

Seven Factors of Awakening - Introduction - (Part 1)

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So good morning and welcome to our Dharma practice day. And these Dharma practice days are meant to explore the Dharma or the practice in a variety of different ways on different days. The difference sometimes is a lot of meditation, sometimes a lot of discussion, sometimes teaching a variety of things, depending on the topic and everything, and the theme for today is called the Seven Factors of Awakening. And it's part of a particular discourse the Buddha gave, one of the discourses that probably gave the clearest instructions the Buddha gave on meditation practice. And so you want to know what the Buddha had to say about meditation, you'd read the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, and this whole series of instructions there of how to do meditation practice, and starting with breath meditation, and being centered on the body, and variety of things, said Wilina. And so over this last year, we've gone over much of that.

Those exercises are that approach to meditation. And then, today, we come to almost the penultimate, right? Is a penultimate the second to last kind of approach of meditation, which is that of the seven factors of awakening. And one of the ways of understanding the discourse, the instructions the Buddha gave on mindfulness, is that usually when people relate to their life, relate to life, we do it not neutrally in an unbiased way, but we usually have a bias. We have a framework or understanding, a view through which we see, experience our life. And so if you're, you know, if you're sixteen, and mostly you're interested in sex, then you orient yourself towards life around that particular framework, perhaps much of the time.

Or if you're interested in money, then you're always looking at how this relates to my acquiring money. Or keeping it. And that's kind of like the frame that you're looking at. Or if your frame might be safety, and so some people may dramatize, and so you're always looking at things through the framework of, How can I be safe here? Or there's the framework of some sense of self: This is who I am and now. This is how my self imagines to be or something.

And so how does it support, how does this enhance, how does this threaten my sense of self? Any situation, that's a framework that we look at the situation. And so the idea is that it's very seldom that we're actually present in a neutral way, and just present for how things are. The Buddha recommended that there were certain frameworks that are helpful and useful if you are interested in liberation, full awakening. And one of the frames and so there exists The Four Foundations of Mindfulness we've been talking about over the year is offering a variety of frames of reference to help us, kind of, or wean ourselves, understand what's important in the present moment, what we need to look at. So the frame, a reference of our breath, to looking at our experience from the point of view of our breath breathing in the middle of our life, and what happens to our breathing, what goes on with our breathing, working with our breath.

That's much more important than focusing on our finances. For example, if you want to attain liberation. So also our bodies, tremendous emphasis on mindfulness of the body. And so to constantly come back and use the body as a reference point for our experience, rather than our self image, our inner sense of the body, not the self image of our body. And to use the reference point of the feeling tone of our experience, the immediacy of the feeling tone, to use the frame, the reference point of our mental states. And for today, the reference point is that of the seven factors of awakening.

And these are the wholesome qualities of mind, the helpful qualities of mind that get developed as people do Buddhist practice, and which are intentionally cultivated and encouraged and enhanced as we practise. And so you can, in a sense, these are the kind of the mental qualities that need or that need to be in place to let a person have the foundation for awakening and freedom. So these seven factors are the—these are all qualities of our own minds, our own hearts. They are all qualities that are available to all of us, and some of us have them to small degrees, may be present for ourselves. And as we practise, the idea is to let these become stronger, to become strengths within us, more prevalent, pervasive experience in our lives and the mind. And so, in order for them to get stronger and become more readily available, first we have to be able to recognize them and we have to build the value of them and value them enough that they become a frame of reference, to become a reference point for understanding our experience.

So when you go into some situation, you can ask yourself, Are these present? How are they present? Can I cultivate them? Can I tap into them? Can I evoke them? So rather than again, looking at the experience as, what will I do this to my self image? What will it do for my reputation? Will people like me or not? That's off, you know. Put those things aside, and look at,

how does this relate to the cultivation of these beautiful qualities in myself?

So these seven qualities are: first is mindfulness. The second is for now, I'll call it investigation, investigatory mind. The third is energy or effort. The fourth is joy. The fifth is tranquillity. The sixth is concentration. And the seventh is equanimity.

The Other Seven Factors of Awakening In the teachings of the Buddha, these seven factors are extremely important. So what we're going to do today is I'm going to introduce you to these Seven Factors of Awakening in the form of basically guided meditations. So the day will be made up of meditating kind of ideas, more or less forty-five minutes of meditation, and fifteen minutes to walking for going to the bathroom, whatever else you need to do, and then coming back. And during another forty-five minutes or so of meditation, and we just do that through the day and we'll take forty-five minutes for lunch. So shorter than usual. I hope that people have lunch with you. If you don't, then maybe there's some place you can get a quick bite nearby.

And now the encouragement at lunch time will be that you eat a light lunch, because we can continue this practice right into the afternoon. We don't want you to be kind of really lethargic, having overeaten at lunch time. It's better to eat just lightly and have more energy, becoming more alert. And so as we go through the day, it will go progressively through these seven factors of awakening. So by hopefully, by the end of the day, you have some experiment, hopefully some experiential sense in your own experience, your own life, your own mind and heart, your own body, of these seven factors. That's the plan. How does that sound?

So we'll keep the day except for my talking. We'll keep the day in silence. Lunch in silence. We keep in silence and engage in this practice. Yes, yes, Bruce is recording it, okay? So we'll begin.

So take a comfortable, alert posture, and perhaps the operating word is alert. Sit up straight and use your posture, care, taking care in your posture, to begin cultivating a sense of presence in your body, a sense of being here. If you've ever experienced someone who was really present for you, you felt that their attention, not just the attention of their eyes or their attention, but their whole being was kind of really there, alert, present, engaged with you. In the same way, take a few moments to enter your posture, your body, and see if you can find a sense of presence being present in this body. A huge part of what mindfulness is is presence, a presence of mind, a presence of attention, a presence of attention that we can apply to our breath or our body or different things. So either somehow find a presence of mind, a presence of attention to help with this.

It may be useful to take some long, slow, deep breaths. Really let the feel the almost like the breath, or the movements of breathing fills your body. You breathe in almost like the air of the breath. This may be something clear and refreshing. It can refresh, move through your body, and refresh your whole body. And as you exhale, you can allow whatever concerns, worries, anxieties, preoccupations you have, whatever negative feelings you might have, let them kind of just kind of flow out with the breath.

Breathe in refreshingly, and then breathe out whatever is there that might be standing in the way, getting in the way of being here and now. Breathing in deeply, and then as you exhale, softening your body, letting your belly be relaxed, your chest. Perhaps a softening of the shoulder blade area. And then let your breath return to normal. Here you are here. There's something phenomenally precious and important about here where you happen to be.

Having a sense of presence or attentiveness always involves here. And as a synonym for mindfulness, presence is nice because it's something embodied. It's not a mental knowing in and of itself, but a kind of a physical knowing. And as you breathe in, notice how the body experiences breathing in. Notice how the body experiences breathing out. Notice how the experience of breathing in is different than the experience of breathing out.

And in being mindful of them, there is a choice that's being made: deliberateness to being present, being engaged with attention, with awareness, with presence. Here in this time and place, though, with mindfulness, there is a presence, a sense of being present for the breath, presence from the inside of the experience. It doesn't matter how you are breathing this, there is a presence for how it is. And there's also a very simple knowing. It goes along with that presence. It can be as simple as knowing that you're breathing in, knowing you're breathing out, there can be a very simple knowing that the mind wants to drift off into thoughts or other concerns.

There can be a very simple knowing of feelings, emotions that might be making it might be helpful or hinder your ability to be present for the breath in whatever you know. And you also meet it with a presence, being really present for it in an embodied way, clear way, relaxed way. If there are ways you feel uncomfortable, notice the knowing of that. Let there be a knowing of that. Very simple mindfulness knowing that's not for or against. And then coming back always to the breath, the breath within the breath, the breath that's just the breath, with a sense of presence, embodied presence for the breathing.

The very simple knowing—knowing that you know, knowing you're present, knowing that you're engaged, knowing that this is breathing in, is breathing out. If the mind wanders off before coming back to the breath, come back to knowingness, a presence. Knowingness is

the thinking mind. This is wandering off. This is being present for that. Another way of talking about mindfulness is talking about attending to something. Our presence, our attention, attends to the breath, attends to breathing in, to breathing out.

You can also attend to the judgments you might be having, our expectations without its going wonderful quality of attending, almost like compassion attending to your experience but not caught by it, not being for or against it. And with the foundation of presence, mindfulness, knowing. You can use that knowing to look more closely, to investigate, almost with a question: What is this? Simply look carefully so you can look at the breath, not just simply be present for it, but add to that presence that discerning awareness that discerns, sees the sensations that go with breathing. Here there is expansion, movement, pressure, tautness, warmth, coolness. And then there could be a contraction, a letting go, a lightening.

There can be an investigation into what parts of the body move in relationship to your breathing, only knowing the quality of those movements, the texture of those movements. Not thinking about the breath, but almost like having a little magnifying glass. You begin seeing some of the details of breathing, the physical details of sensations in your body, the details of the felt sense or whatever you are paying attention to. It's said that investigation is a beautiful quality of the mind, a natural quality. So to be present, and then allow whatever you are present for to reveal itself more clearly, more fully. We start seeing the details here and now.

Felt sense, experiential details, not what you think about it, what you prefer. With the immediacy of the details, whether it's your breathing, body sensation, sounds, or the traffic, what's going on in your mind, there can be a kind of childlike wonder that allows you to take it in, see it clearly, sensing it, feeling it with more intimacy. The details bit is a really beautiful quality. And it's a whole study, a whole long process of learning how to cultivate and appreciate it, or even what it is. But one way to understand it is that it's something very simple that's just bringing our presence or mindfulness to what is. And one way of going with that is to have this idea that in each moment of life, each living moment, there's always something which needs attention, needs attending to, needs our presence in the present moment.

If you're drifting off in thought, you can't be that presence. So what is it that needs our attending to, our presence? It could be the breath. That's very helpful. It could be our body. It could be our feelings. Could be our thinking mind, and that in learning to attend to what is part of the art. The beauty of this mindfulness is that it's not for or against what experience is. We sometimes talk about having non-reactive awareness. It's a beautiful thing to learn to have a quality of non-reactive awareness.

That awareness just kind of can learn to hold what's there. And if you're struggling with the mindfulness practice, then it's interesting to back off, back up, get a kind of bird's eye view, and see: Is there something that you've left out? Something else actually needs attention. What is it that needs attention here? Because when you find what really needs attention, chances are that you're not going to struggle. So if you're trying to be with the breath, but really you're feeling irritated, there's going to be tension then between the breath and irritation. So it can sometimes help to back off, back up like a bird's eye perspective, and just kind of take in, All what needs attention here is irritation. And I can do that in a very broad, accepting way, a kind of non-reactive way, not for or against irritation, but then being with that experience, being present for that broadly, spaciouly, openly. What's this like?

And as mindfulness becomes stronger and you're able to stay in the present moment, it becomes like a muscle that's become strong, that you become stabilized in the present moment. You're not always wandering off or lost in thoughts. That gives you the opportunity to use that as a foundation to look more carefully, to investigate. This is a very important quality of the path to awakening is that we are beginning to see more deeply, more clearly what actually is, what our experience is. Sometimes it's wishful thinking that, Oh, if I just be present and get concentrated, something will happen. I'll get enlightened. But actually, it also requires learning to see more deeply, to look at the details of our experience with clarity.

Whether it's the experience of looking very clearly at a flower or Thích Nhất Hạnh has you feel your taste the orange really clearly. We sense that orange-ness of the orange. Or was listening to the details of a car. They won't start, or that you're getting a sense of the details. Your breath. You don't. So there's that mindfulness quality, and then that somewhat established. Then there can be this investigation. And now, and I'd like to think of investigation as being a kind of natural thing, many of us is at the theater. You know, it feels like work because we're not used to it. But if you see a young child, it's very natural to kind of be completely involved sometimes in the most simple kind of things, which we now take for granted.

So that's enough for now, and I'll talk more about that. We'll do other little exploration of investigation in the next sitting. But as you take this fifteen minutes now, to, can I go to the bathroom or do some walking meditation, to walk around the block if you want quickly, whatever you feel like you need to do before the next sitting. See if you can do it next fifteen minutes with a sense of being, of presence. A is here, and he's a kind of presence at present. Not thinking, it's kind of a sense of presence that emanates from you, not from you. And presence perhaps is not even personal. It's almost like you don't even do it. Maybe that's why people talk about the presence of God, because it's not like you are not doing this, but this sense

of presence, of being here in your body and feeling, and you're here. And then keep it silent, silent, silent. It.