **Right View** -- the right (skilful, considered, appropriate) way to view the world. "Wrong" (*un*skilful, *in*considerate, *in*appropriate) view occurs when we impose our egotistic expectations onto things; expectations about how we hope things will be, or about how we are afraid things might be. Right View occurs when we see things simply, as they are. It is an open and accommodating attitude. We abandon hope and fear and take joy in a simple straight-forward approach to life.
We have to practise a detached discernment, and attempt to view things in an unprejudiced, neutral and dispassionate way…. We have to attempt to prevent emotion from distorting our View, and of coming, therefore, to a misguided conclusion….
It is rather like reading a map and plotting a route from point ‘A’ to point ‘B’…

Deciding on the chosen route, memorising the road to take and studying the map is all very well… But unless we actually **put** one foot in front of the other, and experience this ‘way’, we will never be able to accurately recount the journey made, or describe what the route and point ‘B’ actually look like… so we have to connect completely, and empathise as far as we can, with what it is we are Viewing….

‘Develop a Mind that clings to nothing’. ([Diamond Sutra](http://www.diamond-sutra.com/), Mahayana teaching.)

Be mindful of not only what you see, but of HOW you see things; your point of view should be as flexible as a reed in a spring breeze: well anchored, but subject to the energies that may move it this way and that - ever ready to accept the changes Life inevitably brings, without being so rigid as to reject them without so much as a glance.”

There is a Zen saying: When a finger is pointing at the Moon, it is wrong View to concentrate on the finger, instead of the Moon"
In other words, 'Truth/Wisdom can be likened to the bright moon in the sky. Words, in this case, can be likened to a finger. The finger can point to the moon's location. However, the finger is not the moon. To look at the moon, it is necessary to gaze beyond the finger."
Right View means not clinging to your impression of what you View, but to what The View is giving you....

The **second** point of the path is called **Right Intention**. It proceeds from right view.
If we are able to abandon our expectations, our hopes and fears, we no longer need to be manipulative. We don't have to try to con situations into our preconceived notions of how they should be. We work with what is. Our intentions are pure.
When we have first considered the object of our perception, and assured ourselves that we have viewed it from every angle possible, and that we have as accurate a perception of this situation as we can possibly muster, then, our next question in evaluating our response, is to ask ourselves:
“What is my motivation?”
We have to be discerning enough to immediately recognise any agenda or prejudice we might be harbouring… Our minds can be very cunning this way…! We have to first then, understand what is stimulating the thought, or intention we are experiencing… Is it Resentment? Desire? Anger? Pity? Prejudice? Are we able to render our thinking Neutral and impartial? Can we succeed in our discipline, to enable ourselves to evaluate matters with a Clear Mind? Neither here or there, but in the Middle…
“The Thought” (Intention) “manifests as the Word, the Word manifests as the Deed; the Deed develops into Habit; and Habit hardens the character. So watch the Thought and its ways with care, and let it spring from Love born out of concern for all beings… As the shadow follows the body, as we think, so we become.”
(Adapted from the first two verses of ‘[The Dhammapada’](http://www.serve.com/cmtan/Dhammapada/) – The sayings of the Buddha.)

Sometimes, it might not be possible to spend an indeterminate amount of time weighing all these things up – occasionally, we find ourselves reacting with instinct, or as a reflex…. And sometimes, in the result, we are skilful, and at other times, we are less skilful. But the more we can practise and meditate, and be Mindful of this teaching, the more it becomes familiar to us, and the more and more we ‘get it Right’.
Practice makes perfect.

The **third** aspect of the path is **Right Speech.**

*“Not even the mightiest army of the fastest horsemen in the Emperor’s kingdom can halt or retrieve the harsh word, once it has been spoken.”*

Thought forms the Word, so we must guard against using wrong words with which to express ourselves… Once our intentions are pure, we no longer have to be embarrassed about our speech. Since we aren't trying to manipulate people, we don't have to be hesitant about what we say, nor do we need to try bluff our way through a conversation with any sort of phoney confidence. We say what needs to be said, very simply in a genuine way.
This not only means using appropriate language, but also being mindful of the circumstances we speak in, and whether how we express ourselves is the appropriate manner for the situation. Sometimes, saying nothing is the wisest ‘speech’ of all…..

Right Speech also covers the subject of Right Listening…. Not specifically mentioned in the Buddha’s teachings, here, but considered, none the less to be important, during our exchanges with others…if, for example they are asking us to do them a service, or they are in some distress, ‘reading between the lines’ is a skill we need to develop and be aware of… We can perfectly well hear what the person is saying to us…Our verbal response to them will also have to hinge upon what we are hearing them NOT say…..Being silent, and listening to others is certainly covered by the Buddha in other teachings though....

Quote:

Those, who are virtuous and who live a life of **heedfulness**, are set free through attaining perfect wisdom and Mara cannot find a way to them

Quote:

Silent in body, silent in speech,
silent in mind, without agitation,
blessed with silence is the sage.
Such One is truly washed of evil.

And -

Quote:

If silent as a broken bell,
such one is close to Nibbana,
and far away from arrogance.

Speech - as the most direct and obvious means of communication - is so important that The Buddha included it in the First Five precepts - the Vows taken by all wishing to follow The Buddha's calling.

The **fourth** point on the path, **Right Action**, is the way our Views and Intentions ultimately manifest…in the form of a physical gesture or process….so all our actions have their origins first, in the prior two…View and Intention… It’s a follow-on…
Consequently, if the first two are skilfully applied, then we shall find that our Actions improve.
The Buddha laid down a series of precepts, or vows, taken by those seeking ordination (as Monks or Nuns….) But the first five are very commonly vowed by laypeople also, as an adjunct to taking refuge in the Triple Gem, and as a sub-heading, one would guess, to Right Action. Here they are:

The Five precepts:
The **first** of these is to abstain from harming living beings. This includes human beings, animals and insects. This is why many (but not all!) Buddhists are vegetarians as the eating of meat involves the slaughter of animals. Interestingly, the Buddha, didn't forbid the eating of meat altogether. His monks were allowed to eat meat providing it hadn't been killed for them specifically.
This first precept further covers everything we think, say and do: it covers the following Four Precepts and all the remainder adhered to by the ordained. And it always, but always includes ourselves.

The **second** precept is to abstain from taking what is not given - stealing. This could be in the shape of objects and property, but governs also ideas and inventions, and even just taking liberties… ! It covers deceit. Deceit, however well-intentioned, is still an unskilful premise.

The **third** precept is to abstain from sexual misconduct, such as being unfaithful to one's partner, involvement with prostitution or pornography or entertaining lustful thoughts.
Just as a note, here, there is nothing in any of the Buddha’s teachings, anywhere, that condemns, criticises or discourages homosexual love. But the same precept applies, whatever the situation.

The **fourth** precept, abstaining from false speech, includes lying, tale-bearing, and gossiping. This obviously is covered by Right Speech, but talking is an action, and could be furthered by including ‘bearing false Witness’ or remaining silent when one should actually speak out…

The **fifth** and final precept is to abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs - of course, drugs taken for medicinal purposes are perfectly acceptable.
An aspect of Right Action not often considered involves a kind of renunciation. There is Right Action, but there is also Right in-Action… Abstention, abdication, renunciation or just sacrificing doing something we previously loved doing, but might be a distraction to our practice, is also Right Action. In many cases, only we can know what these things are, and only we can examine our conscience and intentions…. Sometimes we may be forced by circumstances, or obliged to give up something we do… the Right Thing to ‘do’ in these cases, it to let it go with a glad heart. After all, everything comes and goes, anyway…..
We need to give up our tendency to complicate issues. We practice simplicity. We have a simple straight-forward relationship with our dinner, our job, our house and our family. We give up all the unnecessary and frivolous complications that we usually try to cloud our relationships with. In giving up these things, we may find that we gain a great deal more than we “lose”….

**Right Business**, or **livelihood**, as it is more usually known, (I changed it to give a more pronounceable Acronym!) is the**fifth** step on the path. It is only natural and right that we should earn our living. Often, many of us don't particularly enjoy our jobs. We can't wait to get home from work and begrudge the amount of time that our job takes away from our enjoyment of the good life. Perhaps, we might wish we had a more glamorous job. We don't feel that our job in a factory or office is in keeping with the image we want to project.
We also have to consider whether the ‘End Result’ is skilful…

To give an extreme example, a technical designer, gifted in the craft of creating on paper, and expert in the field of mechanics and engineering, would not be using his abilities skilfully, if he was responsible for the design of weapons…Those horrendous machines purely and simply designed to hurt or maim and even kill another sentient Being.
From a purely personal point of view, I don’t find this a ‘Right Business’ decision.

The means by which we earn money should be honourable. We should be providing a service that will put a smile on peoples’ faces, somewhere along the line. And no matter how tedious, how monotonous, how structured and mundane, it gives us the perfect opportunity to observe *Things Exactly As They Are,* and to make a difference. Even if it’s just amongst the colleagues with whom you interact. Make it a pleasure for them to come to work each day, because of the impression you make on them….
The truth is, that we should be glad of our job, whatever it is. We should form a simple relationship with it. We need to perform it properly, with attention to detail.
However, if for any moral reason, our job leads us to question our conscience, then we need to question which is more important:
Our pay, or our Principles?

The **sixth** aspect of the path is **Right Effort**.

''Wrong' Effort is struggle. We often approach a spiritual discipline as though we need to conquer our evil side and promote our good side. We are locked in combat with ourselves and try to obliterate the tiniest negative tendency. Right effort doesn't involve struggle at all. When we see things as they are, we can work with them, gently and without any kind of aggression whatsoever.
There are many quotations I could give as examples, but I like this one in particular, spoken by Yoda, in response to somebody’s assurances of Effort… "I’ll try…"

Yoda replies:
“ ‘Do’ or ‘Do Not’…There is NO ‘Try’. ”
In other words, Right Effort sometimes means that Trying is futile…let me give you an example.

Take a book.
Put it on a table.
Now try to pick it up.
Don’t ACTUALLY pick it up.
Just ‘Try’ to pick it up.
You see?
It’s impossible.

There are some situations where ‘Trying’ isn’t productive, because we don’t need to try. We just need to ‘Do’.
To ‘Try’ to do something is to actually not want to do it at all….

Let us say that you arranged to meet a neighbour for lunch, in town.
She cancels at the last moment. Now, for whatever reason, you were really counting on her turning up…you’d really been looking forward to this, and you feel really let down. But she’s very apologetic… you’re still mad, but you try to forgive her…
In this case, you might as well not bother.

What’s the point in trying to forgive her?
You either do, or you don’t.
If you do, you feel lighter, quite ok about it all, and joyfully make new plans, and arrange to meet another time.

If you ‘try’… well…what you’re actually doing is holding on to a bit of resentment… Why? Because it feels good, to justify your righteous anger….you still feel mad, even though outwardly, you’ve said it’s ok, and it’s not a problem, and it’s no big deal… but in your heart, inwardly, you’re still harbouring Anger and Resentment. Well, in that case, you might as well not forgive her at all. You can’t forgive and still stay mad. You either forgive, or you don’t.

Don’t ‘try’ not to swear at people – ‘Do not’ swear at people.
Don’t ‘Try’ to drive more slowly through town – just ‘Do’ drive more slowly.
“Do or Do Not – There IS no Try”.

" 'Trying', isn't 'Doing' ".

Right Effort is powerfully fuelled by Right View and Right Intention… it is accompanied by Right Speech and Right Action…. So Right Effort means putting everything into practise by Skilful means and Mindfulness.

**Right Awareness**, or **Mindfulness**, the **seventh** step, involves precision and clarity. We are mindful of the tiniest details of our experience. We are mindful of the way we talk, the way we perform our jobs, our posture, our attitude toward our friends and family, every detail.

Thich Nhat Hanh, that wonderful, wise and extremely insightful Vietnamese Monk has written several books on this subject alone… (‘Peace is Every Step’, ‘The Miracle of Mindfulness’, ‘Present Moment, Wonderful Moment!’).

He emphasises the importance of living purely and simply, in the Now… of being aware of every single nuance and nanosecond of the Present Instance…. Of simply being one with your breath, and of stilling the Mind of its constant babble, chatter and interference….
He gives an example of being able to do this during an every-day, mundane, boring task, like washing up… a time when, because of the automatic nature of this task, our mind is apt to wander and run all over the place….
He encourages just watching the water flow out of the tap…. Watching the soap bubbles rise, gleaming, sparkling and white…of wiping each plate…feeling the warmth of the water on your hands, rinsing the plate, seeing how clean it is….placing it to dry in the rack… But with no appropriate commentary…

WITHOUT thinking -
“I am watching the water flow out of the tap… I am watching the soap Bubbles rise, gleaming, sparkling and white…. I am wiping each plate….”

Do all of the above, but without any commentary, and without letting your mind wander elsewhere… If it does, just gently bring it back to you, with a deep breath… Smile…. and start again…..

That’s another of his pet loves… ‘Watching the Breath’…. Simply feeling the gladness of your body expanding with the in-breath.. The coolness of the air in your nostrils…. The momentary ‘emptiness’ as we hold the breath for one, two, three, maybe four seconds, and then the deflation of the body, the feeling of our garments against our skin, and the warm air as it leaves our nostrils…. The pleasurable aspect of just ‘sinking’ into a relaxed state as your body rests, lungs empty of breath for one, two, three, maybe four seconds…..and again…..
Watching the Breath, and being absolutely connected to everything we are doing, and that is happening, keeps us Aware, and Mindful… If we are ‘Here’…How on earth can we be ‘Miles away’…?

**Right Meditation**, or **concentration**, (absorption) is the **eighth** point of the path, and leads on seamlessly from point Seven…..

Usually we are absorbed in absent-mindedness. Our minds are completely captivated by all sorts of entertainment and speculations. Right absorption means that we are completely absorbed in ‘Now-ness’, in things as they are. This can only happen if we have some sort of discipline, such as sitting meditation. We might even say that without the discipline of sitting meditation, we can't walk the Eightfold Path at all. Sitting meditation cuts through our absentmindedness. It provides a space or gap in our preoccupation with ourselves.

Our Minds are never still. There is a constant burble and chattering going on, and one thought runs seamlessly into another, so that there is no interruption from the moment we awake, to the moment we sleep….

No…That’s not quite right…There are instances when there is a pause – a second of emptiness that signifies the end of one thought, and the beginning of the next….
The secret is to notice these gaps and to make them longer…..

In Buddhism, a frenetic mental activity is known as ‘Monkey Mind’…

Metaphorically speaking, your 'Monkey' frenetically leaps from branch to branch, jumping up and down, screeching, whooping leaping, never still, always engaged in frenzied activity, so that watching him and noting everything he goes through can make us dizzy! The only time he is still, is when he’s asleep, or when he’s eating…. And while he eats, he is alert, aware, but at least, calm, collected and controlled, for once…
So, (because we can’t sleep every time we want to calm this Monkey Mind) what shall we feed him?

We ‘feed’ him our breath.

As detailed above, we sit and we ‘watch’ the breath….. Or we can recite a Mantra…or a simple, single word….
As we breathe in, we focus on the word ‘Peace’…… as we breathe out, we focus on the word, ‘Calm’……
Or we could listen to some meditative Music, but focus intensely on each and every single note...listen singularly to every instrument being played, simultaneously…. Or we could simply gaze peacefully at a scene (in a painting, outside our window) and take in every single detail, without commentary…Just look…. Just see….
And if a thought starts leaping across your consciousness, smile….Take a deep breath, and release …let go of the thought as you exhale, and let it drift off, thus emptying your mental plane and calming the Monkey Mind again…..

You don't have to do this for hours on end....give yourself time to learn this skill... Start with just a couple of minutes, or even just one.... meditation is about quality, not quantity. And sit, kneel, lie or stand in any way you like.... the full-lotus position is all very well, but only a comparative few can hold it for more than a minute!! You can 'Meditate' any and everywhere you feel like; in bed, on a park bench, in the bath.... and of course, at the kitchen sink....

Meditation has often been misinterpreted by many, as having to cease all thought altogether…. This is not so…. The brain is made to think. What we are doing, is training it – as one would any muscle – through discipline and perseverance, to behave in the way WE want it to behave, rather than permitting it to have free uncontrolled reign….We want it to work FOR us, not against us.

It’s like taking an active puppy in, and training it to be a guide dog for the blind…. It never stops being a dog…it always knows how to play, run, bark, leap and be happy…But it is disciplined, and knows it has a job to do, and does it according to the training.

Making your Mind work for you, the way you want it to, may take years of work on our part, because we have to cut through the lifetime of conditioning we have been subjected to – and to which we have ultimately subjected ourselves.
Many people initially disagree with this statement, but: whether you are happy or not is your choice, completely. It has nothing to do with outside factors, it has nothing to do with what anybody else thinks, says or does.
Whatever weather is blowing, how we deal with it, is our choice. Full stop, period, finito.

This came as a massive blow to me personally, because at times, I really enjoyed wallowing in self-pity, fear, pain and resistance. It was great, it got me the sympathy vote, for a start, and prevented me from making any efforts as well…
But something I once read, caused me to stop, and haul myself up sharpish, pronto.

I digress from the path a moment, but sit on this rock with me, rest your feet, put your stick and baggage down and listen up…..This is a true story.

An elderly monk named [Lopon-la](http://www.friends-of-tibet.org.nz/news/september_2005_update_13.htm%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), managed to escape from Tibet and made his way to Dharamsala, the Tibetan Capital/Base, where the Dalai Lama lives, outside Nepal…. The journey of less than 100 kilometres took him over 6 weeks, over dangerous and exposed territory, but he was very old and very frail. In addition to this, he suffered greatly through constant pain, to virtually every bone in his body. He had recently been released from incarceration at the hands of the Chinese. He was virtually blind, nearly deaf and stooped almost double, and all this, due to the constant, daily torture inflicted upon him. He was beaten daily, subjected to electric shock, both externally and internally, and abused in the most despicable ways you could imagine.
News of his arrival in Dharamsala soon spread and the Media, eager to learn the true facts of what was going on in Tibet, flocked in their hundreds.
This tiny bent and broken man sat in front of them, and told his story. He answered all questions put to him, painstakingly and calmly.
One Reporter asked him, in all the years he had spent in the prison confined and treated in the way he had been, what had held the most fear for him?
He quietly replied that in the 18 years he had lived in this way, his greatest fear was to have lost his compassion for the Chinese.

(In any situation where sensitivity, tact and diplomacy might be required, journalists and reporters are occasionally briefed on what may be suitable or unsuitable questions to ask. It was apparently the Dalai Lama himself, who suggested this question to the reporters, in an effort to broadcast to the world that hatred, vindictiveness, resentment, revenge and animosity are highly unskilful emotions, and that cultivating quite the opposite is better in the long run….)

This is when I personally realised, “It’s all in your Mind”.
This is where you live, and this is where your Truth starts, continues and ends.
This is what I personally feel I need to achieve. Joy, Serenity, Peace and Compassion, all the time, regardless.
And this is why I made it my choice to stride this way.

Meditation is an essential component to the Eightfold path, because through training the Monkey Mind, and through discipline, we can then use **Right View** with more clarity and clear, sharp precision….

And so the Wheel has turned full circle…..