

# Committing to the Path

Noirin Sheahan · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

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Right Intention is the second strand in the Noble Eightfold Path. In his book “A Whole Life Path”, Gregory Kramer distinguishes three levels at which we can practice Right Intention: moment to moment, bringing wise attention to each footstep, gesture, thought; episodic, where we make a good wish for a specific activity – e.g. before we go to a meeting, or open our emails; and overarching intentions, which are our guiding principles for life. Marriage vows are an example of overarching intention. So also is Lay Ordination, which I took last Sunday, on Buddha Day, confirming the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha as the cornerstone of my life and pledging harmlessness according to the five precepts. I did this to affirm that my life is dedicated to the Eightfold Path. While I’ve had that as a background motivation for decades and recommit every morning when we chant the Refuges and Precepts, it strengthens commitment to make the vows in public, at a formal ceremony witnessed by friends. We don’t like to let people down! The Buddha ranked guilt and shame as beneficial mind-states. They keep us within societies norms. Sadly, these same forces can be used to perpetuate prejudice, war, racial hatred. But when we chose wise friends, align ourselves with a tradition we trust, then our social instincts of guilt and shame foster traits like friendliness, compassion and generosity. One danger with making any vow is that we take the words too literally, get paralyzed with fear lest we make a mistake. It is painful to see ourselves fail to live up to our own expectations. That pain, when examined mindfully, persuades us to let go of tight definitions of right and wrong, trust that just being mindful of that tension between our aspirations and our habitual tendencies is to step along the path. Taken gently like this, the vows give a background frame to support us through life’s challenges. Feeling tired and despondent this afternoon, I remembered my ordination and ‘drudgery’ took on the hue of nobility. Life is dukkha after all, tiredness and despondency are only to be expected. What matters is that we embrace them willingly. Remembering the broader aspiration for my life allowed me to value each plodding step. Though the sensations and feelings reflected despondency, the heart saw in these the first noble truth and embraced them with curiosity and tenderness. After a retreat at Satipanya there is the option to take the Refuges and Precepts formally, and also chose a particular quality you would like to develop, such as equanimity, wisdom or patience; this quality then becomes your spiritual name – traditionally its translated into Pali. My name is Puñyanandi which means ‘Rejoicing in the Power of Goodness’. This balances my tendency toward over-effort and grasping; reflecting on ‘the Power of Goodness’ brings me beyond myself, helps me trust the wider world, develops gratitude for all the goodness I receive, joy that I can contribute to Satipanya and all that I perceive as beneficial. Lay Ordination is one aspect of ‘The Power of Goodness’. It reminds me to practice Right Intention, direct my life toward the end of suffering, resist habits that drag me into whirlpools of misery. It’s a safety rope. I hope you too will grasp that safety rope, take the Refuges and Precepts formally, make

those vows in public, choose a name that calls you home, to the stillness and peace of your true nature.

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