

Thursday Morning Guided Meditation

Gil Fronsdal

September 17, 2026

Keywords: *Satipaṭṭhāna*, *seven factors of awakening*, mindfulness, clarity factor, joy factor, *samādhi*, equanimity, awareness, non-reactivity

The way I talked about the *seven factors of awakening* yesterday was that they're the culmination of a whole process, a path through the *Satipaṭṭhāna*. There's another way of understanding them that maybe is more to the heart of how we do this practice. And that is that the *seven factors of awakening*, in one way or the other, are always present, or almost always, and they are a valuable perspective to have on our experience as an alternative to your usual perspectives.

Some people's perspective is that everything is seen through the lens of me, myself, and mine. Everything is seen through the lens that there's a problem, or the lens of the difficulty we're having, the lens of what's not working. All these lenses are, at best, giving us only a partial perspective of what's happening. And part of mindfulness is to expand the perspective to include everything.

So sometimes the *seven factors of awakening* are just ordinary. They're there, and it can be useful to recognize how ordinary they can be. If you spent a fair amount of time indoors here in the building at IMC, or at home, meditating, being quiet, with your eyes closed, it's a small world. Maybe you're a little bit tired or fatigued from the effort, or it's a beautiful day outside, and you step outside and feel the cool air on the face. Feel the sparkle of the sunlight on the plants and the blue sky, and maybe there's beautiful foliage nearby and trees.

Your eyes are kind of delighted at the sight and the beauty of it. Your skin is delighted at the coolness of the air. And without trying, you're naturally more aware in this new, refreshing, beautiful environment. Of course, you're looking at the trees and the leaves. Of course, you're feeling the coolness and the pleasure. It's not work. You don't have to apply yourself to do it.

Awareness is there. Maybe that awareness is a little heightened, and you see more clearly than you did in meditation, because meditation is a lot of time we spend thinking. That's one of the reasons it's so nice to step outside and kind of clear the mind a little bit from all the chatter. And there's more clarity, and you see the details of things you hadn't seen the first days on the retreat. Small little things stand out as beautiful, interesting.

A single leaf lies on the ground, and there are always some leaves on the ground, but today that one leaf just seems kind of amazing. It stands out and is highlighted. And so there's the clarity factor of awakening, seeing something as itself. And there's a little bit more energy in the system, coming outside and taking in the sights and the sensations, feeling the refreshment of being there. Delight, delight like this can awaken a kind of energy, kind of a little bit more vitality in being aware, a little bit more interest in being aware without that being the intention.

And there might be kind of a smile in your eyes or in your skin, somewhere in your whole body, smiling a little bit at being free outdoors. You have breathing room. It's so nice to be this simple way without any responsibilities anymore. To be with your breathing and note your mind, note your thinking, and the very thing that you are trying to cultivate now is happening naturally. Maybe you sit down with a cup of tea, or stand still, and something seems very reassuring.

Things are good in the world for a few moments, and there's a relaxing that begins. You notice after a while that that incessant thinking mind that was so caught up in something has quieted, has relaxed. Maybe you should bring it back, and then something says, "Why? Let's just stay here and take a break." It turns out the break is just doing exactly what the practice is.

And sitting there, looking out across the foliage and the trees, sky, it seems like the world gathers to be just this—a gathering of attention to this moment, a kind of unification, almost like becoming unified with the trees and the place you're in. Everything comes together for you just now, just here. Kind of like this spot has become a home, homey. And then there's a degree of *samādhi*, but very ordinary.

And in this way, you're there, looking at the foliage, the skies, the birds, whatever is happening. And you notice for the first time that there's a hole in your sock. And you notice that you don't care. That's not a cause to be alarmed or worried socially. People will think about you and your hole, your sock. It's okay.

You look down your shirt. There's ketchup spilled all down your shirt. Wow, that's like the leaf

on the ground. It's so nice and red, and the contrast with the red and my white shirt—wow. No orientation to take the trouble to be alarmed or embarrassed. There's equanimity.

No orientation to compromise the situation with reactivity. And there's equanimity for a few minutes. So as you're sitting and meditating, from time to time, you might see if it's reassuring for you and allows you to shift your perspective. Maybe shift unhelpful perspectives you didn't even know you had by bringing in the perspective of the *seven factors of awakening*. Are any of them present?

How are they present? Are any of them absent, and what effect does the absence of them have on you? What effect does the presence of them have on you? In what way are these *seven factors of awakening* not practices you do, but states that are present? Maybe they're present in a natural way, always part of the present moment.

The *seven factors of awakening* are rooted here and now, and they're here when they are here to reassure us. To settle and calm the reactive mind, the frightened mind, the wanting mind. Awareness—the awareness of your experience meditating, without tightening or fixating on anything, without trying to accomplish something—the natural awareness that's always here, the natural way we know and see and feel. The ordinary clarity that takes the time to see things clearly, but not as a strain or project, just like looking at the leaf on the ground is not a project or a strain. It's actually kind of a delight and a pleasure.

The joy factor of awakening, the ordinary joy of meditation, may be a way that your heart smiles. This opportunity to be here, a natural vitality, aliveness in being aware, being clear, having this inner smile. The ordinary calm that might be here may be easier to feel if you lower your standards for what calm is. Maybe just calmer than your reactive mind.

In the ordinary way in which resting in awareness, allowing awareness to be here, somehow gathers together the whole experience into the center, here and now, the place of rest, the place of calm. And an ordinary equanimity, non-reactivity, being easy, being light, being non-contentious. Oh. Oh.

If even ordinary factors of awakening are present for you, allow yourself to be nourished by it. Allow it to help settle you more here and now. It's good to be here. It's good to be awake in the present. Yeah.

So as we continue in this ever-flowing world of practice, today is cycle two, and the people who would normally be seen in the evening will be seen in the afternoon. And today there's a switch in the kitchen team, so I think I switched one of the people, the cooks, maybe Joanne, maybe with Roberta. So if you're the evening, seeing, looking at the schedule, double-check

that you haven't been moved. And if you've been moved and you've been put into a place that's a work meditation time for you, you can come at the end of the afternoon cycle. And there's time then for me to meet. Thank you.