

7 Factors: Investigation

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So the topic today is the investigation, the second factor of awakening. And, you know, Gil's metaphor yesterday ended at the ocean, so I'm starting at the ocean. When I was six years old, it was our first family vacation, and so we drove 250 miles to see the ocean for the first time. And I was really excited and we were almost there. And we were going up this really steep hill, you know, and so all you can see is the sky. And then we got to the top, you know, me and my sister are like kind of, you know, expectedly, you know, excited in the backseat.

And there we see all of a sudden we see this big, huge ocean, this big blue ocean. And, you know, I just started, you know, bouncing up and down like, you know, kids do. We've learned to be a little more less enthusiastic for some reason. But, you know, I just, how beautiful, how beautiful, you know. And it was like just kind of in my eyes, I saw just this big thing of blue, of this beautiful blue. And so we kept driving, getting a little closer.

And then I started seeing, oh, it's all sparkly. Everything's sparkling. You know, the reflection of the sun, you know, I did, you know, it was just really, really cool. And then we got a little bit closer yet. And I started seeing this other motion, you know, what later I learned are waves. And, you know, and I remember, you know, just seeing all this, all this different details of the ocean.

And then we got to the beach and, you know, we talked to our parents into letting us go right to the water instead of going to the hotel. So, you know, we still had our clothes on. And, you know, so we walked to the shore across the nice white sandy beach. And, you know, we noticed, now we notice that the waves actually crashed and this little white foam would show up and, you know, play with her toes, you know. And so we were just, you know, hanging there and showing it when suddenly a bigger wave came and soaked us, you know. And, you know, so I learned, you know, skillful means and moved back a bit and not so close.

Yeah. But it's really, that's kind of the process of investigation. You know, I didn't think about it. There was no actually discursive thinking. Okay, that's reflection. That's different. That's this. It was just really being there for the experience.

And as I got closer and closer, I saw more and more detail. And then when a choice was needed, I was available to recognize that I need to step back further away. Yeah. So, you know, definition, this is a capacity we all have, right? You know, the capacity to notice what's happening in carefully, really see what's happening carefully.

You know, one thing about investigation, a lot of us, you know, when I first learned about investigation, it was really serious. You know, it's like, okay, we're going to investigate. You know, my only association with the word was, well, you know, crime, you investigate, you know. And, you know, the mind's committing all sorts of crimes, right? You know, all sorts of cruelties to myself and maybe about others, you know. So we've got to investigate.

You know, but investigation as a factor of awakening, it's not trying to figure something out. It's not trying to solve something. It's just, it's a receptive state. We're not doing something, but it's what happens naturally when we're mindful. We're really there. We're really present.

And then it deepens so we can see a lot more clearly the details. We see the details of our experience. You know, it's the investigation in terms of the factors of awakening is known as the wisdom factor. Because it's the factor that allows us to see what's wise and what isn't wise. It allows us to see really closely the nature of reality. So, let's see.

So, yeah, we have these two ideas at the same time. Do you ever get that, you know, and they go this way or that way? So, an example is I think most meditators at some point have had an itch, right? And if we have an itch, we can get, if we're mindful, we can get closer to it. We can notice the different sensations. You know, it's not just one thing, right?

Mindfulness might say there's an itch there. But investigation notices the different vibrations. Maybe there's an intense spot and then there's another intense spot. And we can actually hang with it until it fades by itself. But what might happen is we have an intense itch and we have a huge craving to scratch it. And we've probably been there also, right?

And when that craving arises, that's the dominant experience we're having. And so sometimes we think that, okay, this is the itch is where the attention should go. But what's really happening is we're hating the itch. We desperately want it to go away. And that's its own experience. You know, so we might change the object to, you know, what's it like to be so desperate about getting that itch to go away, about scratching that itch.

Yeah. You know, as we get closer to our experience, you know, just like with the itch, you know, we notice the finer, finer details, not because we're looking for them, but because we're showing up. I had a, at one point in my life, I had a swimming pool, and we had a cover on it, and if we didn't use the pump, you know, and just let it sit without any mixing. What would happen is the water would layer, you know, and it would jump in, and first you'd feel this incredible hot tub. And then as you went in about a foot, it would be kind of nice and warm.

And then you'd get to the bottom. It was really cold. And it was this very interesting experience. You know, I didn't think about, okay, this is like a hot tub. You know, it's only in the retelling that the words came up. You know, it's like non-discursive.

It's very immediate, so immediate things tend to be more non-discursive. But that's the quality of attention. It was totally embodied, right? You know, it felt it, it felt a particular way, and then it changed. So the reason, you know, in practice itself, we, as a wisdom factor, we make choices all the time, right? When we're paying attention, watching the breath, we notice a tight shoulder, and the wisdom factor is where the choices are made.

And so, for instance, we're already making them. You know, if we notice that our shoulders are up by our ears, we naturally drop them. You know, that's the wisdom factor. We're already doing that. It's not something we add to our experience. And as we, the more we are close to our experience, the more obvious it is what to do, you know, which way to choose.

You know, if it's a hot stove, you know, you don't have to go, should I put my hand on it or not? You know, you know to pull away. And, you know, like Gil made it very simple the way he says the ouch and ah of an experience. You know, that's the choice, the skillful choice, the ah of an experience. It just feels right. There's an ease to it.

The whole process of investigation is not something to work at. You know, it's something to open to. But sometimes it's not that easy. For instance, if a fantasy pulls her attention away, there can be a lot of craving to stay there. You know, I've woken myself up in the middle of a fantasy and want to stay there. You know, I got mindful for a moment, but that was such a good fantasy.

I ever deserve a break, you know, and totally forget that I'm here practicing. I'm practicing for freedom. You know, this is what I'm doing, you know. But in that moment, it's like, you know, that juicification is that fantasy, you know, or whatever it might be for you, you know, has so much pull. And so when I connect with my, you know, at that point I might remind myself why I'm here. You know, I can fantasize anywhere, right?

You know, I'm here for a reason. I'm practicing for a reason. I sat down to practice at home or in retreat for a reason and reminding myself what that reason is. And then, you know, the feeling of, yeah, that's obvious. You know, I come back to here. Yeah.

You know, so there are two aspects that are particularly relevant, you know, what we pay attention to and how we pay attention. And, you know, in the same vein, you know, the Buddha said in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, the mindfulness of breathing sutta, put away or a caveat and grief for the world, put away our concerns for the world, you know, so it's not a time to solve the problems of the world. It's a time to be here. And to do this consciously, to consciously put aside those concerns and then continues to pay attention to the body as body, to feeling as feeling, to mind as mind, to mind objects as mind objects, you know, to, we're not thinking about them, that we're actually experiencing them as they are. You know, what's here right now.

And the how we pay attention is crucial, is how we pay attention. You know, we say an open-handed receptiveness. If we pay attention without an agenda, just paying attention to what's here regardless of what it is. For instance, if we're investigating a dead body, I don't know how many of you have had a chance to do that. You know, does repulsion arise? Does something arise?

You know, it doesn't let us look. It doesn't let us look. But if we really pay attention to it just as it is, you know, we might notice, you know, maybe the smell, the textures, the colors, the different aspects, you know, we might notice that this body is just like mine. You know, and bring us into a different kind of contemplation. But we don't have, but it's an openness to what's here. I like the term affectionate curiosity.

To use that quality of a friendly interest as opposed to, you know, when I first met, for quite a while in my early practice, I always investigated like frowning or something, you know, the feeling of frowning, like, okay, I'm going to look closer, you know. And, you know, it's, yeah, identify, right? Yeah. And, you know, so this is really, you know, oh, what is this like? It's like that ocean.

What is that? What's that reflection? You know, what are the sparkles? You know, you know, the beginner's mind, the beginner's mind, the child's mind. There's like this really beautiful aspect to the way a child might look at the world. You know, in a skill talked about yesterday, what primarily gets in the way are the five hindrances.

And when the hindrance shows up, we're really no longer paying attention to what's here. We're trying to make something different than it is. You know, if we're wanting something or

we want it to go away, you know, we're not here. And so getting to know the hindrance, if we really turn our attention to the hindrance wholeheartedly, open-handedly, and investigate the hindrance, then it's no longer a hindrance. We're seeing what's here. You know, we see the hindrance.

We notice the sensations in the body, and we're already present. We've already transformed it. And, you know, that's the beauty of mindfulness and investigation, is that there isn't anything that shows up that we can't open our hearts to, open our minds to. One of my favorite images that I would use in my mind or idea, you know, when I first started trying to befriend the hindrances, which were in my mind, they were the enemy, you know, and was, I started shifting by considering it, you know, have you ever watched a child trying to do something to get really frustrated? You know, they get just really so frustrated, they can't do it, you know.

And, you know, whenever that happened that I would see that somewhere, would, you know, my mind would automatically kind of have this affection towards them. Right? It was sweet affection. You know, it was okay when the child did it, you know, and I held it that way. And I would, so I started treating my own hindrances with kind of that idea, that feeling of, you know, oh yeah, this is a frustrated child. You know, or, you know, with aversion or anger that shows up.

Oh, yeah, that's that child having the tantrum. You know, and with greed, yep, that's a child wanting to eat way too many cookies and getting a stomachache, not so wise. You know, so that for myself that kind of brought that ease of, you know, oh yeah, I can be warm and affectionate towards the hindrances when they arise in me. Yeah. To me, that was one of the very transformative times, the very first time that a hindrance came up, and I didn't try to squish it. I didn't try to get rid of it.

I didn't make it wrong. You know, I just saw it arise and my mind immediately just started looking at it, you know, like a bird that might be going by, a beautiful bird that might be going by. You know, it's like, oh, wow, look what's happening, you know. And so there was no conflict. There was no conflict.

You know, with pain, you know, I've had the opportunity to work a lot with pain in my life, in meditation. And, you know, as I said about the edge, you know, one of the things, like for instance, you know, I remember the very first time that, you know, I was having a shoulder pain and, and, you know, it's like really bothering me. And the teacher was giving instruction, mindfulness of the body. You know, I look really carefully and the pain went away. It was like, whoa, you know, it went away.

Next time I got a pain, I was paying attention with the agenda that it should go away. You know, I wasn't really that interested in seeing what it's like. I just, you know, I wanted it to go away, you know, and was absolutely missing that, you know, not being mindful of that part. I just really caught in wanting it to go away, and it didn't go away, you know that? You know, sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. You know, with pain, you know, it's real art working with pain.

And, you know, it's been, I remember one of the, and I've said this, told this before, you know, I was having a lot of, I was struggling a lot with pain. And so I decided, okay, I'm going to really pay attention to everything that shows up here. And I got deeply, deeply concentrated in my mindset. Oh, this is a playground of pain. You know, it was so delighted. And it was such a surprise that I could get so delighted with this condition, with this pain.

And, you know, and then of course, you know, as I said, you know, we want that to happen again, you know. And so letting go of that agenda, you know, I've struggled a little bit of just like, okay, I'll show up for whatever's here, not for what I want. One of the opposite of investigation in some way is assuming. And, you know, we do that in our lives often, you know, like I'll assume somebody's a certain way because of something they said or something about the way they look. But we also assume a lot of things about our own experience without really being there.

And one of the real surprises for me was boredom. Because I assumed that I knew what boredom was, and whenever boredom showed up, I'd tune out. You know, I'd start, okay, how much longer? You know, all the familiar, I think, you know, for many of us, we have some familiar litanies that we've run across when we've felt bored. But really, the bottom line was, this moment isn't worth being here for.

This experience is not worthwhile. And so at one point I began to turn my attention towards the boredom and exploring it. And to my surprise, it wasn't just nothing happening, but it was unpleasant, right? You know, it's a little, but it was such mild and pleasant. I'd rather have pain. It's much more interesting.

You know, boredom was just such a dull, you know, unhappening place, you know. You know, and again, you know, bringing back the little kids, you know, image, you know, you know, little kids, you know, they might be really babies in particular, you know, get really irritable and crying and you give them something colorful to focus on, you know, it's like to play with and they're happy, you know, at least they got something happening, you know. You know, so we want stimulation. We want stimulation. And this low level of stimulation that happens when we're bored is kind of against the stream. You know, it's against what we want, you

know.

And so can we turn towards that? Can we actually turn towards that with open-handed interest wholeheartedly? Yeah. You know, sometimes we have biases, you know, where we explore what feels good and what's pleasant, and we really show up for the pleasant and the wonderful feelings of energy in our bodies. But when the unpleasant arises, you know, we kind of bite our time, you know, till something good happens. You know, and, you know, so to treat the, you know, or shadow parts or painful parts and the, and or boring, the boring experience, you know, all the different things, you know, with the same open-handedness.

You know, but some of us have the opposite experience. You know, I've seen practitioners who they always want to focus on their what's wrong with them. You know, I'm going to fix that. You know, there's that the bias towards improving ourselves. You know, okay, well, this is good for me. I'm going to improve myself.

And, you know, it stops us from really showing up for what's here, what's really here. Sometimes we prioritize intensity. You know, and that can be either, you know, something exciting, you know, it's like even if it's painful, horrible imagery, it's intense, you know. And so we all have our habitual patterns of how we relate to the mind. You know, one of the standard things that I've often talked about because it was so meaningful to me was that when I first, for years in my practice, you know, I was really diligent practicing every day, 45 minutes.

And I would, the first took me usually about 20 minutes to get settled. You know, my mind would still be thinking about work, thinking about this, thinking about that. And, you know, and then I'd settle, you know. And so since that happened so often, I wouldn't pay attention to the first 15, 20 minutes. I just kind of, you know, I'd pay attention enough breaths that I would, I knew would settle me eventually, you know.

And so, you know, I don't remember what the trigger was, but at one point it was like, wait a second, you know, what's this restlessness? This is actually restlessness happening. And it started becoming a really valuable part of my practice. You know, because when we're caught by that, you know, we're reinforcing clinging. You know, that's basically what, you know, if I really watched my mind what was happening, you know, I'd be, you know, worrying about something of work, you know, and my heart would be tied, you know, and I'd, you know, I'd be like really wanting it to come out and there'd be all this clinging around it, or, you know, I might have had a difficult conversation or, or, or I was looking forward to going out for lunch, and I was like, oh yeah, maybe I'll get this and that, and, you know, whatever the things of the mind and make or keep our mind going.

And when I started finally paying attention, it was like, wow, there's a lot going on here. A lot of practice, a lot of valuable, important practice. As soon as we become interested in our experience, including those first 15, 20 minutes, you know, we change it. It's already changed. It changes in a positive way. There's like a brightness comes to it, a spaciousness.

You know, there's a lot of wholesomeness when we explore those kind of unwanted pieces. But, you know, investigation is known as *dhammavicaya* or the wisdom factor, as I said. And the purpose of investigation of all these factors is to let go of clinging. You know, there's nothing special about getting to know a knee pain inherently. It's about how we relate to it. How free is our heart.

And it's a training in freedom, a moment of like really being there and choosing skillfully. It's already a taste of freedom when we choose skillfully. And clinging always causes suffering. And so that's what we look at, you know, when there's clinging, we let go or we aim in the direction of letting go. You know, one way of thinking about clinging is that suffering is caused by a whole bunch of unwholesome habits of mind, you know, unhelpful habits of mind and skillful, you know, and we do those over and over and over again, like any other habit, you know, the habit of, you know, biting your tea, your nails, or any other habit. It's just, it's like a bitch, the way we do it over and over.

And there's a teaching story, you know, and about a tiger. You know, many of you have heard this story. You know, they're in a cage, and they just have enough room to pace back and forth, back and forth. And they're in this cage for years, you know, and finally the door is open, and they don't walk out the door. Yeah.

They don't walk out the door. They're so conditioned, the repetition of all those years that they'll just stay there. And it's a teaching story. I don't know if it has any basis, but, you know, animals have those tendencies as we do. You know, we live in, we kind of live in our mental cages. Right?

You know, we have these limits of how we, you know, we react to things. I don't like it. I pushed it away. I like it. I want it. You know, these are, they're like mental cages, like, just like the tiger.

You know, they're like a reflex, you know, in, you know, in the human body, we have these reflexes. You hit the knee just right and it jerks up. It jerks up. You know, and so the mind does that. I want that grabs, you know, and so the practice just softens that. So we see it and we don't have to grab.

So as I said before, you know, we don't have to go looking for anything. We don't have to

go looking for anything. We don't have to, you know, like Gil said, you know, the, you know, if it's not simple, it's, you know, it's not *vipassanā*. You know, so we're mindful, we can be mindful of the moment, and then we can look closer at the moment. But it just happens. It happens when we just show up wholeheartedly without any reservation.

You know, if we look at our motivations when we're practicing, you know, I've seen it myself. Sometimes I'm really fully there. You know, other times, you know, I'm holding back. You know, so, you know, being there full-heartedly, regardless of what's there. And, you know, when, you know, we talk about being the wisdom factor of choosing what's wholesome as opposed to not wholesome.

But in a way, we don't even make the choice because the choice becomes obvious. You know, if you see that direction is awe and this direction is ouch, we're not going to go for the ouch. We're going to go for the ah. Not as a matter of greed, but because there's a feeling of rightness there. There's a natural feeling of rightness. You know, and even if there's pain in the body, the mind can still be at ease.

The mind can still be wholesome. Even if there's a painful emotion. Yeah. You know, or number of, you know, challenging thoughts come up, challenging judgments, but we can still make room for it with that same attitude of really showing up for it. One of the teachings that can be very useful is to remember that if we're struggling, something is being left out of our attention.

So, you know, during this retreat so far, you know, has there been any struggling at any point? You know, I mean, things might be difficult, but there's a way that struggle doesn't, it's not an open state. It's a kind of, you know, unhelpful state of struggling with ourselves. You know, so if that's happening, what can we pay attention to? What's there to pay attention to?

How can I open up to what's happening? And if they're struggling, there's clinging. You know, so we look closer, you know, is there clinging, how are we clinging, what are we clinging to? You know, again, non-discursive, it's non-discursive, it's just looking deeper, looking deeper. And when we consider investigation as a tool of wisdom, you know, it's the tool of insight. It's the tool that brings insight.

And the factors of play at many levels of practice. It's at play. And, you know, we first sit down and the mind's totally distracted, and that's at play there. And as we bring the attention, you know, then it starts strengthening. But it has, as it gets deeper, as the, as we become more, the meditation becomes subtler and quieter, it starts taking on a liberative aspect.

So instead of just noticing this, oh yeah, I'm clinging here, I'm not clinging here. We start

seeing the true nature of reality. This is where we see its investigation that shows us that things are changing all the time. That shows us that everything's moving. There's nothing that will keep us happy. Nothing we can grab that can keep us happy.

There's no one there that's constant to grab any of it anyways, you know. And so we start, we see that and we start penetrating that. And that's where the, when all the factors are balanced and strong, you know, that's where we can see that clearly, that sharply, that freedom can arise. And, yeah, you know, and, you know, that's what they call the factors of awakening, you know, and, you know, and I just encourage you to enjoy investigation, to enjoy that, to appreciate it. It's a tool of wisdom. Yeah, so let's sit for a minute.