Finally, the third of the steps of virtue is Right Livelihood. What's interesting is that virtue is so infrequently spoken of in our culture, in our modern California culture anyway, because it's Victorian and old and repressive; it needn't be any of those things.

Virtue is on one level a training. It's learning to speak, to act, in our sexual life, in our business life, in our family life -- to train to act more consciously, more mindfully, more compassionately. And it takes practice. It is also, quite wonderfully, an expression of our awakening, a foundation of our awakening. You can't awaken if you're involved in killing, lying or stealing. Even in the more subtle levels of it, it's hard to pay attention. Your mind is caught up, busy, and paranoid. So it's a foundation for a clear mind, and the training of it is a foundation for being more mindful. But even more beautifully, it's the expression of an awakened heart and an awakened mind.

What is Right Livelihood? I will say some things about it without defining it completely. I'll say a lot of things. They're traditional teachings and some contemporary associations, and then maybe we can take a little time for discussion, especially if I get through them in relatively reasonable time.

I remember going to a conference recently with the Reverend Cecil Williams. I don't know if any of you have watched him on TV but he's great. He's a black minister of the Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco, who has done all kinds of very wonderful projects in the community and in the state for years. He got up and he spoke. It didn't come from his head. He spoke the way many black ministers are able to do, partly through the culture that allows it or embodies it, but his voice came from a place really deep, and he said to people, "What you need to learn is you need to learn about love." He put it out in such a powerful way. He said, "What I'm talking about is not what love you get, but how much love you give." He said it over and over in his speech in that kind of repetitive way of a preacher, and it was so beautiful. He kept saying it in different ways. "It's not how much love you get; it's how much you give."

I could just end the talk right now. It's really quite beautiful.

What is Right Livelihood? Right Livelihood, like the rest of these aspects of the Eightfold Path, is a path to become happier in our lives and to become enlightened or awakened. There are five aspects.

The first is non-harming. The traditional non-harming means not to take a
livelihood that involves weapons, or exploitation, or drugs, or things that hurt people. Not much more to say about it. You can look at it in your life and look at in the society you're around. If you don't do it, great; and if you see other people doing it, and there's a way that you can help it not to happen, do it. It's pretty simple. That's non-harming.

The second part of Right Livelihood is an appropriate happiness. There is a sutra from the Buddha that talked about appropriate happiness in Right Livelihood; First is the "having." It's essential to have a trade or a career. Even if you change it five times in your life, that doesn't matter. But to feel decent about yourself, it's really important or helpful -- I don't care how much money you have or what you have to do or don't have to do -- to have some way of contributing to society, because you're not happy if you don't contribute. So to find a trade or a livelihood or a career; maybe you use it for a while and then you change it. There's a happiness or a joy in having a career or having work that you can do. And if you haven't found it, it's really a crucial part of spiritual practice to look for it. It doesn't mean it's going to be some big special thing.

There's a mythology in our country that is false. It tells you that you can have whatever job you want; anyone who grows up here can be president -- God spare you -- and that you will find just the right job and it will make you happy, the perfect job for you, the one where your creativity and all your talents are used, and so forth. That is the same American myth like the one of the perfect relationship. I don't know how many of you are still looking for that. Is there anyone who hasn't gotten that one yet? Okay, you got that one. It's true about jobs too; there is not the perfect job. I had the perfect job, traveling around the world to glamorous places, getting a lot of care and respect, relating to people on issues of Dharma and meditation, sitting together. It really was wonderful. I got tired sometimes. People came and they called me in the middle of the night. There were things I didn't like about it. Plus which I couldn't have a house and I didn't settle down until recently. So I gave it up to teach in a different way because it wasn't as perfect as I thought it would be. It seemed perfect. It was wonderful.

There is no perfect relationship and there is no perfect job. Find one, or something, and really give yourself to it; that's a happiness. Secondly, there's a happiness in producing from the job, which is basically to make money. It's both producing goods or services for other people, which we'll get to, but it's also in having things and using them. And as householders, money is necessary, and it's fine, and that's part of our dharma, of our way of being in the world. And to have a career or to find some way to work, even if it's your career for a year or several years, and then to use it to create a home or to create the financial things that are appropriate for you, is great; it's really wonderful.

Also, in terms of being happy, there is a wide range to "using". It can be using in a very simple way or it can be using in a more extravagant way. You're not so
happy if it's based on a lot of indulgence. Not that you shouldn't do it, you're welcome to try it, but the people I know who have tried it for awhile found it not so satisfying. So there's a happiness in having a career and work, and in producing and using the things that come from it, including one's money. The third happiness is to be free from debt. That's a good one for our country, isn't it? Funny, it was said 2,500 years ago. It seems to still be true because you worry and you're anxious, and you struggle, and it really has to do with contentment. See if you can learn fundamentally or basically to live within your means.

I'm just going to put this stuff out about Right Livelihood. You can do what you want with it. It's not commandments or anything like that; it's suggestions. It says, "Wake up to these different areas of your life; that you're happier if you live within your means, and that people who don't, find themselves unhappy. Frankly, if you've ever lived in a Third World country or some simple situation for awhile, you discover you don't need one-quarter of what you think you do to be happy. You can live with a lot less than you think you can. And you can be as happy watching a sunset or taking a walk as having an extravagant night out on the town because you know how to relate to those things.

The third happiness is freedom from debt, "having and using," and the fourth is being free from blame or fault in your livelihood, from your work; that you do it not to please the world around you or because of what people will think, but you let it somehow come from inside; that what you choose, and where your actions come from, are not from how they look, because after a while you get caught by that, and you get into pain and sorrow, but that you start to reference inwardly to what matters and what you care about, and that affects your livelihood and your work.