Developing the Factors of Awakening

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 46:56

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasah Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasah Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasah

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So make sure that you're comfortable. Always begin your meditation by creating at least that physical comfort. Begin by making sure your basic posture is comfortable and then lifting up that spine without any tension. Then just begin to physically relax around it. Pass your attention over your forehead, your jaw, your shoulders, and just feel that relaxation coming.

If there's any spots that are tense, like the shoulders, give them a squeeze. Or if you feel a lot of tension in the face, give it a squeeze. Screw it up and let it go. Sometimes a deep breath, holding it for a little while and just letting it go.

Now as you scan your body, as you feel the whole of your body, you may just feel the calmness there. So that calmness is *passaddhi*. It's one of the qualities, one of the factors of enlightenment. It can become quite delicious, that sense of calm.

So having established that at a basic physical level, we can now just bring the attention to the breath, becoming aware of the sensations of the breath. Now you can do it at the nostrils, but with this sort of exercise, you can contact the abdomen, just the rising and falling of the abdomen, just the sensations there. Just get in touch with them, feel them, experience them as if you were feeling cloth.

What you're bringing to that is just awareness, which is the leading factor of enlightenment. As you begin to become aware of those sensations, those gentle feelings, calm *passaddhi* feelings, calm feelings, the rising and falling of the abdomen, use a little noting word just to keep the mind steady: rising, falling. If there's a gap after that out-breath, feel a touch point like your hands: rising, falling, touching.

As you contact these sensations, these feelings, as it were, go closer to it. Get the feeling of focusing in. It's a gentle thing. If you're knitting your brow and forcing it, then that's putting any pressure. You're just looking and you're focusing. It's like you're looking at a countryside in the distance, you see something, and suddenly your eyes stop and focus in on that object. Get that feeling of focusing down into the breath.

That's the concentration, and all the effort you need is just to keep that focus in and hold it there. In the old cameras you had to turn the lens to focus it; now it's done by electric motor. So the effort, the gentle effort, just focusing in on the object are two factors of enlightenment. As you focus in on the object, other

things begin to fade into the distance, as it were. You become less aware of sounds, other feelings in the body. All this is a sign that you're beginning to focus in, to concentrate on the object.

You can see it's very much a relaxation, just drawing your attention more and more particularly into the sensations and feelings caused by the breath. So now we have a general calmness and awareness. We know what's going on. We can see, feel, experience the breath. There's a general focusing down and an energy to support it.

Now we bring in the factor of investigating the dhamma, which means that we don't just focus on the feelings and sensations, but on the quality of impermanence, transience, change, process. Become aware of that now. This is the quality of investigating the dhamma. Now this is supported by the quality of equanimity, which means that we're not coming from a fixed position, some expectation, some idea. We actually want to experience the arising and passing away, first of all, of the gross long breath: the beginning and the end of the in-breath, the beginning and the end of the out-breath.

We can say, yes, the in-breath begins and ends. The out-breath begins and ends. Very simple. As we draw our attention to that, you might feel a sort of joy, a sort of delicate energy in the body, and that's the interest. Now we've raised that wanting to know, a childlike curiosity. Am I really seeing things as they really are? Or am I just seeing a concept in the mind, an image in the mind?

So hopefully now you're actually moving towards pure *vipassanā*: awareness, focusing and effort to keep us there. Calmness of the body and the joy of interest. Equanimity, not coming from a fixed position, investigating the quality of impermanence.

As you observe the breath, you might notice that there's an image in the mind of the abdomen rising and falling. There's even an idea that something is rising and falling. These are mental concepts, mental constructs. Focus in more deeply into just the sensations.

That brings us to the end of our little exercise. You see you can talk yourself into that. Going through these qualities, remember that all of this rests upon a quality of trust, a quality of faith, *saddhā*, which is a spiritual faculty. We wouldn't be here if we didn't have that initial confidence.

When that confidence goes, for instance, the usual loss of confidence is in oneself: everybody else can do it but not me. When you get that wavering, that doubt in the mind about one's own capacity, that's when you have to remind yourself that these qualities are natural to all human beings and just there within us. It's not as though they are special qualities to somebody who's a Buddha or who's already spiritually advanced.

Once a child's over the age of seven, you can talk them into this sort of state. It's easy, any time before puberty. After that it gets very complicated. So these qualities are just to be developed, just like any other mental quality that we have.

We're very good at developing the negative qualities. We've learned how to do that very well. So you feel, you start whingeing, and you know how to do that. You whinge. You know that sound with the whinge, and you just develop it. At the end you become a whinger. If you look at all these qualities that we've developed which are negative, all the irritations, same with depression. You feel a bit depressed, so you say to yourself, "I'm depressed." Then you go around saying, "It's really depressing. Everything's depressing." Then you start saying, subtly underneath it all is, "I am a depressive. May I be depressed?" Then you want to spread that out. "May all beings be depressed." Then you feel you're in communion. You look for other depressives.

I once went to a Depressives Anonymous. A bit sad, really. They're all sat around in this circle, and the leader said, "Like everybody who'd like to just speak out," in one of these counselling sessions. "How do you feel?" So everybody told everybody else how depressed they were. Everybody said, "Yeah, really depressing." I was getting depressed.

There was one fellow who said he'd had a fantastic week. You could see he was on a high, he was manic. He was lifting himself up. So everybody was looking at him. Then there was this lovely moment where the leader of the group said, "Well, I've had a very good week, and I was doing very well and I was keeping high. It's all the experience of talking yourself into this high. Then I tripped over a pavement. So I wrote to the council and said, 'I've just tripped over your pavement and I've hurt myself, and I asked for compensation.' Well, they wrote back and said that there was no compensation for that. So I felt really angry about that. And now I'm depressed." It's amazing. I was out there thinking, hmm.

At the end of it, I gave this talk on how we make ourselves depressed. It was funny. I said, "Well, I teach over in North London there at the Bihar." Of the twenty-odd people that were in the room, maybe seven or eight came over to see me, and they all determined that they'd come over and learn this meditation so they wouldn't get so depressed. Well, they never turned up. I just presumed they got so depressed they couldn't come and see me.

I left that meeting feeling very sad, because they were obviously trying to help themselves. There was nothing immoral or wrong about it. It just hadn't clicked. They just hadn't understood how they were continuously recreating the same old scenes and just driving themselves deeper and deeper into depression. Anyway, after a while, I heard that they must have gotten really depressed because the money ran out and they had to stop the meetings. It's very unfortunate. Very depressing.

Here you can see that through practices like *mettā*, you can develop quite the opposite. Now, if you develop *mettā*, that's loving-kindness, compassion, all those sorts of things, but you don't develop the *vipas sanā*, then you're laying over the top of your mind like a manic. You're laying over it this sort of icing, like an icing on top of dung. When it cracks, all this stuff comes pouring out. It's very depressing.

Here, in the *vipassanā*, we're actually trying to create a level of consciousness. Don't confuse that with a mental state. I'm using mental state to mean a general state. So the physical feelings, for instance, that go

with depression, the heart state, the depression in the heart, and the thoughts that go with that depression - all that I'm calling a mental state. This is, in the Pali, for those of you who know, that's *citta*. That's the mental state.

Now, to associate with that, to identify with that, to go around saying "I am depressed," is a level of consciousness. Because there, you believe yourself to be that state. So there's no separation between me and that. "I am depressed." It's there in the sentence. The "I" and the depression are one and the same thing.

What we're doing in our meditation is we have the same feelings as anybody who's depressed. You've got the sensations, you've got the heart feelings, and you've got the mental thinking that goes with it. But now you're observing it. You become an observer of your own inner state. So you must have pulled yourself out of that. You no longer identify with it. You no longer say "I am depressed." You're saying "there's depression." That's it. Can you see that's a very different way of relating to ourselves? It's a different level of consciousness, and the image I gave you this morning of a cone: on top of the cone looking down on this vicious circle.

What we discover is that we can develop beautiful mental states. We do that with pleasurable things like ice cream and stuff. But here, when we develop these states, they're dependent on something within ourselves. So they're not dependent on something outside. The weather can be awful. There can be no ice cream. There can be no tea. And yet you can develop these beautiful mental states just by this inner exercise.

All you have to do is just keep gently pushing yourself. Just gently. When I say push, it's against the grain. The grain wants you to fall asleep, get tired, go to bed, take a walk, jump up and down, beans on toast. When you go against that, it feels like you don't want to do it. But as you keep doing it and these beautiful feelings start arising - the calmness, sense of joy, the wanting to know - then all your energy begins to move that way. Very slowly these factors of enlightenment are becoming developed.

The Buddha says they have to be developed to perfection. The perfection is when you start having insights. When it comes to all the negative stuff, these five hindrances that we've mentioned - the greed, the hatred, all that sort of stuff - you have to see how they arise and how they pass away, and how they are not maintained. You've got to see that process. That's the *vipassanā*, when you're doing insight on these negative states that are arising.

On the other side, you've got to see: now this is a spiritual faculty, this is a factor of enlightenment, this has to be developed. So the acuteness of my awareness, the sense of one-pointedness in the mind that we call concentration - that word concentration is unfortunate for us because it goes back to school and people giving us cuffs on the back of the head and told to concentrate. But actually, when you're interested in something, when you're really interested in something, have you ever had any problems with concentration?

It's raising that interest, that wanting to know, and immediately you get that focus. Immediately you get the mind coming into *ekaggatā*. *Ekaggatā* means going one way. It's not coming here and there. One-pointed is probably a much better word for us than concentration. A one-pointed attention.

It all begins with this factor of *sati*, this awareness, which is essentially the Buddha mind. It's essentially that Buddha nature within us. *Sati*. It knows. There is this knowing. Its quality is knowing. In English we have this facility of making a verb into a noun. So there is the knowing. If you say consciousness, it blocks it into an object. Whereas if you think of knowing or the awakening, it gives you the sense of process. It gives you a sense that it's not something, it's a faculty, it's an ability.

There's this knowing, *sati*, awareness. They've got all these other words for it: mindfulness, being in the moment, being now, being here, all that sort of stuff. But its quality is it knows.

As you place your awareness on the breath, so you always begin with that to create these faculties. As you put your awareness on the breath, there is that raising of interest. I've done it slightly different, but you can do it another way. You can raise the interest by saying, "Oh, let's see this. What is this?" You can drop a question in there. "What is this? Who am I?" It doesn't matter, but you don't think about it. You just stay in that emptiness after the question. "What is this?" And then you look.

As you focus down, as you become focused down, all the peripheral stuff begins to fade away. So you can become centred on the breath, and you don't hear anything. Then suddenly somebody coughs, and you can be shocked out of your meditation. You might want to kill the person, but that's a good sign to you that you were fairly concentrated. There'll even come a point where you're so concentrated, somebody coughs, fires a gun, and you won't hear it. Because you've brought yourself down into this singularity.

That's an effort. That's all the effort you need to become awakened. Just that. Just that of looking. Just like in the body, all the effort you need is just to keep the spine erect. You can get away with just breakfast. If you just have breakfast and meditate all day, within seven years - the effort needed is a very gentle effort.

If there's any force comes in, if you feel that forcing, something's getting in there. You're trying to see. As soon as the trying to see comes in, there's the "I." It's looking for something. As soon as you know that, as soon as you get the tightness - you stay with the body, you can feel the tightness coming - then you know, stop. Wanting to see something. That's not like you're looking for something. What we should be doing is just looking at.

Have faith. Have faith that if you look at something, there will be a seeing. This is the Buddha. He says, first of all, just look at something, and the insight arises naturally. For instance, if your car breaks down and you open the bonnet, first you look, don't you? If you go to the bonnet with preconceived ideas as to what's happened, then you can be looking for a long time. But a trained mechanic, they know what they're looking for. They open the bonnet and they see. Same with the doctor.

It's a case of training ourselves to see these three characteristics. With something neutral like the breath,

it's always the sense of transience. Always the sense of something arising and passing away. It can also be the sense of that distance, not me, not mine, that you can get. But remember that that's only a first position. Once you've created that objective stance, you go towards the object, investigate it. So that concentration is better developed when you draw up the interest of wanting to know.

And you'll see there's a natural focusing in on the object. And just that effort of wanting to know—that's enough. You don't have to go beyond that.

Now, as you do that, this is supported by the calmness in the body. So that calmness in the body is balancing the joy that's coming from the interest. Sometimes you might, if the calmness goes a bit too far, then that's when you begin to get feelings of heaviness, sloth, torpor. There's too much of it. So when you feel that, you just lift the spine, correct your posture, and just raise the interest. So the interest will raise the energy of wanting to know. If you start looking for something, so the interest overreaches itself, then you find yourself getting restless. So all these are little pointers to what's happening within us. So it's that sense of general awareness and then being aware of anything that's happening and then slowly just moving towards the object.

Now, we've been primed and this is where the faith comes in. What we've understood from the Buddha's teaching is that the delusion lies within the looking. It doesn't lie within thought. The thought is only an expression of our delusion. It doesn't lie within the emotional life. That's only an expression of our delusion. The delusion lies deep within that which is looking. It can't see properly. There's a kink in the way it sees things. And what the Buddha points out is that this manifests in these three characteristics.

So where there is real radical impermanence we have a sense of continuous time. But actually there's no such thing as time in any continuous sense. Time is just the way the mind relates events or experiences a sequence of moments. How long is a moment in time? Is it as long as the word "time"? It's a bit longer than "time." How long do you experience an actual piece of time for? Interesting, isn't it? But at some point we lose the present. It suddenly becomes the past. But this present is long enough for us to believe that it's the same person moving through time. We've got this idea that there's time like a tunnel or something like that, and we're moving through it. So the past somehow exists in a way, and the future exists because we're going towards it. But actually, nothing in any essence exists.

When you get down to the actual moment as it arises and passes away it's just a sudden coagulation of energy and it dissipates—it's gone. That's why when you keep watching the breath eventually you'll get down to a point where there's no breath. All there is is a sequence of arising and falling away of sensations, which is frightening. Because before, you thought you existed. And this existence was based on your experience of your body, and of your emotions and thoughts. So it's beginning to perceive that.

Now, the process is undoing, undermining all our concepts about who we are and what we are. We believe we're human beings. This is a big mistake. If the word "being" means anything beyond the present moment, it's a big mistake. Because at some point, the body of the human being will be as lifeless as a

useless log, it says in the scripture. It'll just lie there, totally lifeless. Somebody will pick it up and chuck it in a hole. So, whatever we mean when I say, "I am a human being," and you go into that as an investigation—not much there, is there? Investigating that is to begin to realize that this self that we've constructed is a delusion. It doesn't exist.

So by observing the quality of transience and by observing that quality of "not me, not mine," we're undoing these essential misunderstandings we have. Now, if it were to lead us just to an annihilation, just to the fact that there was nothing there anyway, and that's the end of that, and when you die you disappear, then that would be depressing. But what the Buddha's saying is that as you begin to perceive what you are not, what you truly are becomes more and more obvious to you. So the process is one of negation. It's one of "not me, not mine." Now to do that these spiritual faculties have to be clearly honed. They've got to be nicely developed and you've got to be able to hold that steady gaze within the calmness. Keep the interest going and keep looking at these three qualities.

Now even when the negative stuff comes up, even when the body now begins to shake with restlessness or it begins to feel heavy with tiredness or sloth and torpor, even then you can maintain that same quality of watchfulness. Even then there can be that quality of, as it were, calmness behind what's happening on the surface of the body and the mind. Even then you can maintain an interest. Even in dullness where all it is is just porridge in your head, you can wander about that and be completely awake as if you'd woken up brightly in the morning. Because it's within that awareness to be awake like that. It's only by way of association and habit that it keeps falling into that state of drowsiness and sloth and torpor. By way of habit. By way of, in the past, seeking refuge there. Seeking refuge in the bed. The final haven. When everything goes wrong, go to bed. Just when everything goes bad, you get this little neon sign come up. "Head for the bed." That's it. You dive in and you wake up and you feel better, usually. And all you've done is use sleep to suppress, to push it down. Whatever it was that made you head for the bed.

Now you begin to see all these things. You begin to see how we are moving away from what is unpleasant, moving towards what is pleasant. And that's that psychological vicious circle that we get caught up in. So again, having established this watchfulness, having got these seven faculties developed, we begin to see that. Just the seeing and the understanding is the moment of liberation. It's the moment of liberation in the sense like a moment, "Ah, now I understand." But then, of course, there comes the training. If it were just that, well, I should think in a very short while we'd be all fully awakened. If it were just a matter of seeing these things, I should think we'd be very quickly out of this state.

But the problem is that the conditioning is so heavy and so deep that you have to keep working against it all the time. So here on this retreat, you're moving forward a bit. Then you leave. And you say, "To hell with it," and you go back a bit. This spiritual life is like up and down, up and down. That's why it takes so long to look back and think, "Oh, something might be happening." So that effort has to be kept up even in daily life. Remember, this is not whipping yourself or kicking yourself or forcing yourself. It's a gentle self-cajoling, encouraging yourself.

So, just to revise these seven factors that we've tried to distinguish in our meditation, which you, in every sitting, that's how you should begin. You should begin by trying to establish that state. If you lose it, go back, start again. Bring yourself back to the breath, et cetera, et cetera. When I say lose it, I mean when there's too much thought around. But remember that sometimes the mind is just like that. It goes mad and you just have to have patience and you just keep bringing it back and bringing it back. And remember that you can have these seven factors even though there's a negative mental state there. You can still see the quality of transience as we've mentioned. The depression, you can still see how you relate to that depression, which is understanding how we create suffering. You can still see that there is depression—not me, not mine.

So these factors of enlightenment, as it were, are sitting behind, or beneath, the presenting quality that's arising in the mind. So the essential quality is this *sati*, this awareness, the knowing. And what empowers us, what empowers the meditation is that sense of interest, the wanting to know. And it's wanting to know something quite specific. It's wanting to know these three characteristics. It's wanting to experience them, to see them very clearly.

And to support that, the body has to support it. So there has to be that stillness. So even though you might feel depressed in the chest, the body can still be quite energized and relaxed. Even though you feel restless, very restless, you can still relax the body around that restlessness. So that quality of what's known as *pīti*—often it's translated as "bliss" I think, which is way over the top. It's just that sense of joy in the body and the calmness of the body balancing each other. And what's driving that is that interest.

And then you're investigating the Dharma. You're investigating these three characteristics. And to investigate that you have to come at it as somebody who doesn't know. You don't know. You've heard this from the Buddha but you don't know. So you've got to keep looking. So you've come from a point of no position. You've not taken a position. You're not saying to yourself, "The Buddha said everything's transient, so it must be right." If the Buddha says everything's transient, "I'm not so sure about that. Let's have a look." So it's a case of that investigation. That equanimity.

And you have to be careful with the sense of achievement. It's a difficult word for us in English because achievement is always something in the future. You're doing something now to achieve something in the next moment, in the next year, by the end of your life, when I'm retired. Achievement is always ahead of time. But if you define your achievement, if you want to use that word, as being aware in this present moment, then that's the achievement. So to be aware is to be there. There's nowhere else to go.

So if you think about achievement in your meditation, don't think about some insight, or where you'll be in ten years' time or something, or what you're going to do, like planning to live in the now. That's a lovely one. Actually, just bring yourself, just say to yourself, "Am I aware?" Yes, well, that's it, that's the achievement—I'm aware. That's it. Once you're aware, you're there. So you keep saying that to yourself. It's a secret mantra. "I'm aware, I must be there. I've done it." And so, get rid of the idea of something

achieving in the future time.

So, awareness. And we can actually make things very simple for ourselves. Sometimes, especially for those of you who are more established in your meditation, you can see these faculties, you can do things to balance them. So that's the skills of meditation. But for those of you who are new, and all this sounds very complicated—what, seven of these, ten of those, and five—you can actually put all that aside because the one factor which draws everything into balance is that awareness. And that's the key discovery of the Buddha. Once you place your awareness on something with right intention, to observe the characteristics or to be stilled, then all these faculties just come up to support that awareness.

Now that awareness, you might say, is our intuitive intelligence, but it's in its passive mode. In a passive mode, it's receiving, "to be aware of." And as that information comes in, there's a sudden seeing. So that awareness has an active mode of an intuitive understanding which is known as *paññā*. And you will notice that our trust is called *satipaññā*. *Satipaññā* is the Buddha mind. It's that which is to be liberated, to be awakened, to be enlightened.

So, having said all that, having gone on like this for too long, there is a very simple approach which is just to keep placing the awareness on the object. Just that activity of wanting to feel, experience exactly what's going on now, whether it's the subtle feelings of the breath or the feelings that are associated with a heavy state or a beautiful state, that's enough. Just doing that, and the insights will arise. Remember these insights are not cataclysmic. They're just little incremental points which over a period of time for most people build up to a change in the way we see things. It's a change within consciousness and when that change begins to take place it has a systemic effect. It affects your attitude to things.

So if you see transience, then of course you don't hold on so much. So when you're watching the TV and somebody phones you, you can turn it off right in the middle of a soap. It doesn't matter. Just as he's about to score the goal, you can turn it off and go and answer the phone. Before you couldn't do that. Now you've understood. So it's a case of this change becoming a change of attitude and that immediately expresses itself in the way we speak, in what we do and how we do things. And in our livelihood. People change their livelihood if they meditate sometimes. Because they find themselves in a livelihood which they find doesn't fit with the Dharma. So they make this effort to move over. Change. Even if it means a loss of wealth. A dislocation.

Now, just as that happens that way, outwardly, from understanding into livelihood, remember, it's also coming back the other way. So your livelihood has a great effect on your attitude. It has a great effect on your general understanding. So as you know, if you're trained as a policeman, you're always suspicious. You have to be. You're trained to be suspicious. Anybody you see, you think, "Hmm." If you're a soldier, you're trained to kill. So your profession—those, of course, are heavy examples. If you're a nurse or a doctor or in a more helping profession, then you're developing that compassion, usually.

So, remember that the whole of the teaching is one composite. It's a mandala. As soon as you affect one

part, the whole mandala changes. Something happens. So, I hope that little explanation does clarify for you these factors of enlightenment and how to establish them and to use them in order to gain slowly, just to gain little insights and change our view of things. So I hope that's been a benefit and I can only hope that your liberation is sooner rather than later.

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