

2015-03-30 Seven Factors of Awakening Equanimity

Thu, 9/17 10:19PM • 40:50

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

equanimity, people, factors, awakening, grief, states, buddhism, mind, contracted, clinging, agitated, attachment, cling, feel, balanced, situation, stay, support, strength, lose

SPEAKERS

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Good evening everyone.

So on these Monday evenings that I've been here, for the last six or seven weeks, I've given a series of talks on the seven factors of awakening. And so today tonight I'm going to talk about the last factor which is equanimity could easily be said to be the most important of them all. Because they're understood, sometimes. They're understood sometimes there's something that develops sequentially, with equanimity being the kind of the climax or the conclusion of the seven factors. The seven factors of awakening I mentioned at the beginning of this series that are kind of like the sap that runs through the tree of Buddhism. That there are many different branches of Buddhism, different traditions, lineages, denominations, and that seven factors awakening are the nourishment that kind of keeps it alive or it keeps it flowing. And I like it this way, because the seven factors of awakening are not so much practices as states states of being, ways of being the kind of inner inner qualities that get awakened and strengthened and kind of are there as you know, as, as you might say, a state of peace settled into your state of calm or a state of use a happy state for you woke up in the morning you don't know why, but yours the happy state, either states and states are more enduring than practices. They're more enduring than fleeting reactions and bring it to the world we have. states are also impermanent and changing but There's something inner like an inner, I don't know if it makes sense to call them either inner radiance, but an inner kind of, like I think of them as strengths. That kind of we develop and grow with practice. And with that they nourish us, they support us. In fact, there's stories and the ancient texts of people using the seven factors of awakening, awakening for healing. There was once at the Buddha was sick, and one of his senior disciples came to see him and then reminded him or told him or evoked or did a guided meditation or something on the seven factors of awakening. And the Buddha got well, and then later, the disciple got sick and the Buddha returned the favor, came and offered this.

And I did it once when we had a sangha member here who was in the hospital at Stanford sick. And because she was a quite an experienced meditator, a lot of depth in her meditation, very, very committed very thought of confidence in meditation practice. When I came to her bedside, I did a guided meditation for her on the seven factors of awakening. I don't really know, I don't think I healed her at all, you know, if anything, it was just meaningful for her, in that those minutes to be reminded about something that was very close to her, you know, something she was familiar with, yeah, experiences these states at the times very strongly. And so to be reminded of this, you know, it's a lot better than some of alternatives in the hospital. But I believe that these states can be quite healing because at least they feel that way have had that in me where, when they're when their concentration

in these different states or operating in a kind of dare is kind of status emotional. qualities or something like that, that it kind of literally feels as if there's healing energy that's kind of moving through moving through me and through my pores or my veins or something. And it's quite an amazing, amazing thing to feel. That doesn't mean I know for sure that their healing or you know, or that whatever I was experiencing was healing. I didn't know you know, where that's really how it felt. So these these seven factors awakening, like a sap, this thing is flows through us. And because it flows through people, it's what animates Buddhism. Buddhism is about people. It's not about books, it's not about doctrines. It's not about you know, lists in themselves, like the seven factors of awakening.

But rather they are, you know, what animators from the inside what kind of bring certain a lightness and ultimate Freedom to us. And so this idea of awakening is a big word in Buddhism, that's used almost synonymous with freedom with a liberation emancipation. It's a big deal. So this is the reference point for the growth of Buddhism and supports it and it allows us tradition to grow and develop in different ways. And equanimity, that was a seven factor of awakening. And some people have kind of a negative reaction to hear that equanimity is important in Buddhism. And it's reasonable to have a little bit negative reaction. So if you already have that, it's okay, that it's reason your reason you're being reasonable. And some of the reasonable way we're reasons people react negatively to it, is that Buddhism can give the impression that you're supposed to always be cool. You're supposed to be kinda like always be calm and you're supposed to not react or have any strong passions or excitement about things and And after all, you're supposed to let go all the time if you're Buddhist, just let go. And you know, and your life would be better if you let go. And so it just kind of sounds kind of like a lot of renunciation, a lot of kind of not life, you know, Amish life you find and letting go. And so equanimity can just seem like a dampening down and just kind of and there are people who've gotten the message that you know, you're too excitable, you're too much this too much that just kind of chill. And sometimes that's done as a kind of, it's kind of violent to do some people because it's who they are to be excited and animated and, and then be told they can't be that way. You know, it's a kind of, it's painful, they're worse. So this is maybe maybe there's some of the reasons why the topic of equanimity is a little bit off putting for some people. However, equanimity is not a form of weakness, not a form of dampening down it. When it becomes well developed, it's a strength. And it will, you know, we become strong and extra all solid, all seven factors of awakening are as they grow within us our kind of strength that we carry with us as we go about our lives. And, as you probably know, and there are many situations where you're really strong in something, you are then less challenged by situation you're in. So if you're strong, and you know, maybe you've learned to ride a bike, maybe remember what it's like to ride a bike. And I've taught I don't remember when I learned to ride a bike, but I remember teaching my kids riding a bike, and they were afraid and uncertain and unwilling, and it was a big deal. You know, like, Oh, no, I can't do it. And they were not economists. And then it's like crashing into the mailbox. And, you know, and that created a certain more angst and was a big deal. But then finally they managed to ride the bike. And they were really excited and looks like a real high for them was nice but eventually they became pretty good at it and as they became good at it they were equanimous riding a bike converting bike was nice to do they enjoy it, maybe but it was, you know, that they didn't weren't worried by that. So certain competency and strength and something we do, they just to be more kind of balanced at ease with it. It's not a big deal, we can do it in a nice way. Or if we go to the gym, maybe if you can work out and get all buff and strong. You may not get strong in some way. There's something about the vitality of kind of being physically strong, which translates to being emotionally balanced, not that so easily pushed around or sway but because around us, so that you know, but if you're sick and weak, if you've been that way sometimes then we feel more tentative and fragile and so people say things things happen. It's like, Oh, it's just too much. But physical strength sometimes can make a big difference. So same thing with emotional strength, or psychic psychological strength, the more we have some kind of inner psychological strength. You know, the more we feel like we're resilient, the more we

feel like we can hold our own in different situations. And there are teaching in Buddhism that maybe points to the value of this kind of equanimity. And this is called, it's called a teaching of the four winds, the four winds of the world.

And these are the common winds that blow through our social world, which pushes people around, they sway people, people get caught in them and reactive to them and come under their influence. And these four winds, their pairs of things. It's praise and blame success and failure, pain and pleasure and fame and ill repute. So praise and blame. How are you when you get praised, it's been praised as good, it's can be fine, especially if it's deserved. And it's fine to enjoy certain kind of appreciation that people give you. But as many of you know, praise and blame can be really be a hook for people. And some people get used to being praised and they get high and energized by it and certain vitality and the opposite is a horrible right to be blamed. And so we get caught up and you know, we don't want to be blamed. We take it personally, we want to defend ourselves. We want to attack we want to do all this stuff. Sometimes it's appropriate to, you know, counter blame that's not justified but it's Get contracted to get anxious to get upset, get angry, quit then with the winds of praise and blame or pushing us around. And to be able to walk into situation of praise and blame and not be swayed to stay imperturbable to stay balanced to stay unruffled is part of what this equity video is. So the same thing with success, success and failure, some people get crushed by failure in whatever they're doing. And some people get excessively elated by success and we get pushed around by it. And so that also is a can be a setup for a lot of suffering. So to be able to engage in activities wherever whatever we do, energetically and fully and not be crushed by failure, not be, you know, get conceded by success, but to stay balanced to be economists and then pain and pleasure Some people don't see any value in a quiet equanimity round pain and pleasure. But it's a beautiful thing to be able to go through certain degree of pain and pleasure and not get swayed by it not getting excited or contracted or kind of lost in it. And we have a society of people who get lost in the pursuit of pleasure in a variety of ways or are chase or running away from discomfort and pain at all costs. And so to learn to have equanimity, about pain and pleasure is a beautiful thing.

There's a story of Mullah Nasruddin, this famous wise, Sufi Master, who would stay home every day and have a meal of beans and rice or something. Just every beans and rice beans and rice and but as neighbor who is somewhat well to do and attended to the king and got wealthy and he came to the Buddha one day said look, moolah all you have to do is go visit the king from time to time and kind of kiss up to the king. And you too can get wealth and be able to eat good food good food and moolah turned to his neighbor and said, all you have to do is to learn to appreciate rice and beans and you won't have to kiss up to the king. So, you know, finding some you know capacity of equanimity or balance or you know simple things not be caught up in pleasure and pain. And then the last one last wind is fame and disrepute. And probably many of you know how often fame really messes people's psychologically big ways and the tremendous amount of suffering that comes with people who get kind of addicted to fame and eating it concerned with it. And then there are people who also get caught up and crushed by this repute, they will refute in some ways, this was pendulum can swing so easily when with fame, too often it goes the other direction. So how to go through life with these things. Sometimes you can't avoid some of these things, but how to stay balanced and perturbed, not to lose your peace or your well being. That's part of the function of equanimity to be able to have that in circumstances. One of the words that's used in Buddhism for this equanimity is imperturbability. It doesn't mean that you're unfeeling. It means that the mind doesn't constrict. The mind doesn't get agitated by what goes on. There might be energy that might be you know, even some passion and some really intense Susie asked him for things. But it doesn't mean that we get agitated the mic and stay peaceful. To get also get a sense of how equanimity is really a great thing why Buddhists might champion it so much. Is that in this and the seven factors of awakening, it's, it's the, it's the final one. So to go through them.

Mindfulness is a state of strong awareness of the present moment. really got a strong sense of presence here. Investigation as a strong sense of clarity. But what you see here, really kind of see clearly distinguish clearly what is it that's going on in this moment. Now kind of in the present moment, vaguely just hold here, it's all kind of nice, but it really can be clear and here present and be clear. And this is a great thing to be present and clear what's happening.

Energy is The third factor is to be engaged wholeheartedly in what you're doing. There's going to wholeheartedness in the activity. And then there's joy. The joy is a great thing. Buddhism emphasizes tremendously, factors like joy and delight and happiness has been very important. Food and nourishment for us in the practice. So developing strong states or joys is one of the functions of meditation and then tranquility, or deep states of serenity and peace, and then cause concentration, strong states of mental stability, focus, steadiness, sense of unification, feeling kind of whole presence. These are strong states that develop in the beautiful states. And right now I just want to highlight the joy thing. And it's on the basis of those things be it becoming strong. That equanimity arises. So, equanimity arises on top of these other strengths, these are the presence that are there. And so it becomes the kind of the combination is very, very sublime. It's extremely satisfying state to be in, it's actually much more satisfying and enjoyable than the state of joy or tranquility and such things. Because a certain kind of purity of mind or certain kind of healthiness of mind, which doesn't get ruffled by things. And so the mind stays clear and present and open and available. And you know, goes through life without kind of getting contracted.

So, for example, if I don't know what to get exactly go into a social gathering and you're basically calm and feeling Good, and you're going to social gather gathering and you're wearing the wrong clothes. Or, you know, where people are ignoring you or people say, you know, all kinds of political strange things that, you know, you know, what kinds of they can even go on, right? And so a lot of stuff goes on the mind and these kinds of social gatherings there's concern about how people see us concerned about do we say the right thing? Or do we fit in. We have our opinions and views ourselves, about things about politics and all kinds of things. And it's very easy to watch the mind get contracted or tight or forceful or compulsive, to feel kind of kind of uncomfortable in situation or forceful or something. It's another thing to go into the social gathering and have equanimity, where the where you're present and available, but there's no clinging in the mind. There's no attachment to anything. There's no need to make something happen. But there's a lot of presence, attention, knowledge, understanding of what's there, but the mind doesn't get agitated by it. So to walk into some situation that might be challenging and not get agitated. And one of the prime ways that equanimity gets cultivated because peers is beginning to appreciate that it said nice, it's really nice, not too clean. And a part of this whole process of the seven factors of awakening, help support us to understand first of all, what clinging is, what grasping or mental attachment is, you know, kind of erotic attachment. It's not so obvious to have a visceral, intimate, felt sense connection to what it feels like for the mind to cling to really want something. And this visceral, immediate felt sense experience of it is so important because if you just read a book it says don't click You know, what does that mean? What do you do? What do you do then? But to know how you do it to see you know, your hand clasps, you read a book, never clasp, your hand is going to hurt. You never close your hand. What do they mean by that. But if you really feel it, then you know something. And so after a while, you get a sense of what this clinging or grasping or contraction of the mind is like. And you start having a sense of the mind, not grasping, not clasping and get a sense of feel for that. What that's like, visceral feeling for the mind that doesn't cling. Forget about the policy that you shouldn't forget about the idea, you know, Buddhists are not supposed to get attached. It's not a good policy, because, you know, in and of itself, policies aren't so useful. Occasionally, they help. They're helpful, but, but what we're trying to do here is to have our own visceral direct experience, of what it's like to cling and more importantly, what it's like to know Not to claim what

it's like, what it's like the mind get contracted or tight. Or it's like to the focus to get narrow and agitated. You know, all these kinds of unhealthy or painful ways that the mind the heart can get kind of wrapped up and caught up and things are frayed and wanting and hating and confused and all these things. do get a real visceral, immediate sense of what this is like to not have this presence. And once you have that you want you have this experience of the mind not clinging, then you have the opportunity to let the investigation go into why am I clinging? Is it worthwhile to cling? Do I need to cling is clinging the best option the situation? Do I really want to cling? Am I better off by contracting or give me agitated? or Why do I want to let go Why don't want to lose this nice state that I'm in for a state which is not so nice. Why sacrifice something which is pleasant for something which is unpleasant. And so these kinds of questions become relevant when the practice brings us to a place where we can feel the difference between clinging and not clinging. And not only can we feel the difference of it, even more importantly, we begin to see the mechanism about what it's like to be to grasp and what it's like to let go. And that's also not so easy to see the inner mechanism of the mind how it works, to see the movement of picking something up and getting caught in it. And then knowing what it's like to relax, settle back and loosen up in the mind or the heart to what we were doing. And so it gets your own personal experience of that gives you the opportunity more and more to begin choosing and questioning what you want to be doing.

What serves you the best. And it comes a point where you're able to get better and better you're able to go into situation You see the mind wanting to cling or starts to cling and say, You know why, why do this? I know something else. What? What, why don't I try to let go and relax. Some people have learned that letting go and relaxing the clinging. They learn to trust it when they see that a non clinging mind is a wiser mind and is able to take care of your life much better. It's actually safer, because you have more wisdom and more clarity What's going on? Some people that's fine. They learned that lesson. They're more willing to let go. So one of the great wisdom questions to carry around with you is when you start getting a sense of the difference between a mind that clings and a mind doesn't cling. Is it for what purpose? Do you sacrifice your ease for what reasons Do you sacrifice your own inner well being. So if you have some inner well being you go about you're going about their life. And for some reason you've settled, you're calm, you're relaxed, maybe you meditated. And then you and you leave, and then ask you, what purpose is it useful to give that up and for what you give it up for? So I'll give you a simple example from when my kids were young. This was back in the ancient world, when we used to have a newspaper delivered to our house. And I used to like reading the newspaper in the morning. You know, I kind of knew that I usually didn't remember what I read after a few weeks. But still, I liked reading it. It's kind of a comforting ritual or something in the morning, and that was, you know, but then I had, but then I had kids, and then had kids had to go to school. And I don't know what it was like for some of your kids. If you had them. Take them. to school when they're really young, but it was a heroic effort. You know, to get them dressed, get them fed and get them whatever they need to do and get them out the door and, and even getting from the door to the car, you know. There's all the interesting things to see along the way and, and they don't have enough sense of time and have to get anywhere on time. And so I used to be sometimes exhausted by the time that I got the kids to school ready to go back to bed. Because it was, you know, such a big thing. But then I know one day I noticed something interesting. I noticed that taking the kids to school getting ready for school know that, that I was always kind of rushing near the end. The kids weren't rushing, that was part of the problem. They were just in the present moment. And that was a problem. And so I was you know, rushing and trying to make it all work and, and that's One point dawned on me now if I had more time in the morning, I could prepare the breakfast, get the lunches ready and kind of do things, you know, you know, get the things ready ahead of time. And then I looked at that I consider that reading the newspaper. I said, you know, if I just stopped reading newspaper in the morning, I'd have had more time and this getting the kids ready for school, it would be easier for me and I wouldn't be so stressed around it. So in fact, I stopped reading the newspaper and became a lot easier. So was it worth reading the newspaper? reading newspaper

was kind of a cause or condition for me to lose my years. So it was I willing to lose my ears for the sake of the newspaper. And I decided at some point no. So that's kind of the evaluation I'm talking about here is you know one way or you find yourself getting agitated in a social situation. And you realize that what you're concerned about is what people are thinking about you? Is it worth sacrificing your ease? what other people think about you. And I would suggest that more often than not, it's not worthwhile, you're better off your ease is a better resource than what people think about you. So let them think what they want. And don't contract don't get clinging. So it's a powerful thing. So non clinging when you get a sense of it is conducive to equanimity. And equanimity is conducive to supporting this movement of not clinging, not losing or sacrificing our well being, by clinging or reacting or resisting or something.

So equanimity comes from strength. They can come from the strength of practice developing these other factors of awakening. It comes from confidence. If you have confidence in the practice confidence in mindfulness, confidence in Your ability to meet the situation with mindfulness. equanimity comes from wisdom from understanding, begin understanding what's going on here. And the more wisdom and understanding we have in situations often the more or less we're caught and reactive to it. If it's one thing someone comes in to work and they're kind of implements, you know, short with you and maybe even a little mean with you, and they kind of snap at you a little bit and, and it's just like, what's going on here you feel bad and you feel angry and how could they be so disrespectful of you? I know what kind of places this this workplace and but then let you know, a few minutes later somebody else walks in and says that says, you know, you know a person, you know, there's some huge tragedy in their life. You know, their kid just died or, you know, just got diagnosed with horrible illness and, and they're like, and it's all now you understand something about, you know what's behind their meanness, they're really hurting, they're struggling. They don't have much patience for anything because of how difficult things are. So without understanding you're more willing to offer equanimity more, we're willing to offer you to not be so reactive and caught up or take it so personally. If it was true, because his kid is dying, that you didn't take it personally. You have to have a reason for not taking it personally. You have to have a reason like that Not to get agitated personally around it. You have the ability not to get agitated. Why don't you just like maybe maybe that person has good reasons to be mean with you. Whatever you know, just or maybe it's not you know, who knows? But you sacrifice your inner well being your sacrifice your calm your sacrifice your ease. Because someone was mean to you or could just Hey, and look. You know, then I guess and there's one teaching that's in, I guess, in Christianity that says, you know, you just if someone hit you know hits you, you know, turn the other cheek I guess, let them hit the hit the other cheek and Buddhism. If someone hits someone hits you or does something with you look them in the eye. So you know, kind of hold your ground just looking at the equanimity, the strength, the ability to and you don't give into it again. You don't run away, but you have the stability and presence and openness to stay there and be present and look them in the eye or the equivalent of it. This comes with the capacity comes from equanimity. A mind that doesn't get contracted or caught or agitated by circumstances we're in. In an agitated mind and uncontracted mind is satisfying because of the peace and the spaciousness and the expansivity and ease and, and, and creativity that can flow in that kind of open mind to beautiful thing. Ultimately, the function of equanimity in Buddhism is to create enough calm enough subtleness enough ease enough non agitation what is that the mind is poised for the experience of enlightenment for awakening. And the experience of awakening is an experience of such balance in the mind that that everything kind of lines up in such a balanced, harmonious, peaceful still way that the deepest attachments we have can fall away your confidence or a trust or an ease or non reactivity that some of our deeds deepest attachments can just vanish. And it's a phenomenal thing, to have the attachment to self, the attachment to anything at all disappear and have a mind have a heart, which is completely liberated from its attachment and the suffering that comes with it. And these seven factors of awakening are one of the some of the preeminent supports for this process of awakening.

How do they how do we how does an individual develop them over time? How do they work, they come in and go.

I think that generally over a long career of practice, like meditation practice mindfulness practice, Buddhist practice. The idea is that slowly they begin to grow. And so it's like your baseline for joy for happiness. For concentration for tranquility, for equanimity, slowly being your baseline grows, that means you kind of have swings up and down past that baseline, but it becomes you know, stronger and stronger over time. And you can identify that over time. You're happier, more often, you're concentrated more often your car more often. We're also the other place what happens is on meditation retreats, and I think the place where they develop the most strongly, is when people can do retreats, where there's ability to really devote one's time to meditation practice, to really engage in this kind of inner work for a long, extended period of time, where things things can develop in an uninterrupted way, and there's a momentum that gets built, gets built. And these seven factors not only work sequentially, but also work mutually together is kind of like a system that support each other. And so there's they grow and they build and so the highest reaches of the seven factors of awakening generally are something that people experience on retreats, probably not the first few retreats you go on. But as this whole meditation becomes more and more, we become more more skilled at more understanding how it works. And then this is the meditation retreats is kind of place where these gets concentrated or fulfilled or they blossom the most. It's like, you know, like the ideal greenhouse for the plant, the tree of Buddhism in your heart to really grow and flourish.

So, I hope that these talks and the seven factors of awakening have somehow pointed to you to or evoked in you or reminded you of particular states of being that you might experience as you go about your day and As you go about them, to recognize them in yourself, and then appreciate that these are important and valuable states that there's that strong states of presence of clarity, of wholeheartedness. And what you do have joy, of calm, have mental stability, and equanimity. They might kind of went through in unexpected ways and times, and when they're there, appreciate them, learn from them, understand them. And in particular, use the foundation or use the experience of these kind of positive states to help you better understand how you lose how you lose them. Because you will and but what happens to you what do you pick up? What do you get involved in what you are calm but then you're not what happened there. Not to beat yourself up not to feel bad. about it, but you can get wise and understand yourself better and better. Because it's the understanding how your inner operating system works that will support you and help you to maintain these states longer and longer and help you support you to live a more liberated for your life. So we have about five minutes before the end. If any of you have any questions or comments about this, you're welcome to ask.

Could you address go a little bit the state of momentum more or more Morning. Most states of mind, I can see I can see the transparency of most states of mind. Well, I have real trouble with that one. Morning, the loss.

Yeah, I think it's a completely natural state, to grieve to mourn when something important for us has been lost. And what we try to do in mindfulness practice, if we use mindfulness practice, is not to try to overcome it or get rid of it or stop it, but rather to offer a respectful presence, to give it its time and time and its do and as we do that, as we make space for it and allow it that sometimes what we can notice is that the morning that grief is complicated by other factors besides pure grief, there might be fear, oh, no. Now you know, who's going to take care of me and part of it is that fear that comes into place or there might be particular things we were attached to, to now never get to do that again. But it had, there's attachment involved in it. And that, you know that feeling that pain of detachment torn away is more, it's not quite grief. So there's a variety of kind of kind of things along the edges of grief, that make

the grief more complicated. And so by giving respectful presence to what we're experiencing is more open to it, allow for it, get support from other people. Don't feel bad about having it. Don't be embarrassed, don't feel this wrong, but just make space for it. But then be gently Be mindful and see what's going on over time. And see what you can let go of this extra and the and, and so this brief can be pure and simpler. And chances are if you do that, the natural grief is always a process. It's hard to believe that in the middle of it when the grief is really strong. But there's a it's there's the heart knows what to do with grief. So if you really can allow the heart to get space and to do with the grief is very simple, open way without adding to it or contracting around it or anything. It's a process that will lead to something appropriate, healthy in the long run. Does that make sense? Or is that appropriate as a response is appropriate? Yes, definitely. So when we look at the time the time factor, however, is it a time factor is is your is your is your time and not other people's time? And it's one of the great the services people do to people who are mourning is to say you should be over it by now. You know, as you know, it's been you know, it's, you know, it's, you know, it's been six months, you know, it's long enough. You know, what's wrong with you? If there's no way of knowing how long grief should last and every individual is different is their conditions of their life, right? Different, their own way of grieving is different. And sometimes in certain ways, maybe it never ends, certain aspects of it, but it can get kind of simpler and simpler a pure impure. And we want to respect the time that it takes in respect to our grief and the way it is. But it really underscore this value of kind of purifying degree for simplifying degree for freeing the grief from all the extra stuff that's added to it. And to experience what Charlie Brown I guess was an expert at Good grief.

Okay, so thank you all and be well