

2019-05-20: Foundations of Mindfulness

Part 13 - The Seven Factors of Awakening

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SPEAKERS

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Okay, well, we're getting near the end of now many months a series of talks on the four foundations of mindfulness. And the way I've been somewhat talking about it is that in a way that this instruction is given by the Buddha in a text called the discourse in the four foundations of mindfulness Satiputthana Sutta. It's, there's a sense or at least the way I read it as being a journey and movement unfolding over time, at deepening and, and that's often what happens in meditation, there's evolving a meditation of maturing of a deepening of it that goes on. And, and I want to give a few metaphors for there's a simile for this And one of them is if you take a light bulb, and maybe and you it's been covered with black, you know, electricians tape or duct tape or something, and you turn the light on, you know the bulb might go on, but there's no light that's gonna come out of that bulb. But if you slowly begin peeling off the black tape, then first you get a little bit of light coming out and then a bit more and more. And eventually, when all the tape is off, you have to hold the light bulb radiates its light out and the light fills the whole room. Before that the room was dark, creamy. And so there's a movement there slowly taking off the tape and slowly, more and more of the light bulb is revealed and more more light shines out. In some ways, that's what goes on in the mind. That we have the equivalent of tapes that are things that hit Under the light of the mind, the clarity of the mind, and the meditation practice slowly, shall helps to shed that. And so there's a lot of clarity that arises. And some people actually refer very explicitly, explicitly to a sense of light that they almost see kind of the inner light or something that comes as a practice deepens. And other metaphor that's used a lot, and maybe you've heard of this is is that of a, of a still forest pond. And if I wasn't still in maybe the cattle or they had a most ran through it, this small pond, then stairs up all the mud and it's all mud centered. So Madison solution and you can't see and that might is not the point is not clear. But if you leave the pond alone to be still, the mud settles down, and the pond becomes clear. So there's a process of if you leave it alone, it settles and clarity arises. So same thing with marriage. There's something important about meditation and learning to leave the mind alone but radically alone that allows things to settle and then

clarity arises and the See I had one more metaphor I want to use maybe it's gone it's been shared and oh yes that's with it now I came back and that is if you go backpacking, and with a heavy pack, you know you're hiking along with a heavy pack and you've hiked for many miles, hiking up a steep mountain, to the weight of the pack. And then you get to maybe the top of the mountain and you take the pack off. Suddenly you feel lighter. It's almost like you couldn't lift feel like you're lifted or kind of floating almost and it's so much easier to go and, and if you start walking without the pack if you weren't pack my wife couldn't We hiking for many, many days, she was doing what's called the Pacific Crest Trail. And there was one section of the trail for a day where she did it without her backpack. And she said it felt like she was felt like she was flying. And you know, that you're along. And, and so, you know, so meditation is like that you dropping a burden, the weight that we carry. We carry a lot of tension and struggles and burdens and responsibilities that we carry in this kind of MindScape that we have. And when, when meditation helps us to drop that something shifts and changes and we feel different, we feel lighter and more upright. And sometimes just meditation, there's an upward movement of the body, as it straightens out with the burdens of our life begins settling and we get focused in this last section of the four foundations of mindfulness Fourth foundation that have Adamas them the laws or the patterns or the truths of the dirt revealed in this practice.

It's, it's begins by talking about those things which darken the light bulb, or fill the pond with mud are the heavyweight that we carry. And these are called the five hindrances. And so part of the deepening of the practice is to learn how to be wise about these see them that they're there, these forces in the mind and have them quiet down or settle down or, you know, go out guado solution or get peeled off the light bulb. And these five are preoccupations, strong preoccupations of the mind. into in with desire, so often called sensual desire for comfort and sensual pleasures of every type. There is, ill will, to resent the man to steal The anger that we might have. And then there's a lethargy and resistance. So we might be caught up in a kind of strategy of kind of just resistance or lethargy or giving up or kind of despairing and the energy just two crops from our system. Or the might be the opposite, that there's a lot of restlessness, agitation regrets that are kind of stirred up and agitated or preoccupied with or preoccupied with doubt. Those are the five that the Buddha listed. And these are quite strong. And, and as these settle down, in the mind, no longer operating, things begin shifting in our mind and body. There's a lot more clarity, because these hindrances preoccupations, obscure the clarity of the mind. There's much more feeling of lightness and softness because these hindrances tend to be hard and heavy in the kind of on the mind, the heart and, and so there's starts being a shift and that shift moves in the direction of what the topic is today, which is called the seven factors of awakening. These are seven states of mind that begin to bubble up to surface to radiate when the these hindrances abate. And these are kind of like the, the little bit that was the initial rewards of Buddhist meditation, because they feel so sublime so wonderful when they become strong. And, and they are so these seven very beneficial states, sometimes considered kind of like the crown jewels of Buddhism. If you know anything, there's like, the treasures that they're literally called sometimes gems or treasures. And so you know, you go to a museum to see the crown jewels of a Contrary, and you go to your own mind to see your own crown jewels, your own gems, they're they're considered that precious. So there's seven of them. And the first is mindfulness itself. The second and mindfulness here is not a practice we do,

but a state of mind that we obtain or that arises or is there. The second is usually in English is translated as investigation, which gives the sense of a lot of work and act investigate the and I'll just say more about it later. The third is energy or effort engagement. We engage in the practice. The fourth is joy. The fifth is tranquility. The sixth is concentration, and the seventh is equanimity. And these seven states You know, I could imagine some of you and then maybe never heard this list before. And so maybe the words don't mean much for you and they kind of dry and, you know, you know, it'd be an interesting and maybe even slightly bad news not so not not not, not doesn't excite you like, Wow, that's a great energy, great, let's put energy in, oh my god, more and more energy. I've been busy all day I'm exhausted. In the time of the Buddha. There were, he had a monastic friend, monastic who was sick. And so the Buddha went to visit him and, and this monk was a meditation monk, so he knew these states. And so the Buddha basically did kind of a guided meditation to evoke these seven states of awakening. seven states seven factors of awakening enlightenment in them and the monk Kind of because he was he was so familiar with them, the Buddha kind of could evoke them by naming them. And then he got Well, that's kind of nice story. But when in fact when these things are quite strong people who have these experience of having these seven factors of awakening coursing through the body, it feels very healing. And I felt them It felt kind of like this The almost the only way I could describe this energy or vibration or sensations that were flowing through it flow into my body, was that this Scout's amazingly healing, sensation or feeling. The mind feels very sane, when the seven factors of awakening are mature and strong. So like maybe the sameness through the healthiest the mind can be in. And they're not so much things we have to do, but rather things that we allow for we set the conditions for them, and then they mature and they arise. And this is the kind of this wonderful interplay in meditation practice between What we do and what we allow, and some people don't understand that balance. And so to find that balance as part of it, some people hear you're supposed to, you know, focus on your breathing. And so they put all their effort into, you know, staying concentrated, and they get a headache. And other people think, Oh, just suppose you sit there and do nothing. And they just kind of sit back and they fall asleep. It's a combination of two things. And the example would be, maybe, would be if maybe you're stressed for busy day and preoccupied with many concerns, and you feel like you want to take a little break from it all and get refreshed. And so maybe you are you listen to music, maybe you put headsets on and you close your eyes, lay on the floor and listen to the music. And part of you is really focused on the music. And that's what you're that's what you set yourself up to, to do is to focus on the music. But if you're going to enjoy the music, you don't focus too hard. Right you you're there. Fully there, but you're not going to work at it exactly. At the same time, there's a letting go of the concerns of the day. And these two things are happening together, we're letting go of some of the doings we had. And we're still doing something which is we're listening to the music. So in meditation practice, we're doing something, we're bringing some focus, perhaps to the present moment, bring focus to the, if you're using using the breath as a focus, bring your focus to the breath to the breath. And then tuning into the music of the breath to the rhythm of the breath, to the sensations to you know, that's where we get it, you know, can we focus on but at the same time, you don't want to try too hard. Because that just messes things up like crying, listening to heart to music. And but you also don't you want to let go of all the other things that get in the way, the thoughts of the day that concerns that preoccupations. And so these two things work together. The

letting go of creates mental space, or heart space or physical space inside of us. It's kind of like we're getting rid of the clutter. So something can grow and develop inside. And what grows and develops are these seven factors of awakening. As we begin letting go, the hindrances, we like our preoccupations. So part of the reason to talk about the seven factors of awakening is so meditators can begin to recognize them when they arise, as opposed to here's one more set of things after memorize these seven things that have to do them and this Buddhist meditation, you know, I thought I was just sitting there and relaxing and distressing, but they can give us all these lists of things to do and you know, it's, it's, I'm just getting confused. So I apologize for that. But the idea is to do less, and but one of the ways to do that is to begin to recognize what begins to shift and change To recognize the unfolding of the journey of meditation, to be able to track and watch the shifts and changes in the mind, the heart and the body, as we sit down and do very little except be awake and be present, and then at some point to recognize the awakening or the arising of the seven factors of awakening, and that's one of the instructions that Buddha gave here. Recognize, and it's the arising of the factors of awakening that have not yet arising, said differently, recognize the unresolved factors of awakening when they arise. So it's just recognizing they're coming. It doesn't say, crank them up, you know, you know, just, you know, do them better. So it's a remarkable process of the house and then the bracket. Noticing creates more space. And the recognizing allows this amazing process to go on inside. I mean, I when it started happening to me, I was just kind of in awe of what this mind can do and what the process of this meditation could unfold and that these natural, beautiful, powerful natural processes, like the you know, like the weather or the wind or, you know, Teutonic plates shifting and moving, I don't know what you want to compare it to looking into the Grand Canyon or to look into your own inner life and watch it unfold and open in these forces come alive and sit there. It's quite a phenomenal experience to have appreciation and valuing. And so the recognize these arising so mindfulness practice is the practice of recognition, the practice of bringing bringing attention to what's going on. mindfulness practice that record ignition that noticing and naming and coming back and being present, allows for a state of awareness to begin developing clear awareness. What's distinct from mindfulness practice is mindfulness. Mindfulness being a state of awareness that's able to abide and rest in the present moment. and experience what occurs with comes and goes in the present moment. So the ability to get out of the way enough to keep recognizing what's happening in the present moment, to get out of the way to no longer get caught up in the past in the future, allows there to a surfacing, bubbling up or clear clearing the field for our field of awareness, present moment awareness. And that feeling of present moment awareness is quite delicious when it's established in your head. And you're not wandering off a lot and feel so good to be here. Wow. And then when you're here and present and aware, then there's a natural process of being seeing things more clearly. There's no there's less obscurations and so we start seeing more clearly. And, and what we call what what in English we call investigation in the ancient world, literally means to to distinguish or differentiate what's happening here to tease apart what's happening. So for example, the I might be sitting here feeling, some physical pain. In fact, I am i square here, I sprained my ankle a couple of weeks ago and it still hurts a little bit. And if I press it a certain way, so so I looked into pressing it the wrong way right now. And kind of a little bit so it hurts a little bit down there my ankle. And so I can feel the pain. And I can feel that the mind has some preoccupation with it. So I can see those two are happening in the present

moment. There's the pain, there's the feeling of the pain. Am I doing the right thing with it right now and checking it out. So these are two different things. I can notice that I have a little bit of delight, about focusing on the pain as I'm sitting here, because it's kind of delightful to kind of feel present and connected. Maybe it feels kind of odd to say that around pain, but in fact, that's what I feel. So it's not like I'm investigating looking for these things. But as I sit here and just open to the field, I start seeing these different pieces of it. That I wouldn't have seen if I hadn't taken a little pause in the talk. To do this like to do this exercise. I would have gone on it. Kind of this would have been receded into the background. But I started seeing more clearly the terrain MIT that I have my mind begins going off on a thought train about it, you know, didn't happen, but I could imagine, you know, oh, this means that they're probably going to amputate tomorrow. You know, this is going to be terrible, you know, in the mind goes off that way or, or maybe you know, whatever you know. And so if you really sit back and really start to be clear, we start the work initially seemed like a big, buzzing confusion of anarchy and chaos of our experience becomes less and less chaotic as we begin seeing distinctions until such a point where we see things in their simplest manifestation. And one things we're looking for mindfulness is quieting the thinking mind enough, the conceptual mind that's has stories and ideas and plans and reactions to what's going on. So we're not seeing our experience through the lens of those ideas. But rather, we're seeing things in their simplest possible manifestation. So I can feel, you know, I could be feeling my pain in my ankle, but mostly what it is, is, you know, you know, I might be caught up and worry about what it means and I'll never be able to walk again and I can't afford a doctor. And this is a terrible life and why was I, you know, ended up like this. And it's just a big buzz of confusion. I can't really see the details at all. But if I relax all those thoughts and concerns, and I dropped down and be very quiet and peaceful, the simplest manifestation of that pain has been in and of itself has no worry in it has no ideas for the future, no ideas of doctors. It's just a kind of sharp little searing heat and vibration that feels a little bit between hot and cold. That's what I feel right now. And, and so it's just a simplest manifestation of it. And as I tune into these things really work carefully, I see that actually it's not a single sensation. It's a series of sensations that are like a dance that come into existence and vibrate and dance around, move around coming and going. And it's becomes a whole different phenomena, then they're gonna amputate my foot tomorrow, you know, and all those concerns, you know, that's just like a gross very high level kind of interpretation of the event. So I don't know if this was the best example to give you for what I'm trying to say I apologize for that. But but it's just what came up is nice though. I stopped to pay to notice myself that's when I noticed. So the so so as we have developed this clarity, what arises is the ability to start seeing the distinction, the simple manifestation of the different things so they're not all lumped together in a big lump.

That's interesting. And there's a way in which it's very interesting to start experiencing life directly behind the veil, of all the thoughts, ideas, concerns, plans, memories that kind of make it all confusing, make it all kind of murky and filled, fill the pond with mud. And as the as it gets clear and clear. There's a tendency for the mind, to start getting interested to be in wanting to engage and there's a feeling of health, a healthy way of engaging I don't know if any of you have ever done something like going hiking or do some exercise or something and at some point something clicks in. And it just feels like the system just loves doing the hiking. It's just like just going and going and it's just you don't want to

stop because the system is engaged. No one has to tell you, you know, go out there and hike. You know, I'm hiking you're hi Carter. You know yours, you know, work at it. It you know, at some point, it feels like the naturalness of walking takes over, and you were engaged. And it feels like it's the easiest thing to do is like you're flying maybe or something appeals. And so sometimes there's a way of being engaged, where the engagement takes over. It's not us doing it, but we're being done. So that can happen in many areas, people playing music and report that sometimes people you know, different things we do and feels like the engagement something is taking over. But we're being done too. So same thing happens in meditation. At some point, the engagement of mindfulness of attention and recognition is not something that is self consciously done. But it's something that clicks, we just want to be engaged. And this is like one of the best things going. And it's better than going back to the old way, which was thinking about amputated amputated feet and doctors, you know, just like quite so much better just to be in the simplicity of it all. As it as we as that interest and engagement develops, it seems like the way that our psychophysical system is created. When there's a kind of continuous focus of attention and engagement, it tends to release a good chemicals in our system. And it tends to kind of make everything work in harmony. In such a way that joy arises certain kinds of light and happiness and usually in Buddhism, we call the joy that arises, and, and again, it's something that arises in the Buddhist instruction was When unreasoned joy arises when joy which has had no luck has not yet arisen. It's no longer it hasn't been there yet. When that comes this meditative joy, recognize that it's there. As this joy factor develops, it can be quite intense sometimes, at some point as the letting go process, the deepening process that focusing practice continues, there starts to be a wonderful shift into tranquility. And this is a very sublime feeling. It can be, it tends to be very physical feeling, and embodied sense of tranquility, that might be spreading through the chest or the torso. It's in me it's very torso based and this inner critic really comes into place, a deep kind of glowing field of peace and softness and serenity. And its skin. It's not something what's remarkable is it Keep saying is is not something I'm doing. But it's I'm being done to it's arising out of the process of it all out of, you know, the deepening of the practice. And then that tranquility gives rise or supports the deepening of concentration, steadiness of mind, the ability of the mind to be still settled, steady, composed, and unified. The mind now is completely involved in the process of meditation. It's not interested in anything else. It's kind of like your this is this is the most delightful and pleasant place to be. And all the different capacities of the mind, seemingly are absorbed and involved in the present moment of doing this one thing. And I think we know that in other endeavors besides meditation, some people find tremendous joy and delight in getting concentrated in some activity. They do. Sometimes it's sports or music or art or you know that you just really get absorbed in something to do one thing really well. And, you know, people get kind of high. The first time this happened to me in my life was something that I told my kids about it. And you'll understand that they did not appreciate this. And maybe I shouldn't maybe it was not a stressful parenting moment. But the first time I really noticed for me, this kind of joy arising from being absorbed in something I was taking final exams in college. You know, I would study and study and study and learn all this material. And that was there was in there stayed in my memory for about 24 hours, but it was long enough for the test. And then I would sit down and how to get completely absorbed in the test. And, you know, I wasn't thinking about getting absorbed or just that's the world, it's just the test. Everything else I could think about disappeared. And

when I left that those exams after two hours, or 300, or three hours worth, whatever how long it took, I would go out and I just be like, stoned. It was like, you know, a natural high, he was like, so wonderful. Like, my mind was so clear, so empty, I felt solid, so much. I wasn't happy about the exam. I was just happy. And, and so just, you know, being absorbed. So just so anyway, so and then when that settles down, and we move into this tranquility, it's beautiful when we get concentrated, and the concentration is Anyway, I'm getting confused here because concentration brings more joy. And so there's a whole process of deepening and deepening but as concentration deepens, 10 point it gets into a very tranquil place, very peaceful place. And then it moves into the deepest place, and this is considered the most sublime or the most satisfying state of the seven factors of awakening, kind of the pinnacle of meditation practice before the experience of enlightenment. And this is and the word that's used here. If you if you're kind of uninitiated who all this can seem kind of uninteresting, or you know, now you're talking about being aloof or it's dry, has no emotional valence at all. So why is that interesting? The word is equanimity. And you know, how can that be? I think of it as one of the best emotions you could have, most most pleasant, enjoyable, happy, satisfying emotions you have. It's not playing it's not. It's not aloof, but the mind is, is like the mind is at its best. Because the mind is not reacting to anything. A reactive mind is agitated reactive mind is caught directed mind is is afflicted in certain kind of way. The but this beautiful mind we have can operate quite quite well without reacting to anything. And to learn to trust, that we don't have to be doing and reacting and fixing and defending, and all the reactions go away the mind becomes still an even and quiet. And so things can happen. But it doesn't create any waves in the mind, the mind doesn't get agitated whatsoever. So this deep equanimity so these seven factors of awakening arise as meditation deepens, arises, the hindrances and preoccupations fall away. It's helpful to recognize when they arise, because it's the recognition that kind of creates the space to allow them to grow, or makes the space that allows for the continuing deepening or full unfolding of the journey of many of the mindfulness meditation. It keeps going deeper and deeper. And then it comes to Equity and the value of equanimity. Why is not to be economists for its own sake. The reason why it's held up as being so important is that because the mind is not reacting to anything, it makes possible for the mind to two makes available to mind two very important things. One is, is the mind and becomes very soft, very malleable, very, very kind of relaxed. Whereas when it's reactive, it gets tense and held and kind of tight or, or, you know, hard to mind you can feel the mic getting softer and softer and softer. And, and so when the mind is most softer, most economists that's where it's the easiest for the mind to let go further. But with the mind is tight, it's difficult Miko, so that's one. And the second is that an economist mind has no no filters of ideas through which we're experiencing what's going on. And so we can have a deeper insight into what's going on moment moment that is normally not available to people in more busy conceptual thinking mind, and to be able to drop down to a very, very primal level in the mind to see the moment to moment. arising and passing of experience is a phenomenal stepping stone for liberation. And that's what we'll talk about next week when we talk about the final exercise the final instructions or the final description of this process that is given. It's usually referred to as the Four Noble Truths and so this state of equanimity is a setup for experiencing the Four Noble Truths. The so the seven factors of awakening are not an instructions this teachings here is not an instructions of what to do, but rather instructions of what to recognize. And so that's why teachers like to teach them and help people get familiar with them and know what they're like. And

when doing so, then when they occur, people can recognize them. So we have about seven minutes left. And would you like to do a little guided meditation on the seven factors of awakening, and I'll guide you through them in a rather innovative way. And you might not be able to, you know, follow along but That's okay.

What I'm going to offer for each of the seven factors of awakening is this single word to represent that factor. And as you hear this word, welcome that word into you in the way that maybe if you were stepping out of the cold and into the warmth of the sun, you might step forward, open your arms. Why'd your chest open and out to receive the warmth? So imagine that these words are kind of like the warmth of the sun. And you let them settle in or absorb into you and see what resonates. See what opens in you see if they There's something inside that corresponds to these words. That is kind of good thing or satisfying something inside that. Oh, yes, this is good.

So to begin, though, you might take a few long, slow, deep breaths. And part of the value of taking deep breaths bigger than the beginning of meditation is to feel connected to your body. To know that you have a body and to inhabit a body body to be here with your body. And then letting your breathing return to normal. And maybe feel your body. There's any obvious places that you can relax. Relax around the face, the shoulders. Maybe you can soften your belly.

And maybe as you exhale, you can relax your thinking mind. Perhaps even to a very small degree. Perhaps you can let your thoughts either slip or fall away. drift away like a thought bubble. That's your thoughts recede into the background.

So, for the for the mindfulness factor awakening, I offer you the word here, here, here in this body in this place this time step forward into here

for the investigation factor of awakening word is this This, here just with this, whatever it might be that appears this

and then for the effort, factor awakening who word is? Yes.

Yes to being present here with this

And for the joy factor. Not quite a word, but it's the sound. Ah

and that word you might quietly say to yourself as you exhale ah

here with this Yes.

And then for the tranquility factor it's a simple word relax.

Hear with this relax Okay.

And then for the concentration factor of awakening the word is steady.

Let yourself be steady in the middle of this here steady

And then for the liquidity factor the word or this phrase is it's okay it's okay. Here whatever this is it's okay

hear this yes ah Relax, steady. It's okay.

And if this little meditation has given you even a teeny little glimpse of what these seven factors might be for you and your experience, May those glimpses be a little seed that can keep growing for you and developing. So these seven factors of awakening become your companions and your friends and your siblings quarters and you'll find that they're much better friends than the hindrances.

Even though people don't think this way, functionally, people tend to trust the hindrances and preoccupations, we entrust them, we wouldn't spend so much time in them. And the shift that happens in this practice is we begin trusting the seven factors of awakening more than the hindrances and that's a great thing to trust these things. So but you have to really know how to recognize them. So may that recognition become yours. Thank you