

2014-05-18 Factor of Awakening Investigation

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Good morning. So I'd like to talk about what's called a factor of awakening. In our tradition of meditation practice, there are sevens. Psychological functionings that come into play as the practice deepens. And these seven are called the seven factors of awakening. And the second one is called the factor of usually in English is called factor of investigation. And it follows the first which is mindfulness. And the idea is to work together and mindfulness is kind of the foundation and based on that foundation, then there can be investigation. And there are many ways of understanding the specter of investigation. When I was in Burma, it was emphasized quite a bit and with language of penetrating investigations where they look deeply into something to use the mind Not just be present for something, but to kind of look through it or deeply into it what's really here. And one of the things that I learned through that kind of penetrating investigation was how much of our my experience I think much of our experience is mediated through abstract concepts. And that as we begin to look more carefully, what we penetrate is the concepts of things. So we can see more deeply what's actually happening below the concepts that we overlay on our experience with this word, that the Pali word for and that's translated as investigation has another meaning. And I kind of like these days, the other and more literal meaning of it, it means to distinguish or differentiate. And what that helps me with at least is that investigation to easily implies a kind of probing or And now even analysis of our experience, right. Try to really analyze it deeply what's actually going on being an investigator, you know, Detective of the Dharma. The, but the literal meaning of the word is a bit vicaya and vicaya are more literally means to differentiate or distinguish. And what I said to distinguish is damas, dharmas and probably the best possible the best translation for this technical word dharmas is things that differentiate things or states are what's kind of what's differentiated what's going on here. And so part of the function of mindfulness practice is to bring forth our capacity to make better and better distinctions between what's going on here. So we don't see things in the abstract, but see things in the particularity of what's actually happening in the moment. So mindfulness itself also has different meanings of how it's practiced. Mindfulness is the practice of using our attention to, or engaging our intention. So that attention is really present for our present moment experience. And how attention is used for that purpose can vary from situation situation. Different people find different uses of Attention, attention, most useful for them. For some people, what's most helpful is directed attention. Someone tells them pay attention to the breath, they just turn their attention directed at the breath, and they just stay there. And that works really well for them. Other people, the idea of directed attention is doesn't work so well, partly because it's maybe there's too much self in the effort, too much expectation like I have to succeed. That's something to do here. And they bring a lot of doing into it. And the very doing of Because there's things up and actually sometimes people tie themselves in knots and, and trying to do too much. And so rather than directing attention, some people find it much more helpful to, to not do to undo rather than doing attention. They mostly practice letting go of the distractions, letting go the preoccupations that interfere with the natural functioning of

awareness. That awareness is something that we're, we're always doing we're pretty much always aware. Some people would say that there's a certain kind of awareness operating even in sleep. But there's awareness is always happening. And as some of you know, I've done this regularly here that I like this exercise where I get to tell you to stop paying attention. Just stop being aware. Cut it out.

And, and what happens to some people is that if you tell them to pay attention, they try her Quickly, they keep, you know, the mind wanders off, they come back and they keep trying and trying. And as soon as you tell them to stop, and just cut it out completely, they can't help but be aware. It just like operates in spite of themselves because there's a natural functioning of the perceptual processes are always operating some degree. And so we're aware. So rather than having directed attention, some people find it helpful to have the language of allow attention, get out of the way of awareness of mindfulness and, and let it just kind of surface arise from within, in a kind of holistic way. The directed attention. The first type, as I said, works very well for some people. But it has a little shadow side or difficult side sometimes. And that is it's easy to divide our lives between what we think we should pay attention to, and what we shouldn't pay attention to divide our life between the doers In what's being done or what's being done to. And so, it can reinforce for some people, the tendency to live divided lives, fragmented lives to a very sharp separation between self and other self in activity. And in that sharp divide, there can be a lot of suffering. The, the kind of awareness that we allow awareness to surface, we kind of get out of the way. It tends not to divide so much It tends not to create an awareness where we're separate from our experience, but rather it's more holistic and that allows whatever is occurring to arise in that open field of awareness. And so that allows for things are included, and rather than not excluded, the direct attention can sometimes exclude the, the allowing awareness can include everything. The downside The allowing awareness is that it's sometimes way too easy to let the mind perpetuate a certain kind of inbuilt indulgence or addiction to thinking and, and that you know. And so rather than letting thinking kind of get quiet, the thinking just barrels, you know, kind of mood continues uninterrupted, because we're just allowing everything to be there. But it's not so helpful and not people who's been maybe a long time, thinking they're meditating. It was mostly they weren't there. They weren't being mindful, they're being thoughtful. And just kind of thinking there's a lot of things to be and they just allow their thinking to gallop ahead. And so they're, you know, both sides have their pluses and their minuses. These are the different ways in different times in people's meditation life. different approaches are useful, sometimes more than directed, sometimes more than allowing, but the point is But not so much which way is right or wrong, but rather to come to ability to no longer have the mind distracted from the present moment, to no longer be spending a lot of time in fantasy, a lot of time thinking about the future, about the past, or a lot of time caught up in discursive thinking, in analyzing the situation in very discursive way. And so the function of mindfulness is to get us into this place. And many people find that being present in this way, is relaxing, is a calming because a lot of the stresses of rely agitation of our life comes from the mind being overly busy caught up in its concerns and activities and, and worries. And so there's something about for many people of coming into the present moment where our worries don't exist, that things quiet down, and the mind becomes quieter. Another way of referring to that is that the mind becomes clear and Part of the function of mindfulness practice is to cultivate a clear seeing a clear mind that can see clearly what's here. So the analogy would could be that, you know, I'm nearsighted and if I take my glasses off I can I, you know, I could say that I see. Yeah, I can see. But I don't see much. But I can tell there's a sea of people out there. And, but, you know, it's, I actually can't see your faces. You know, maybe I can see Chris's face you know, because but kind of, I think he has glasses on. And, but further than that, it's like just the faces become just as this blur of color.

And, and so, you know, I'm not seeing clearly but if I put on my glasses, then I said now I can see clearly now I can see what I see what I couldn't see before. And I can distinguish people, different

people. And I can distinguish the people but I can distinguish different aspects of all of you, I can notice that you have eyes and nose and mouth, which I kind of didn't only knew because of memory when I had my glasses off, it was just a blur of color. And it's useful to distinguish these different aspects, it's useful to distinguish different qualities of what goes on around you. I can I can notice your facial expressions, I can notice, you know different things about you. If I can notice, you know, your eyes or your nose in your mouth, or we know what's going on or your gestures, what's happening. And so the ability to see clearly allows us to distinguish, and this is a very important part of human life, the ability to distinguish differentiate what's happening to and part of the function of mindfulness meditation is to get us to a place of practice. Where the mind naturally will start making clear distinctions or differentiations of what's happening in the moment. Not because we're analyzing it, but because just like putting on the glasses, it becomes pretty straightforward to see these distinctions. And why that's helpful for us is that when we are abstract about our life when we, you know, life is very complicated. I'd like to think of human life as being a individual life and then let alone our social life is a very complicated ecosystem of many, many factors. Social interpersonal, psychological, emotional, historical, many things come together. And it can just seem like a buzzing swirl of activity that just seems kind of like confusing, we don't quite understand. And the Buddhist tradition kind of holds that one of the reasons Problems with human suffering is that human suffering tends to be confusing when people don't really see clearly what's happening when they're under a lot of stress, when there's a lot of distress, when there's a lot of sorrow or grief. And so it's just confusing to understand what's going on here. There was an article today. And I read it in the BBC News about teenagers in Northern Ireland. And they said that 10% of teenagers in Northern Ireland have contemplated harming themselves suicide or cutting themselves or something. And their article or their study is considered that the reason for that is that there's a lot of stresses in their lives. And it's a way of dealing dealing on feelings the right word with their stresses But they don't they can't differentiate between what stresses are fed to them from from society. And so they think they're to blame. And so there's kind of a self criticism that's part of that wanting to hurt themselves. And so what they need to be taught, I suppose, is that we live in a society where there's a lot that society has a lot of demands on people, a lot of stress. One of the I don't know if it's still the case, but 10 years ago, there was a book about high school students in Palo Alto and talked about the tremendous stresses they were under for success, and how some of these high school students back then were taking speed and different kinds of drugs in order to really stay up, up on top of their studies and really kind of progressing, get along and talk the book talks about how much stress these students were under. I can see that with my my, my son who's in high school, and when I compare it to my high school days, I mean, it was, you know, it was really relaxed you know, college, college college there wasn't much You know, there wasn't much concern about you know, I was the impression I got mine You know, for me and do well in high school. I mean, no one was watching. So, and there wasn't very much demand my son, you know, can't hear out there. Other people hear out there. You can hear out there. You might want to use the hearing system device if you can't hear because I don't know if most people out there can hear. Okay.

So I think my son is getting a much better high school education that I got and I look back at my education, why I hardly learned anything. And and, you know, I missed a lot of classes and the but I you know, but my son he gets he's getting a very good education but I could see that he's under a lot of stress stresses the right to work but he works really hard it gets tired from all the work he does. And so the idea of success of getting into good college and all this stuff is some tea in your teens live under. It's stressful. And some of these messages come from society and family. This is what you have to do. And so what this study in Northern Ireland said that rather than understanding of stress has come from society, the values of society around them. They blame themselves and in that blaming, they suffer, right? So there's an example where the researchers or the psychologists would like to help the teens differentiate the sources of their stress that they're under, understand where it comes from, and

understand what goes on in our society. It confusing they don't understand then a confusion. Some people blame themselves. Some people do the opposite. They're under a lot of stress and a lot of pain. And what they do is they believe Blame everyone else, blame others. And that's what they're good at doing. And you know, that's a coping mechanism. And so the when the mind gets quiet and be able to see clearly, we start seeing what the details are what's going on the particulars of what's going on. And that differentiation is very helpful. Not only is it helpful, but it's in Buddhist region says it's liberating it can free us, because we see where the freedom is in the situation. And it also offers a tremendous power, personal power to see clearly understand what's going on. So the so there's many things that get differentiated. So a very simple one that we say is we differentiate an experience and our reaction to it as being two separate things. So if there's a lot of traffic noise happening while we're meditating And the traffic note a lot of late yesterday we've meditated here and there a lot of banging across the street. They were doing construction work during our meditation. So the banging is what's happening, but our reaction is distinct. And I've been in I've met been meditation situations where there was a terrible noises that should not happen in meditation center. Absolutely not. And it those noises were interfering with my meditation practice, don't they realize that I bring up some great breakthrough and, you know, my, my precious meditation it's so important than And who are these people who are not paying attention being disrespectful and if someone needs to talk to these disrespectful people don't they realize how important I am in my meditation and, you know, it's, you know, it's all about them, and that noise but you know, my reaction is distinct from the noise. And I've actually gone full circle sometimes I kind of full circles right where it becomes the other side. Where I eventually saw my reaction to the noise and was able to put down my reaction. And the same noise continued. It was just noise and excitement. In fact, sometimes the noise became my friend, because it helped me stay in the present moment. Turned out, I wasn't so good to be in the present so good at being in the present moment. And my mind would drift off, bang, bang, oh, the present might think of the mindfulness hammer, bang, bang. And I came to appreciate it, rather than you know, his whole story about my meditation and how it's interfered with me. So to sit quietly and begin to tease apart the experience and the reaction is important. Also within the reaction to begin teasing apart the different aspects of it, to distinguish between, for example, the what's emotional emotional response from the beliefs that are operating, and to see Oh, there's a belief here, my meditation how important it is. And so you know, and the emotion is maybe one of distress at first, or one of anger, indignation. To see these are two different things, which are that has priority, where do I bring my attention to where does where can work what makes the most difference? To really notice, then if you kind of stay present and watch that differentiate, then at some point, you start seeing that there's a place of choice. And the place of choice is sometimes very hard to see.

But the whole Buddhist enterprise has a lot to do with allowing, letting things be becoming quiet, letting reality show itself trusting reality in a certain way, the unfolding of it, trusting the Dharma, but so that we can see clearly, until such a point we'll be see where we have a choice. At some point we know and it can be quite surprising to see it's see the place where I just, there was a sound. There was a thought, this is interfering with my meditation. And then there was a choice, do I pick that thought up? Do I get involved in it? Or do I leave it alone? And you see, oh, it's just a thought. And the ability to differentiate a thought, is just a thought. To see it clearly. Oh, it's a thought is it can be phenomenally significant event, because then you can be wise about that thought. But if you don't see a thought as a thought, which I think in ordinary life, it's probably fair to say that we don't clearly see a thought is just a thought. Thoughts are important thoughts are alive some people I am because I think, you know, there's no you know, it's inconceivable that you know, that, you that you could even exist If you weren't thinking and some people are frightened to let go of their thoughts, because they're so closely identified with it. And so we're so we're involved so much that we don't see it as thoughts. The example I gave yesterday was, I think twice I think in there many years I lived here in the peninsula. I don't know if it has to do with a particular exit, but there's an exit onto at the page mill exit, going south. And I was happily driving

along. And of course, they got off at page mill and I missed the exit. I was I was driving safely enough, I was paying attention, but I was, you know, involved in some kind of thoughts. There was more interesting than the exit and it's it's kind of consequential at that exit because the next exit exit is far away. Elmont is kind of a little bit far. So you know exactly No, I didn't know I just thought was I thought I was living in a thought that was caught up in the thought that was perpetuating a thinking, which is appropriate enough sometimes. But when there's really a lot of clear seeing, we see a thought is just a thought. And there's and then we can just leave it alone we see the place of choice, or you see an emotion as just an emotion not to dismiss it or belittle it, but rather, so that we can just maybe respect it and leave it alone. Most emotions, I think it's useful to see most emotions as byproducts. As rather than something primary as bright products, the causes and conditions come together. And there's an emotional response that happens to situation and we don't have to see it as good or bad as long as we don't act on some of them. But to see it, oh, like so today. I am grumpy because I'm not grumpy, but, but you know to see all this grumpiness or irritation. It just the irritation is there. Because of causes and conditions and, and to see it clearly helps us then avoid being fooled by the lens of irritation. And you know, so we see that we don't, we are more careful than we go around the world. We don't assume automatically that how we see things is true when everyone's irritating us. So just the irritation is a byproduct we're not you're not wrong or bad for having it these byproducts, but you are response a bowl for what you do next. So this is a place of choice. So you can see Oh, there's irritation. I just leave it alone or I'll be careful or I'll tell my friends warn them. This is what's happening you should know. And because you see it for what it is, and then maybe you don't say the things that come out of the irritation because you're you see those as just, you know see if where they are so investigation wanted meanings for this dumb of the child is to make better and better distinctions better and better differentiations that become skillful in this capacity. And actually the English word skill. I believe in it. Dramatic kind of roots of the word means to differentiate, to separate out. And you know, you can see that some FM is really good at a skill, they get better and better and finer and finer, refined distinctions about how to do their skills, like someone who's a swimmer, you know, it's pretty easy to swim, you just kind of flop your arms round, you know, and you put your arm in front of you and then you push it to pull it through the water and, you know, but the better and better swimmer, you are very, very refined little distinctions are noticed that support and kind of make the swimming better and better.

So this idea of being able to distinguish and differentiate becomes important. And a swimmer who pays a lot of attention is very clear, starts noticing all these little distinctions and how they're consequential over time. So, meditation practice mindfulness meditation practice does have an important component of relaxation. But a lot of people over emphasize the relaxing quality of meditation, as if they're kind of load themselves into deeper and deeper calm. Partly because it's a nice antidote to being a stressed out life. It's a relief to have it. But we don't want to over emphasize relaxation in this tradition, as important as it is, but we also remember that an important quality is this quality of see clearly, and in seeing clearly, to make distinctions to make differentiations. And I would, I would oppose that our ability to make distinctions is also allows us to respect things much more carefully and if that's true For the people you encounter, to see everyone is the same, has a certain wisdom, but it also misses the particularity of people. And to see to be able to distinguish people, by their particularity is the foundation for I think, real genuine respect for people, all the differences, individual, familial, cultural, ethnic, all the different ways that people are different from each other. I think it's possible then to, you know, respect to appreciate to celebrate differences, if we if we see the distinctions that are there. Same thing within us, the better distinctions we can make within us of all the different factors going on, become wise at how our mind works, thoughts, feelings, emotions, beliefs. It's possible to respectfulness and I'd like to pause it. I like to believe that mindfulness practice is a practice of very profound respect for every possible thing that we encounter. That it doesn't mean we respect doesn't mean that we condone it. It doesn't mean that we just continue doing certain things. But everything, everything's respected everything is given a second look, everything is allowed to be as it is. And as we respect and allow

things to be, then we also find a place of choice. And more and more we find there's a place with choice where we can be free. And that place of freedom is this, the place where suffering comes to an end.

So just like with mindfulness, sometimes mindfulness is directed. And sometimes it's more something that's allowed to happen. Same thing with this factor of investing. ideation or differentiation, sometimes we, we intentionally take our attention and look more carefully to really see what's here to begin differentiating teasing apart. And sometimes, we don't make any directed efforts to do that. But we allow the mind get quieter and more open and, and present, and then allow the differentiation to show themselves. And what's nice about the second way of getting quiet that makes so much of work about analyzing or investigating, just allowing the differences to show themselves over time, is that it's very respectful because reality might know better what you need to pay attention to than you do. So if you're directed you might think you've know what needs to be done. But the reality probably has a better idea what what's needed. And so we allow to let it show itself and finally, in The Buddhist tradition used to be passed in a tradition that we're in. As the practice opens up to these better and better distinctions differentiations one of there's a couple of key ones. We start differentiating a suffering and the cause of suffering. And we start differentiating the arising and passing of things, start seeing the things, that things arise, they occur, and they pass away seeing the impermanence the changing nature of things, is supported a lot by being able to see distinctions. If we see abstract concepts, they don't change so much. We get through the abstract concept to see clearly what's here. Then we can see impermanence. And this distinctions of impermanence is one that's also said to be freeing. I wanted to read a story, and then I'll stop really so this is from my book a monastery within. After lunch one day, the Abbess and a visiting philosophy professor went for a walk along the river that passed by the monastery. Being a hot day. They eventually sat down to cool off under the shade of a large tree. The professor asked, I am interested in learning Buddhist philosophy. Could you tell me some of the fundamental doctrines of your religion? Well, so the abyss, I don't think I can help you much. You see, we don't rely on philosophy at the monastery. But continue to Professor everyone, consciously or unconsciously, has a philosophy with which to make sense of their life and their purpose. It is different than the monastery, replied the abyss. At the monastery, we rely on awareness, not doctrines. But insisted the professor, you must have a philosophy, which explains the importance of being aware. After pausing to consider how best to respond, the EPA said as we walked along, we were both aware of how hot, sweaty and tired we'd become from our walk. We did not need a philosophy to tell us the benefits of sitting down here in the shade. If you put your hand on a hot stove, you don't need a philosophy to pull the hand away. If a baby is crying from hunger, the need to feed the child is obvious to the parent. Buddhist practice does not depend on having a set of doctrines or beliefs. Rather, it depends on being aware of what brings release from suffering. Rather than being taught Buddhist philosophy at the monastery, the monks and nuns are trained to develop an acutely refined awareness. With such sensitivity, ultimate liberation is as natural as sitting down in the shade on a hot day. So with greater awareness, greater sensitivity, and then the differentiation, this distinctions we make, show us that liberation is as natural as taking a rest on a hot day. They all love you rest well. So, we have a few minutes before we end, maybe you can take a time if you want to if someone has a one question maybe and you'd like to ask.

And it'd be nice if you say your name so we could really we chose names.

Yes, my name is Dennis. So we had Tom Jeff here for full day. I think it was about a month ago, a few weeks ago. And there was a jackhammer going on across the street. And I chuckled because I remember when I was in, we weren't able to go on retreat in Burma at the time because of the uprising that was going on. So we had the retreat in Thailand at a Burmese monastery. And right in front, they had jackhammers. And I'm thinking I'm going through all the machinations that you were mentioning,

like how could they set this retreat up now and during the time when they're remodeling the front and you know, that data? So eventually I had to choose to just be with what was there and was really interesting, because after about a week, and it was intermittent, it wasn't like it was going constantly. But if you focused on it and made it Issue, it could be very uncomfortable retreat. So I was just trying to be with it. And within a week, they did remodel it. And they put a beautiful walking area with flowers around it. So that place of disturbance became a place of peace because now we did our walking meditation on this cool hardscape with these beautiful flowers around them.

Nice, nice. Yeah, very nice. There reminds me of a story that Rahm das tells of having a sitting group meditation group in New York City on top of a fire station. And they've, you know, sometimes they'll be meditating and suddenly the be fire right or something and then the sirens go off, the trucks go off and you know, and apparently at first people were upset, you know, how could you do this and it's terrible for meditation. But over time, the meditators got to appreciate the their Kundalini rising, are they Are the way that it can make them very present. And so, you know, it's you know, the, the idea of that we get disturbed is only a function of that we have other ideas of what's supposed to be happening. So maybe sometimes we look at those ideas and maybe it doesn't have to be disturbance Okay, so