Dharmette: LImbs of Awakening (1 of 5) Growing Awareness and Clarity

Gil Fronsdal

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Hello and welcome to Monday and the beginning of a new series of Dharma talks. This is, in a sense, a continuation or a pairing with last week's theme.

Last week concerned the five bundles, the five bundling: the bundling of clinging, of attachments, of gripping to things, holding on tight, holding on to our desires, holding on to our aversions. The idea is that we create our own clinging: things we cling to, the ideas that we cling to, the ideas of things, the stories related to them, the assigned meaning to them. There is a complex world of our own creation, this gathering together and accumulating, the accumulation of attachments, of clingings, of graspings, and, with that, the accompanying suffering. That clinging comes with suffering. At the minimum, it comes from the tension in the mind or the heart, the body tightening up and holding on and not letting go. The compulsivity is stronger than our wisdom: compulsive desires, behavior.

And so this is a kind of gathering up and bundling things together. This week, the emphasis is on a very different process, a process that's more natural because it's not gathering together in an artificial bundle all kinds of attachments. Rather, it's becoming sensitive or aware of what grows naturally: the growth, the development, the unfolding of things.

The core aspect of the bundling, the bundling of suffering, the bundling of attachment, is the particular engineering or constructing aspect of the mind that can be called mental constructs. I like to call it making things up. One teacher calls it concoctions. Another teacher calls it the fabrications of the mind that are fabricated, made up, constructed, put together.

There's a whole other side of our life which is not that which we construct and make up. This is a deeper part of who we are, that is not called something made up, not called a construct.

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Sometimes it's simply called the *Dharma*, and *Dharma* is sometimes almost synonymous with nature, almost synonymous with a kind of natural unfolding, natural patterns. Some people even call it natural laws, but the natural movements of things.

What I'd like to present today is the corollary to the five bundles, the kind of opposite of the five bundles that the Buddha emphasized as part of mindfulness practice. This is built on the idea that there are things which grow, that unfold, that can fill us, that spread and fill us to a point of being fulfilled. Whereas with the bundles and clinging, we empty ourselves of those. But as we become more empty of them, there's room for natural senses, feelings, sensations, goodness, wholesomeness to spread into that empty space.

The body becomes softer, more receptive, more open for some heart-warming, the warmth or the goodness of our inner life spreading through the whole body. The goal in this other approach is to grow and develop this spread, this wonderful sense of health and goodness, so it spreads out throughout our whole body. In the same way that maybe, after being sick for a long time, we now feel like all of us is healthy. This feeling of health coursing through the whole body, it's a little bit of a vague sensation, the feeling of being really healthy. We can't exactly put our finger on it, but it feels somewhat like now the whole body is that way.

Even though, if you really get into where those sensations of healthiness or vitality are, maybe it's more centered in the torso or, you know, someplace specific. But we'd say, you know, the whole body is that way. And so, these are the seven things that can grow and unfold and develop. The Buddha's instructions are to take these seven and let them fill you, be fulfilled with them, let them pervade you. These are what's called the *seven factors of awakening*.

The actual Pāli word *aṅga*, which I'm translating as factors, can mean limb, like the arm or a leg. I don't know how well this works with ancient Pāli language, but I think of a limb as meaning it's biological; it's part of our body. It's a natural process, a natural aspect of who we are. We're taking this natural thing and developing it.

In fact, as practice develops, these seven limbs that we have, these seven arms, these seven, you know, that are spreading and opening up more and more, are like arms spreading and opening rather than arms grabbing and holding on. They become more and more pronounced. It's almost as if we don't make them happen; we're not trying to have them. But as we practice mindfulness and concentration, they begin to grow, they begin to appear.

As they grow and appear, we want to recognize them. We want to make room for them. We want to relate to them not as something to push and make and engineer, and make grow

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faster or bigger, but rather we want to tend to them like a gardener tending something to allow it to grow. They don't pull on the plant to see how well it's growing. They watch it. They make room for it. They clear the weeds around it so this can grow.

So, these seven factors of awakening are *sati*, usually called mindfulness in English. I call it awareness. Then there's a second one, which is usually called investigation, which I like to render as clear seeing. I'll explain that in a bit. Then there's usually energy or effort. I like to think of it as vitality because of how embodied it is and how alive it is.

So, vitality can course through the efforts we make. But it feels like the vitality is almost natural. Sometimes I'll run, and in the beginning, it's hard to run. I have to use my will to run. But at some point, the vitality, the energy, seems to be coursing through me, and I'm being carried by that energy, by that vitality. I wouldn't say exactly that it's the vitality of my effort. Now it's a natural vitality that's carrying me along.

Then there's joy, delight, gladness, happiness, this wonderful feeling of happiness that comes from engaging harmoniously. Engaging, being mindful and practicing, where there's a unification, a gathering of ourselves, and how we are with our experience in the present moment has a harmony to it, has an alignment to it that just feels really good and nice, wonderful.

Then there is tranquility as the fifth factor of awakening, *samādhi*, which is the unification of mind, the gathering together, the whole becoming whole. It is sometimes usually called concentration, which is fine, provided that it's understood to be not a narrow focus like a laser, but rather a centering where all things are gathered around a common center. Finally, there's equanimity, considered the most beautiful, most profound treasure of all these factors of awakening. But it wouldn't seem that way unless you really are experiencing it. The idea of it is hard to convey, how wonderful it feels.

So the first is awareness. What I like about this translation is that often when the Buddha talks about *sati*, it doesn't belong to the world of doing. It's not like, now apply your attention, focus your attention, focus well. All that is useful to some degree, but awareness itself is not that. Awareness is not something we do, but something we allow. Awareness is not something we make happen, but we get out of the way for it.

We open to it. We recognize a natural capacity to be present with seeing, with knowing, with feeling, with sensing, and also a kind of gestalt of all those, a kind of combination of all those that can sometimes feel like a field of awareness and the sense of being present and expanding awareness. Sometimes people call it an expanding mind, big mind. Awareness is kind of

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here and present, and it doesn't really feel like we're doing it. This is a time when this factor of awakening, this first limb of awakening, begins to grow and expand.

Who we are as awareness gets clearer, stronger, fuller, it opens up to the second, which I call clear seeing. The reason for that is that investigation seems like a lot of doing and probing and looking for something that we're going to learn from it. It's okay to do that sometimes, but maybe it belongs to the world of doing rather than growing, of making something rather than allowing and receiving.

The ancient Pāli word *dhammavicaya*, *dhamma* here means our experience, the details of our experience, and *vicaya* means discernment or distinguishing, distinguishing our experience more clearly. It isn't a searching and figuring. Rather, if the fog clears, we see the landscape with clarity. It's beautiful here in the Bay Area when the fog, the smog, the haze disappears, and the clarity by which we see the hills and the trees and the bay, it all becomes kind of wonderful because every part of it is very clear, clearly distinguished from the others, but clearly part of a whole.

In *dhammavicaya*, one of the very important distinctions that allows so much more to happen in the *Dharma* is not seeing something exactly, but rather feeling or knowing or recognizing the difference, the clear distinction, between what is healthy for us and what is not healthy. When we get tight in our awareness and our efforts, and when we are getting softer and calmer and more open. When the practice is allowing something to grow, and when we bear down and restrict. When we get involved in thoughts, actions, behavior, attitudes which diminish us, which are unhealthy for us, which are unwholesome, and those which fill us with good energy or pervade us, fulfill us, fill us with goodness.

These different limbs are wholesome. The simple way I have of understanding this is through these English words: wholesome and unwholesome. We clearly see when we're oriented to our life, ourselves, our meditation, in ways that we're no longer whole, we're restricting ourselves and limiting ourselves. We clearly see what it's like to step back into a wholeness of our experience or move in that direction. This kind of seeing, this kind of clear seeing, is what allows the effort, the next factor of awakening, to be a delightful kind of vitality or engagement.

So these are things that are natural within us. They're limbs; they're as natural as an arm and a leg. They are things that can grow and develop, as arms and legs grow and develop for a child, until they become full and complete. This is very different than the engineering approach of meditation. And so this is not bundling. If anything, it's unbundling, so things can grow.

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So, thank you, and we'll continue with these seven factors for the rest of this week.

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