

# Challenge Check-In (4 of 5) Entangled or Disentangled

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

generalization, caught up, conveyor belt, fourth foundation, mental process, operating principle, Five Hindrances, Seven Factors of Awakening, knotted up, loosen, untie, mindfulness, checklist

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Hello, everyone. The topic this week is called “Challenge Check-In.” The suggestion is that you take time to go through this checklist to find out how you are and what’s going on. Not only is it useful to feel and understand how we are, but it’s also a reframing. It is a changing of perspective from the usual way of knowing ourselves to something that is Dharmic, something that the Buddha recommended. It is productive and useful for becoming disentangled from our life, from ourselves.

A common way of being in the world – of knowing ourselves – is through the filter of our desires, fears, aversions, confusions, strains, and resistances. We can take the whole package of who we are and subject it to our generalized opinions about who we are and what’s going on. One of the most general judgments we can have about ourselves is all the things that come under the category, “I am bad, I am wrong.” All the ways we live under the category, “I am right, I am good” can also be limiting for who we are (although that’s not as obvious). One way those generalizations limit us is that they keep us from seeing more deeply and directly what’s going on.

What I’m calling the Buddha’s check-in is a way of dropping below the generalizations – below the beliefs and judgments we have. This is a phenomenally generous thing to do for ourselves – to free ourselves from the generalizations and judgments and ideas we struggle under. These generalizations represent being entangled, being caught up, and excessively concerned about something.

When we take the time to stop and do this check-in, we are stepping out of the strong winds that are pushing us along. We’re stepping off the conveyor belt or the moving sidewalk. We’re not being carried along anymore. We’re stopping to take a step back and see what’s happening here in a way that we can’t see if we’re caught up in our generalizations.

First, we can check in: “How am I in my body? What’s happening here?” If you’re tense, and you didn’t know it, maybe it’s useful to relax. Then check in with the feeling tones: “Is this experience unpleasant? Or is it pleasant?” If you’re caught up in the unpleasant, is that the full story? “Is there pleasure here as well? Is there some shift of orientation? Is the unpleasantness more a product of my own mind – my mind’s reactivity – than the activity that I’m in?” Also, it is important to check in with the state of the mind: “Is it contracted or is it expansive?”

Today I will talk about the fourth foundation taught by the Buddha (the fourth part of this checklist): the mental processes in the mind. The mental processes, in some ways, are not so different; they overlap with the third foundation, the mind. They are the activities, the processes, the operating principles that are driving or supporting the mind.

The Buddha gave a list of the Five Hindrances (sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt). He also gave a list of the Seven Factors of Awakening (mindfulness, investigation, energy, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity). The Five Hindrances are ways of being that are sticky, entangled, knotted up with experience. The Buddha uses the description “knotted up” in terms of how we can get caught up. The Seven Factors of Awakening describe how we loosen, untie, become clear.

The Five Hindrances are considered things that hinder our ability to see clearly, and the Seven Factors of Awakening are what support us to see clearly. Certainly, if you know them, you can check in with yourself: Which are operating? For someone who does a lot of vipassana practice, it should become second nature to notice

what hindrances are operating, and even the subtle ways in which the Seven Factors of Awakening operate for us.

When you're involved in anything at all – thoughts, activities in the world, conversations – I suggest you notice: Do you feel entangled in what you're involved in? Do you feel caught in such a way that there is an "ouch"? Or do you feel expansive in it, open in it? Are you agitated? Is the energy kind of activated? Or is the feeling of energy one of being suffused?

The fourth foundation has something to do with the source from which so much of our behavior arises. The hindrances are behavior that arise out of a source that is very limited and tight, and narrow, and constricted, or entangled. What arises out of the Seven Factors of Awakening is also energetic, but it is an energy that is not entangled or agitated or activated. It is energy or vitality in the body that feels like it suffuses us – it spreads more widely. This is like the difference between being in a tornado versus being in a relaxing pool of water. Both can be energetic, but the quality of the energy, the quality of the activation, or the quality of how we're engaged – how we are with our experience, how we're attentive – is radically different.

So, what are the mental processes involved? Are they the hindrances? Or do they seem more like the Seven Factors of Awakening? Is how you're involved something that feels unpleasant? More like "fight or flight"? The hindrances could be analyzed from the point of view of fight, flight, or freeze. That's not completely accurate, but it is similar. The Seven Factors of Awakening can be more like relax, nurture, soothe, approach. In this way, the operating principles of the mind are the source of how we see the world, how we are in the world.

This change of perspective – this check-in that we're doing – comes to the point where the check-in itself is contributing to a positive way of being present that leans in the direction of the Seven Factors of Awakening. Part of the value of the mindfulness check-in is that we're learning how we are and to see ourselves from a different point of view. We're also bringing into the ecosystem a healthy way of being present and seeing and checking in – a way that is not entangled, not caught up. So both of these work together and are important in changing the perspective of how we see ourselves when we're challenged.

We are applying the perspective of these four different areas (the Four Foundations of Mindfulness) to what's happening for us. It's like bringing an adult into the room where a lot of teenagers are fighting. It's like bringing a wise elder into the mix. Using the check-in is bringing into the ecosystem a new way of being. The whole ecosystem can change by that introduction. Just simply stopping and checking in and going through these four questions: "How am I physically? How am I in the feeling tone? How am I in my mind state? How am I in the underlying processes of how I'm involved?"

I would like to suggest that you check in with yourself periodically throughout the day using these four different questions. If you like schedules, you can schedule it once an hour, or some way or another. Take some quality time. It doesn't have to be long, maybe two minutes to stop, perhaps close your eyes, and check in with yourself.

Notice as you do it, or after you have done it, if the check-in itself – the attention that you bring looking at yourself in this way – has in fact introduced something nice into the system. Is it like a wise elder has entered the room, and everyone relaxes and feels good ("There's someone wise here who helps me to be present.")? See what the effect is on you of introducing the mindfulness check-in.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to tomorrow.