A BUDDHIST STORYBOOK

The Eightfold Path

Maya and the Garden Fair

EIGHT CHAPTERS • AGES 8 TO 12

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Maya and her brother Leo have one week to get ready for the neighborhood garden fair. Along the way, they discover eight ways to meet the things that go wrong and care for the people around them.

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The Footprints by the Gate

Maya found the footprints on Monday, when the desert air was still cool enough to make her wish she’d brought a sweater. They went straight across the new bean bed. At the end of the trail lay two bent seedlings and a little green leaf that had come loose from its stem.

“Leo!” Maya yelled.

Her brother came around the shed carrying the watering can. “What?”

“Look what you did.”

Leo looked down at his sandals. Maya looked too. His soles made zigzags. The prints in the dirt had little circles, like the bottom of her own boots.

She lifted one foot. There they were. Circles.

Maya remembered taking a shortcut the evening before. She’d been carrying the big cardboard sign for Saturday’s garden fair. It was so wide she couldn’t see her feet. She’d been thinking about where to hang it and how nice her name would look in the corner.

“I did it,” she said, so quietly Leo leaned closer. “I stepped on them.”

He set down the watering can. “You sounded pretty sure it was me.”

“I was,” Maya said. That was the part that bothered her most.

Nana came out with three trowels tucked under her arm. She listened while Maya told her about the prints, the sign and the yelling.

“What hurt?” Nana asked.

“The beans,” said Maya. Then she looked at Leo. “And I guess I hurt you when I yelled.”

“Yep,” said Leo. He nudged a pebble with his toe.

They knelt in the dirt. One seedling straightened when Nana cupped a little soil around it. The other had snapped. Maya put it in the compost bucket and felt sad all over again. She’d planted that bean herself.

Leo brought over two flat rocks. Together they marked a place to cross between the beds. Then Maya carried the cardboard sign along the new crossing. She could still barely see over it, but this time she knew where to put her feet.

Nana called this a little lesson in Right View. The Buddha taught that suffering has causes and that understanding them helps us see a way to ease it. Maya had started with a guess. Looking closer helped her see what had happened and what she could do next.

On the back of her sign, she penciled a note for Saturday. “Show people where to walk.”

The Biggest Name on the Sign

On Tuesday, the sign was drying against the shed. It read GARDEN FAIR in blue paint. In the bottom corner, MAYA took up almost as much room as FAIR.

“I could add the gate and the path,” said Leo. “So people know where to come in.”

“There’s no room,” said Maya. She angled her elbow over the corner, which had plenty of room if you counted the letters of her name.

Leo shrugged. “Okay.” He took his pencil to the picnic table and began drawing on a piece of scrap paper.

Maya went back to painting. The brush left a long blue drip. She watched it creep toward her wrist and tried to remember when she’d decided the sign was hers. She’d brought the cardboard, but Leo had mixed the paint. Nana had cleared the garden beds. Their neighbor Mr. Ruiz had lent them the folding tables.

She still wanted people to see her name. She could almost hear Mrs. Bell, her teacher, saying, “Maya made that all by herself!”

That sounded good in her head. Out by the picnic table, Leo was drawing a little gate with a handle shaped like a leaf.

Maya carried the sign over and laid it beside Leo's drawing. "What if you put the gate here?" she asked, pointing to her name.

"On top of the M?"

"On top of all of it, I think."

She handed him the paint. Then she waited while he decided how to turn the big blue letters into a path. He used the two slanted sides of the M for the path's first bend. Maya had to admit it was a very good bend.

When the sign dried, Nana asked what had made her change her mind.

"I wanted everyone to see what I did," said Maya. "Then I wanted Leo to have room for his idea. I sort of wanted both."

Nana told her that the Buddha's path calls this Right Intention. It means choosing what you want your actions to do. You can loosen your grip on getting your own way and choose goodwill and care, even while a part of you still wants the biggest name on the sign.

Maya helped Leo prop up the sign so he could add the gate. His little leaf handle was hardly bigger than her thumbnail. It was the first thing she saw every time she looked.

What Maya Said at Lunch

By Wednesday, someone at school had heard the garden fair might be canceled.

“Leo broke the water barrel,” Tessa said at lunch. “My cousin told me.”

Maya knew the barrel had a leak. She’d watched Nana put a bucket under it that morning. She also knew Leo had been at school when they found it.

Across the table, Tessa was already turning to tell someone else. Maya opened her mouth. A sharp sentence was ready to jump out. You’ll believe anything, won’t you?

She could almost hear how it would sound. Everyone would look at Tessa. Tessa would probably get mad. And people might still go home thinking the fair was canceled.

Maya took a bite of her sandwich. It turned out to be hard to say something mean with a mouth full of peanut butter.

“I saw the leak this morning,” Maya said after she swallowed. “Nobody knows when it started. Nana says we’re still having the fair.”

“Oh,” said Tessa. She picked at the crust of her sandwich. “I already told Ava it was off.”

“Want to tell her together?” Maya asked.

They found Ava on the swings. Tessa said she’d passed along something she hadn’t checked. Maya told Ava what she knew, and Ava asked if there would still be lemonade.

“If we remember to buy lemons,” Maya said.

After school, Maya told Leo what she had said. She also told him about the other sentence, the one she’d nearly said to Tessa.

“I would’ve said it,” Leo admitted.

“I nearly did. Peanut butter saved me.”

They laughed. Then Leo asked, “Did Tessa really tell Ava herself?”

“Yeah,” Maya said. “I think that was the hard part for her.”

Right Speech is the name the Buddha gave to the practice of speaking truthfully and carefully. Words can spread a story that hurts someone. They can also set things straight. Maya had found a way to do that while leaving Tessa room to fix her own mistake.

Later, Maya wrote LEMONS on the shopping list. She knew exactly what would happen if she left that bit of information to chance.

The Lizard in the Bucket

On Thursday morning, Maya found a lizard in the bottom of an empty garden bucket. Each time it tried to climb, its toes slipped against the smooth plastic.

“Let’s show Nana,” Leo said. He reached for the handle.

Maya wanted a closer look too. The lizard had a stripe down its back, and she could see its sides moving fast. She crouched beside the bucket. Every time their shadows moved, the lizard scrambled again.

“Wait,” she said. “I think we’re scaring it.”

Nana was working on the other side of the shed. When Maya called her over, she looked into the bucket and asked them to find a spot near the low shrubs. Nana tipped the bucket there while the children stepped back. The lizard stayed still for a long moment. Then it zipped under the leaves so fast Maya saw only the tip of its tail.

“I wish I could’ve seen it longer,” Leo said.

“Me too,” said Maya. She turned the bucket upside down so nothing else could get trapped.

Later, Maya noticed a pair of shiny red gloves under the picnic table. Her own gloves had a hole right where she needed her thumb. The red ones fit perfectly.

“Those are mine,” said Tessa, coming through the gate. She held out her hand.

For one quick second, Maya wished she’d put the gloves back before Tessa saw her wearing them. Then she pulled them off. “Sorry. I should’ve asked.”

“You can borrow them after I’m done,” Tessa said. “I’m pulling up the weeds by the gate.”

Maya went to get her old gloves. She and Tessa worked side by side, pulling weeds and trying to see who could dig up the longest root. Maya won with a root as long as her shoelace. Tessa asked to borrow her trowel, and Maya handed it over.

Right Action is about what we actually do. The Buddha taught people to protect living beings and leave alone what hasn’t been offered to them. That morning, Maya helped a lizard get free. That afternoon, she began to see how much easier it was to share tools and gloves when people knew you’d ask first.

Before she went home, Maya checked the bucket. It was still upside down.

The Honest Plant Stand

On Friday morning, Nana and the children set up a stand for Saturday's fair. They were selling plants to pay for seeds for the next season. Nana had grown basil, marigolds and a flat of mystery seedlings whose labels had washed away.

"We could call them Rare Desert Flowers," Leo said. He held up a blank tag. "We might get twice as much."

"What if they're cucumbers?" Maya asked.

"Then somebody gets a surprise cucumber."

Nana smiled. "If you paid for a flower and got a cucumber, what would you think of our stand?"

Maya pictured herself carrying the pot home, watering it and waiting for a flower that never came. "I'd wish you'd just told me."

They wrote "Mystery seedlings. Free to take." They set out the plants they could name with clear prices and simple care instructions. Maya made the basil tags. She drew a sun on each one and wrote "Ask us how much sun it needs."

Mr. Ruiz came through the gate with his toolbox to fix a loose table leg. On weekdays he repaired bicycles. Maya asked him what he did if a customer asked for a new part they could get by without.

“I tell them when the old one still works,” he said. He crouched beside the table and turned a screw. “People count on me to know the difference.”

“Do you make less money that way?” Leo asked.

“Sometimes,” said Mr. Ruiz. He stood up and gave the table a shake. “This one needed a screw tightened. Imagine if I’d charged Nana for a new table.”

Right Livelihood is the Buddha’s teaching about earning a living in ways that are honest and avoid harm. The children were only running a little stand, but they could practice the same care Mr. Ruiz brought to his shop.

Maya looked over the plant tags one more time. She moved a basil plant with drooping leaves into the shade and fetched a watering can. When a neighbor stopped by to ask about it, she said, “That one needs a little time. I can show you the others.”

The neighbor chose a marigold. Before she left, she picked up a mystery pot. “I hope it’s a cucumber,” she said.

The Problem with the Paper Flags

On Friday afternoon, Maya and Leo tried to hang paper flags over the plant stand. The wind kept flipping the string over the fence. Then one end came loose and dropped the whole row of flags in the dirt.

“That’s the fourth time,” said Leo.

Maya snatched up the string. “It’s because you keep letting go!”

“I’m holding my end,” Leo said. He lifted his hand to show her. The knot had come undone on Maya’s side.

Maya wanted to say something louder. She could feel herself getting ready to do it. Then she remembered how it had felt to blame Leo for the footprints.

“Can we put this down for a minute?” she asked.

They sat on the shed step and drank water. A paper flag skittered past them. Leo put a foot on it. Maya watched it flap under his shoe.

“What if we hang them lower?” she asked. “The fence blocks some of the wind down here.”

They tried two flags at fence height. Nana showed them a knot that would hold. This time the flags fluttered a little and stayed put.

Maya looked at the pile of ripped paper. She wanted to throw all of it away. Then she saw that the blue flag Leo had painted was torn only at the corner. She folded the corner down and tied it onto the string again.

“Can we do three more before dinner?” Leo asked.

“Three sounds good,” said Maya. When they’d done three, she put the remaining flags in a box so the wind couldn’t take them overnight.

The Buddha taught Right Effort as a way to care for what’s growing in the mind. Maya paused before her frustration turned into another accusation. She let the urge to yell settle and gave patience a chance to grow. Hanging just a few flags helped them keep going kindly.

That evening, when Nana called them in, Maya took one last look at their row. One flag hung crooked. She left it there. In the wind, it looked as if it was waving goodbye.

The Busy Morning

On Saturday, Maya could hear the garden fair from the kitchen. The gate squeaked. Somebody laughed. A stack of paper cups fell over, and Leo announced that he was “perfectly fine” before anyone had asked.

Maya picked up the lemonade pitcher. She was supposed to pour the first cup. All at once she could picture herself spilling the whole thing down someone’s shirt.

“Come on!” Leo called from outside.

Her hands felt damp. Her shoulders had crept up toward her ears. She set the pitcher down on the counter.

Nana came in for a towel. She stopped beside Maya. “What’s happening right now?”

“I’m going to spill it,” Maya said.

Nana waited.

Maya looked down. The pitcher was sitting on the counter. Nothing had spilled. “I’m imagining spilling it,” she said. “And my hands are sweaty.”

She dried them on the towel. She felt both feet on the kitchen floor. Through the window she heard the gate squeak again. Her stomach still felt wiggly, but she could see the next thing to do.

“Could you carry the pitcher?” she asked Nana. “I’ll pour when it’s on the table.”

Outside, a little boy in a sun hat held out a cup with both hands. Maya filled it halfway. The boy took a sip and pulled a face.

“Too sour?” Maya asked.

“Just enough sour,” he said, and drank the rest.

Then another person came up to the table. Maya noticed that her shoulders had gone up again. She let them drop a little. She asked Leo to take over pouring while she set out more cups. By the time she came back, the little boy had brought his grandmother for a taste.

Right Mindfulness is the practice of noticing what is happening in your body, your feelings and your mind. Maya had noticed her worry and the tightness in her shoulders. She had also noticed a plain fact. The pitcher was safely on the counter. Paying attention to what was happening gave her room to decide how she wanted to begin.

By noon they needed a second pitcher. This time Maya and Leo carried it together, with one hand each on the handle.

A Place to Come Back To

After the fair, there were two marigolds left, a handful of coins and a sticky patch on the lemonade table. Maya wanted to tell Nana everything at once. The mystery seedlings had all gone. The little boy had brought back his cup. Somebody had asked if there would be another fair.

Nana carried two cushions to the shade beside the bean bed. “Sit with me for a bit?” she asked.

Maya could still feel the fair buzzing in her head. She sat down anyway. Nana invited her to pick one place where she could feel her breathing. Maya chose the little movement under her hand where it rested on her belly.

One breath came in. One went out.

Then she remembered the money box. Had Leo put the lid on it? She almost opened her eyes to go check. Then she felt her hand rise with the next breath.

A bird called from the fence. Her mind went with it for a moment. When she noticed, she came back to the movement under her hand.

After a while, Maya opened her eyes. The money box was still there, lid on. The garden sounded the same, but she had stopped trying to follow every sound at once.

“Does your mind go off and check things too?” she asked.

“Oh, yes,” said Nana. “I come back.”

The Buddha called the deep steadiness of a mind gathered in meditation Right Concentration. Sitting with Nana, Maya had practiced a small beginning. She gave her attention a place to rest and returned to it each time her mind wandered.

As they put the cushions away, Maya noticed Leo standing at the gate with the cardboard sign under his arm. A little girl was pointing to the leaf handle he’d painted.

“Can I see the beans?” she asked.

Maya almost said they were done for the day. Then she looked at Leo. He leaned the sign against the fence, and she held the gate open.

“Come with me,” Maya told the girl. “I know where we can cross.”

She led her to the two flat stones. Just beyond them, the little bean plant they’d helped on Monday had opened a new leaf.

About the Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path is a Buddhist teaching about understanding suffering and practicing a way to bring it to an end. These eight parts work together. On the same day, Maya might notice a worried thought, speak honestly and choose a kind action.

In the names of the eight parts, “right” points to what helps us see clearly, live with care and train the mind. Everyone has moments when they get carried away. Each time you notice, you have another chance to practice.

For grown-ups reading along, these stories offer everyday introductions to teachings with deeper meanings in Buddhist practice. Maya’s short sit beside the beans is an introduction to steadying attention in meditation.

A traditional source

An Analysis of the Path (Magga-Vibhaṅga Sutta, SN 45.8), translated by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/SN/SN45_8.html