

Zen Lessons for Writers

LLWRC 873

Three Saturdays
March 14th, 21st and 28th, 2026
10:00 AM - 1:00 PM



Class Goal

What we're trying to do

- Class Goal: This is a class about wellness and art, philosophy and creation, work, success and existence. We will explore certain aspects of Eastern philosophy and discover applications of them to the life of a writer. Classes will include directed mindfulness meditations, lectures and connections, writing and sharing of work in a workshop critique environment.
- Students should come away with a new perspective on their art and new tools to proceed in its creation.

You

Tell us about yourself

- Why are you?
- What brings you here?
- Writing experience?
- Any experience with Buddhism or meditation?

Writing Sprint

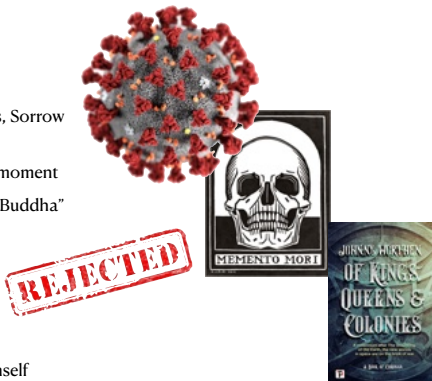


See yourself taking this stairway. Where does it go?
What is it like? Describe the place. Use your senses.

Where This Class Came From

Suffering leads to enlightenment

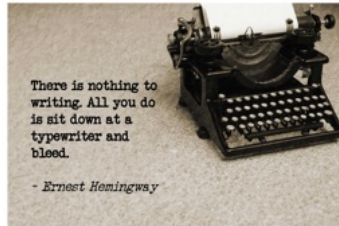
- What the Dalai Lama said
- Mental Health
 - Doubt, Despair, Darkness, Sorrow
 - Challenges to my ego
 - constant but an acute moment
- “Suffering brings you to the Buddha”
 - Peace & Happiness
 - Lifetime interest
 - Time on my hands
- Research for my epic
- The Artist’s battle with himself



The Writer's Struggle

Applies to all artists, methinks

- We sand off our fingerprints to better feel the world.
—What could possibly go wrong?
- Sensitive
 - Introvert
 - Vulnerable
- Hard Occupation
 - Subjective
 - Competitive
 - Teaming with Rejection
 - Imposter syndrome anyone?



The Buddha

Yes, a real dude

- Siddhartha Gautama
 - 2,500 years ago
- Indian Influences
- A psychologist?
- Lists and ideas
 - "Ponderables"
- A way to happiness?
- "I teach suffering and the cessation of suffering"



Note: There are lots of Buddha quotes flying around. Not all are found in scripture.
BUT: If helpful what does it matter?

The Four Sights

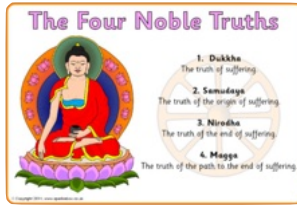
Old, Sick, Dead and the Monk



The Four Noble Truths

The Foundation

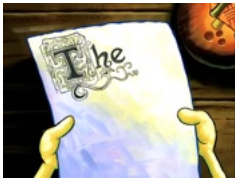
- Ordinary life brings about **suffering**
- The origin of this suffering is **attachment**
- The **cessation of suffering** is attainable
- Suffering can cease by following the **Eightfold Path**



Applying: The First Truth

Ordinary Life Brings About Suffering

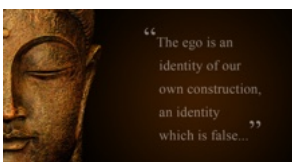
- Suffering?
 - **Dukkha**
 - Dis-ease
 - Dissatisfaction
 - Thirst
- **The Writer's Suffering**
 - Not productive enough
 - Writers block
 - Writing isn't good
 - Computer crash, lost notebook..
 - No editor/agent/publisher/readers...
 - Rejection, Rejection, Rejection...
 - Not enough reviews, money, fame...
 - Falling rank, fame, interest, readers...
 - New project to start...
 - etc. etc. etc.



Applying: The Second Truth

The Origin of Suffering is Attachment

- Attachment?
 - **GREED (+) and FEAR (-)**
 - Acquisition and Loss
 - **Ego**
 - Shoulds / Should nots
- **The Writer's Attachments**
 - Lust for 'success'
 - Fear of rejection
 - Envy of other authors
 - Impatience
 - Self doubt
 - Disappointment
 - Hurtful reviews
 - Glowing fan mail
 - etc...



Applying: The Third Truth

The Cessation of Suffering is Attainable

- A Promise

- We are not doomed to this


SaWeeeet!

- The Three Jewels/Refuges

- The Buddha (the teacher)
- The Dharma (teachings)
- The Sangha (community)

The Three Jewels

- The Three Jewels are the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha
- Also known as Three Refuges.
- The Dhamma could not have been taught without the Buddha, and could not have been followed without the Sangha, so the three are inseparable.

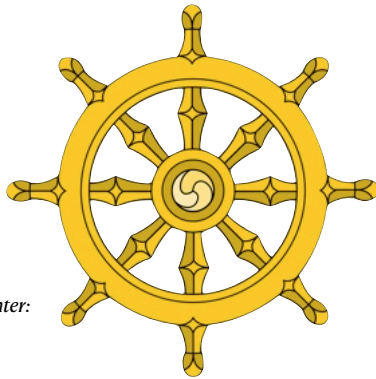


Applying: The Fourth Truth

Suffering can cease by following the Eightfold Path

- A Map to end suffering

- Wisdom
- Ethics
- Discipline

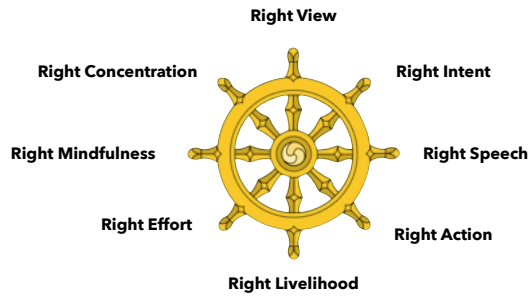


- Note the triple swirl in the center:
*For the Three Refuges or the Three Marks of Existence**

*Lesson Three

The Eightfold Path

“Right” = “Skillful”



The Eightfold Path

Right View

• Wisdom

- Understanding
- Remember the Noble Truths
- Remember the Teachings

Right View



• Writer Right View

- Recognize your EGO at work
- Your expectations
- Your reactions
- Your work flow
- *You know better, so know better*

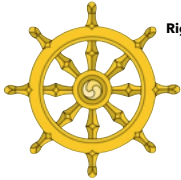
The Eightfold Path

Right Intent

• Wisdom

- Thought
- Have the desire to improve

Right Intent



• Writer Right Intent

- Foster a love of the craft
- Seek not perfection, but improvement
- Commit to working on your all the facets of your working

The Eightfold Path

Right Speech

• Ethical Conduct

- Communicate Truthfully and Well
- Three Gates:
Is it True, Necessary, Kind?

Right Speech



• Writer Right Speech

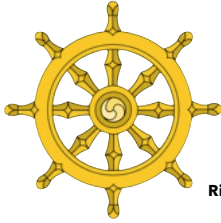
- Obvious call for good writing.
- A writer seeks TRUTH through their work (even if its fiction)
- Monitor not only what you write and say (communicate) but also what you CONSUME
 - to others
 - TO YOURSELF
- Is it "true"
 - Consistent? Necessary?
 - Avoid bad speech (Gossip)

The Eightfold Path

Right Action

• Ethical Conduct

- Act in an honorable way toward your goal



Right Action

• Writer Right (Write) Action

- A writer writes.
- Creative discipline for all aspects of writing
 - Time management
 - conceive, plan, write, edit, re-write, query, follow-up, try again, write more, market, meet, try something new, network, learn, experience, rejoice

The Eightfold Path

Right Livelihood

• Ethical Conduct

- Serve the world in a way that supports your goals



Right Livelihood

The only way to achieve your goals is to help others achieve theirs
"Service is Salvation"

• Writer Right Livelihood

- Gotta pay the bills
- Find a job that you don't hate
- One that does not belittle or threaten your life, your spirit, your goals, your family, your friends, your taste, your planet.
- GIVE BACK
- Help other writers

The Eightfold Path

Right Effort

• Mental Discipline

- Put in the Work



Right Effort

"Work looks like magic to those unwilling to do it"
— David Wong

• Writer Effort

- Hold yourself to a standard
 - Words per day?
 - Hours per week?
 - Meetings
 - Learning
 - Reading
 - Querying
- Deadlines are magical

The Eightfold Path

Right Mindfulness

• Mental Discipline

- Learn to notice and appreciate the present moment - Now

• Writer Mindfulness

- Writing is a Privilege
- Enjoy the process
 - Planning, drafting, editing etc. It's all wonderful
 - Enjoy!
 - (this is the only payment the universe guarantees you)
- ALSO
- Observational skills

Right Mindfulness



The Eightfold Path

Right Mindfulness Continued

- Learn to slow down and observe in daily life as well as during interesting moments
- This skill in particular will improve your life in general

- Be open
- Be non-judgmental
- No multitasking
- The 4 S's
 - Simple/ Short / Small / Slow

Right Mindfulness



- **GRATITUDE**
- Always gratitude

*"Good writing is remembering detail. Most people want to forget. Don't forget things that were painful or embarrassing or silly. Turn them into a story that tells the truth."
— Paula Danziger*

The Eightfold Path

Right Concentration

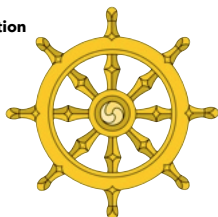
• Mental Discipline

- Learn to focus your mental energy
- Meditation

• Writer Concentration

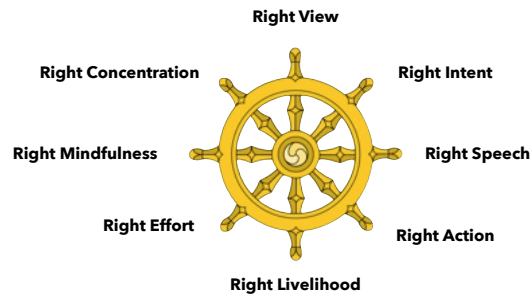
- Limit distractions
- Practice calming the mind
 - Making mental space
- Practice memory skills
- Practice visualization
- When working
 - ritualize
 - focus
 - perform

Right Concentration



The Eightfold Path

The Wheel Turns Together: Each Spoke Supporting the Others



Homework

Ponder these ideas. Be mindful. Be grateful. Be happy.

- Apply the Eightfold Path to something your life
 - Your commitments to work, family, weight loss, your life itself, etc.
(Not for sharing)
- Write for critique 400 words:
 - Sit down in your writing space, meditate if you want, then open your eyes, and observe it, really experience the place anew. Write about it - describe it. Color it as you see it. Use your senses. Not a list, but a moving portrayal of a sacred space. See it fresh. Appreciate it. Make me feel how it makes you feel.
 - Bonus: Fold in a theme of your life
 - Use STANDARD MANUSCRIPT FORMAT
 - Word or .pdf document sent to me at Johnny@johnnyworthen.com as an attachment by **Thursday night** before class (or bring copies to class)
 - We will read these together and comment/critique.
