Seven Factors of Awakening

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 1:03:24

At this point in the retreat, as some of you have pointed out to us, we have not shied away from talking about the unwholesome factors of mind. Some of you may have complained a little about the emphasis here. We've talked about the hindrances, we've talked about difficult emotions, we've talked about the three roots of the unwholesome. This is really important because if we don't know how to work with these forces in our meditation, they will hinder it. They will block its development and deepening. Once we learn to work with them, the deepening can happen in relation to them. Hopefully this is what many of us have been working with during the first two weeks of the retreat.

But now we are starting to turn the page and talk about the beautiful qualities of mind. The Buddha talked about these just as often as he talked about the difficult qualities. When he talked about dukkha, he also talked about the end of dukkha. So we're going to spend considerable time moving forward talking about beautiful qualities. Jill started us the other night with her lovely talk on the four Brahmaviharas. That's one of the key lists of the beautiful factors. The Eightfold Path is a list of wholesome factors of mind. The Five Spiritual Faculties are another. Tonight I want to talk about the seven factors of awakening, sometimes also called seven factors of enlightenment.

Both terms refer to this waking up that the Buddha experienced under the Bodhi tree some 2,500 years ago. The Pali term for it is Bodhi, and it's been translated as both awakening and enlightenment. Enlightenment is sort of from a 17th century European intellectual movement, so its applicability to the Buddha's experience is questionable. I like the term awakening, but it's getting overused today—awakening through ten minutes a day or awakening through drinking tea. I'm sure there are workshops on this in California as we speak. I don't want to get over-popularized around this term, but this is the authentic use of the term. The Buddha means the one who is awake. So I'll use the term awakening and you can use it as you like.

This is a really important list for meditators. When the Buddha gave the Satipatthana discourse and he came to the fourth foundation, he only included two lists of mental factors. One was the five hindrances and the second was the seven factors of awakening. So as meditators, his instruction was really to get to know these two lists. These are the ones he considered most important for you as meditators. Obviously the Eightfold Path and the Five Spiritual Faculties and the Brahmaviharas are very important also. But in the Foundations of Mindfulness, these are the two lists the Buddha pointed to as really critical. So it's very helpful to become familiar with this list of the seven factors of awakening.

Carol said in her talk the other day that what we're doing in meditation practice is we're starving the five

hindrances and we're feeding the seven factors of awakening. This is how these two lists are to be understood. We do the kinds of effort that reduce the force of the hindrances and we do the kinds of effort that promote the growth of the seven factors. This is the direct path to awakening. It's amazing that we can shape the mind in this direction. That's what our practices do.

It's also amazing to meet someone who has gone a long way down this path. So many of you know of the Indian teacher Dipa Ma. She was a really wonderful and inspiring figure, one of the most amazing minds and hearts that I've met on this journey. She taught at the three-month course one year here. We're sorry that the teaching quality has been a bit in decline since then, but we're doing the best we can. Yogis were, of course, curious about her being. Someone asked her at one point, "What's in your mind right now?" This is what one wants to know when one meets an awakened being—what's that like? What's your experience of your mind right now? She said, "There are only three things in my mind. There's peace, concentration, and loving kindness. That's it."

So that's a beautiful mind. But that's a possibility. That's a possibility for us as well. One of the things I want to emphasize about these factors of awakening is that they are not so remote for you. These are experiences that I believe each of you has already had to some degree in this retreat. I've certainly heard reports in my meetings with some of you, and I bet if you look closely at your own experience, you'll recognize these. This is the first step.

Once we recognize them, then we can start to understand how they come about, and as the Buddha said, how to bring them to fulfillment, how to grow them up. They may be kind of baby formations when we first meet them, but just like any seeds, we water them, we feed them, they grow up. These really become your best friends, along with the brahmaviharas. These two sets of states really become the beautiful qualities that accompany you and move you on your journey.

The Buddha put it this way: "Whoever has been liberated, is liberated, or will be liberated in the future, will do so by overcoming the five hindrances that weaken wisdom, by firmly establishing their minds in the four foundations of mindfulness, and by correctly developing the seven factors of awakening." This is a direct quote from the Buddha. They lead to awakening. Therefore, they're called factors of awakening—never shy of stating the obvious. This is what they're here for, to lead us to awakening. They're all described as maturing in release, which means liberation.

He put it another way: "Just as all the rafters of a peaked house incline towards the roof peak, so too when a practitioner develops and cultivates the seven factors of awakening, the practitioner inclines toward nibbana"—toward freedom, toward the unconditioned, toward release, toward awakening.

So these seven factors lead to awakening, but they also describe the mind just before a moment of awakening. They describe the preparation of the mind just prior to the awakening moment. The awakening itself doesn't come through effort, but the preparation does. So the effort goes into developing the seven factors. As they mature, you might say they converge toward the unconditioned, toward

nibbana, toward release, which Annie is going to talk about in a future dharma talk. They converge to that, and when they get very close, at some point the mind can tip into that state, tip into the unconditioned.

It takes effort to develop the mind in this way, to bring these factors together. Once they are close together to the unconditioned, at some point, by a moment of grace which we can't force or predict, they can open into the moment of awakening.

These seven factors are described as sequential, meaning that each one leads to the development of the next one. So they build upon one another, but they're not quite linear in that way. Different factors may pop up at different times in your practice. It's not that you have to bring one to maturity before the next one begins. A little bit of one starts the next, starts the next, and they reinforce each other. So they're also kind of circular.

Let me describe them. You've probably heard them before, but let me review them. The first factor, no surprise, is mindfulness. It's mindfulness that begins the development of all of these. It's also mindfulness that keeps them all in balance, and we'll get later to why that's important.

The next three factors are what are called arousing factors. They bring up energy. These are investigation, energy, and rapture or joy. The last three are called pacifying factors. They bring in calm. These are tranquility, concentration, and equanimity.

When they are all brought up together and come into balance, we have the energizing factors that pick up the energy and make for brightness, alertness, and interest. And we have the pacifying factors that calm the energy, settle the mind in tranquility, bring it together, and provide that base of peace. This sounds a little bit like the instructions we give for posture, doesn't it? Bring up the energy and also relax. The seven factors work in the same way—bring up the energy and then calm.

So let's go into these one by one.

Beginning with mindfulness, we've talked a lot about mindfulness. There's not a lot more that I need to say about that. The practice you've been doing, the way you've been noticing all the different facets of your experience—this is the base of mindfulness that we want to continue to develop. Everything comes out of that. We've talked about the importance of the continuity of mindfulness. That means stringing together more and more moments of mindfulness.

And by the way, when we say continuity of mindfulness, we don't actually expect it to be continuous for you. If you've been thinking it should really be continuous because that's the instruction, let me just modify that a little bit. What we really mean by that is frequent. None of us has continuous mindfulness.

Maybe the Buddha had it. But at this point, none of us has continuous mindfulness. What we mean is keep making the effort to be mindful in as many moments as possible, in every activity through the day—from

formal sitting, formal walking, to all the informal times. Make it as frequent as possible. And we know that you'll lose it at times. That's okay. That's to be expected.

As we become more mindful and connect with our experience, one of the things that happens—and Brian pointed to this a lot this morning—is we get interested. What's that experience really like when we look closer? What's really going on? This is a wholesome kind of curiosity. This is not speculative curiosity. This is curiosity directed to our immediate experience. This is what brings about the second factor, which is investigation.

Investigation means I want to know my experience even better. Mindfulness knows it—it's a sight, a sound, a smell, a taste, a sensation, a thought, an emotion, an intention, a feeling tone. But investigation wants to bring mindfulness as close as possible to that momentary experience. So this investigation—the Pali is dhamma-vicaya—is not conceptual. This is not about investigating through thinking. Sherlock Holmes did a lot of that. We don't do it that way.

We do it like you're walking down the path and you see a beautiful flower and you just want to bring your attention right up to it. Or I was riding my bike up Pleasant Street a couple of miles from here, and this large black bear wandered out from the side of the road and plopped down right in the middle of my path. My interest was right there. I didn't have to force mindfulness. I was one hundred percent present. This is what happens when interest is there with us. It naturally draws the attention, naturally draws our gaze right up to the experience. This is what we want to foster with investigation.

We've talked about this quite a lot in relation to emotions or difficult mind states. We want to really feel the experience in the body. We talked about bringing the attention into the body to explore the feeling of difficult emotions. We talked about bringing the attention close to the breath, to just feel the breath within the body as it comes and goes, being fully with sounds and so forth. So this is the kind of investigation—bring it close to the experience.

One word that's used is "rub." Rub the experience with your attention. Rub the experience with mindfulness. Be that intimate with it. There's a sense that your attention can kind of embrace the experience.

The word in Pali for wise attention, which we've talked about before, is yoniso-manasikāra. Manasikāra means attention. Yoniso is the word that's being translated as wise. If you've spent time in India, you may know that yoni refers to the female genitals and lingam refers to the male genitals. So yoni can also be translated as womb or source. Yoniso-manasikāra has this connotation of attention that's like a womb that holds, embraces, nurtures our connection to the object. That kind of warm attention that we give to our immediate experience is part of investigation.

Some ways to investigate, if you'd like to explore this a little more, with the breath: Can you feel in one in-breath the phases of beginning, middle, and end? Can you feel in one out-breath phases of beginning,

middle, end? What happens after the out-breath has finished?

Is there a pause before the next in-breath begins? Can you notice the pause? Then can you stay with that sequence—beginning, middle, end of in-breath; beginning, middle, end of out-breath; and a pause if there is one—breath after breath.

In this way of investigating, we can refine our interest in what constitutes a breath and refine the mindfulness in relation through investigation.

If you're connecting with the sensation in the body, you can explore details of it. One thing I like to look at with sensation is to ask: is it solid, fixed, unchanging, or does the sensation itself exhibit change? In other words, can you notice impermanence within a single sensation? Or is it fixed and unchanging? Take a look.

As you're feeling into a sensation, look at how far it extends. Maybe there's a sensation in the shoulder. How far through the shoulder does it go? Does it go around the corner and into the upper arm? Does it extend down the back or down into the chest? Exactly where are the limits? Where is that sensation not felt at all? Where has it faded to the point it's not touching any of the surrounding body area?

Just investigating in this very experiential, simple way to see what's really there will begin to deepen the connection to the present moment.

Also, this factor of investigation is an aspect of wisdom. Interest and curiosity are wisdom openings. As we learn to investigate skillfully—which doesn't mean to think about it, but to get in and feel it and see it—we're waking up the natural intelligence in the mind. So investigation wakes up wisdom. It starts it rolling.

The other thing investigation does is it arouses energy. This leads into the third of the awakening factors, which is energy. The Pali term is *viriya*. Energy is just one translation for it. Sometimes it's translated as effort. Sometimes it's translated as energetic effort. That gives you the sense that *viriya* is not just a random collection of blood flows, but it's directed toward the effort of the path.

Some other words that are sometimes used to describe it are strength, courage, ardor, my personal favorite, enthusiasm. I've had so many practice meetings where people are describing their love for this practice and their enthusiasm for it. That is a sign of *viriya*.

This energy is directed toward movement of the path. The Buddha put it this way: Energy is aroused for the abandoning of unwholesome states and the development of wholesome states. One is strong, firm, not shirking from the cultivation of wholesome states. And remember, the primary wholesome state that we're all engaged in developing is mindfulness itself. It starts the whole ball rolling, one of the most often mentioned wholesome states in all the Buddha's lists.

The Pali term is *viriya*, and this is from the word *vira*, which means hero. There's the same root as virile,

which comes from Latin. The English word virile comes from the Latin—same root. And so there's a kind of pointing that this journey we're on is a heroic kind of journey. It's the hero's or the heroine's journey, this process of awakening. And the energy we put into it is a kind of heroic energy. That can be inspiring. Not to underestimate what you're about here. It's a big thing.

Viriya comes out of our motivation for practice. Not so much pushing ourselves as letting ourselves be inspired and wanting to understand, wanting to find out—this deep interest.

I sometimes like to think of it in comparison to athletes. It's interesting, if you look at great athletes in fields like figure skating or gymnastics, they often started when they were five years old and have worked really steadily ever since then. That's a lot of effort to get to the level of mastery that they're at.

The other sport I look at for energy is professional bike riding. I love to watch the Tour de France when it's on in the summer, and I'm a bike rider myself. So I have an amazing appreciation for what those people do. In this case it's men, but there's also a women's race and they are also amazing athletes.

So one bike rider said that every time I get on a bike in that race, I know I'm pushing my body to the limit and I'm going to experience eight hours of pain. Does this remind you of meditation practice? No, ours is sixteen hours.

But they're willing to do it. And that's just for fame and fortune. We're on a much more heroic journey.

So I went through a period when I was younger where I really explored what for me was the leading edge of this kind of heroic approach. It was a period of time when at the three-month course, the teachers were really suggesting that we work hard to minimize the number of hours we slept every night. So they put it out as a standard: it would be really good if you could get down to four hours of sleep a night.

And I thought, I've never done that. Never been able to do that in my practice. And I was younger then. I had more energy in general. But still, on retreat, I would usually go along at about six hours a night. So looking at two additional hours—not only of less sleep, but more hours of practice—that was a challenge.

So I didn't try right away, but I just tried to decrease it little by little by little. Going to bed later, getting up earlier. And I finally reached a rhythm where I could get by on four hours of sleep a night. So I would go to bed about eleven and I would get up at three, and the rest of the day was just sitting and walking and having meals and showers and work and all of that.

And then I found I could sustain that. It was very beneficial for my insight practice. I saw a lot of things I think I wouldn't have seen if I hadn't put in that level of effort. So I found out that I could do it. And I had a certain motivation because every time I came in for a practice meeting, my teachers would ask me: How many hours did you sit? How many hours did you walk? And how many hours did you sleep? So I had to keep notes and I had to report to them.

So we don't teach like this anymore, as you may have noticed. And part of it is that this kind of heroic

effort isn't really for everyone. It's not suited for every temperament and everyone in every stage of their practice. It was very good for me at that time because I was young, I was highly motivated, I had the energy, my body was working. But it's not for everyone, so we don't teach it like that anymore. Though sometimes in individual interviews we might see this might benefit someone and we'll offer it, but not in general.

And so there's another way that this form of energy expresses itself that's very useful for everyone. And that is as perseverance—that's sort of the message of just keep going.

And I like this story from Milarepa. I don't know if you've heard of Milarepa before. He was a yogi in Tibet in the eleventh century, and he's regarded as one of the greatest yogis in all the history of practice in Tibet. And there have been a lot of great yogis in that history. And he's regarded as one of the greatest. He's held as a real model and was a lineage founder of one school of Tibetan Buddhism.

So he had two main disciples. One was called Gampopa and the other was called Rechungpa. And they both also wrote texts and had lots of students and helped solidify the school that Milarepa more or less began.

So at this point in time, one of the disciples, Gampopa, has been practicing with Milarepa for a while. Gampopa has listened to lots of teachings, practiced with Milarepa, gone through ups and downs as all yogis do. Finally, Milarepa thinks, okay, he's learned the basic instructions. It's time for him to go off on his own. The solitude was an important piece of the training—self-reliance at a certain point.

So Gampopa was heading down the path, sad to be leaving his teacher, but he knew it was the right time in his training. And he was heading down the path and Milarepa called him back and said, "Wait, come back. I have one more instruction for you." He said, "There is nothing more important than this pith instruction that I'm going to give you right now."

Milarepa is known in the tradition for just wearing white cotton robes. Even in the middle of Tibetan winters, he just wore white cotton robes. He was dressed in his white cotton robe and was about to give Gampopa this last pith instruction, which he said there is nothing more important. He turned his back to Gampopa and flipped up the bottom of his white cotton skirt and showed Gampopa his backside.

And he said, "You see how my buttocks are as hard as the hooves of a camel? This is my instruction to you. This has come from sitting uninterruptedly hour after hour, month after month, year after year. I want you too, Gampopa, to practice in this way. This is perseverance. Practice so that your buttocks become as hard as the hooves of a camel. This is my final instruction." And then he sent Gampopa on his way.

This understanding of virya as perseverance is profoundly helpful. It doesn't require staying up until eleven or one in the morning. It simply asks that you keep going very steadily, always coming back to mindfulness.

Sayadaw U Tejaniya, a contemporary Burmese teacher, puts it beautifully: "Right effort means to keep reminding yourself to be aware. Right effort is persistent effort. It is not energy used to focus hard on something. It is effort simply directed at remaining aware. It is not difficult to be aware or mindful. It is difficult to maintain it continuously. For this, you need right effort, which is simply perseverance."

This we can commit ourselves to. Let me be as steadily mindful as I can. Let me not let go of that intention throughout the day. Let me practice with this kind of perseverance. This is the force of energy.

The next factor, and the last of the arousing factors, is called in English "rapture." The Pali term is *pīti*. Rapture is not a particularly good translation because it points to something more dramatic than *pīti* actually indicates. I think a better translation would be "happy interest" or sometimes "joyful attention."

It's the quality of mind that develops when you actually like your meditation focus. Whether you're being with the breath, with sounds, with body sensations, emotions, or thoughts, you're genuinely enjoying the process of connecting with that focus, with that object, with that phenomenon.

This happy interest has a deepening effect in our practice. Once we enjoy being with experience, we start to find it more appealing than being lost in thoughts or distraction. We discover a genuine pleasantness, a genuine pleasure in being in the present moment. This quality of enjoyment begins to reorient the mind because it becomes where we want to be.

Instead of dragging ourselves back to the present from fantasies or mental excursions that seem so seductive and entertaining, we actually find we prefer being present. We want to hang out more with our objects in the present moment experience.

Ajahn Brahm, a teacher in Australia, talks about discovering "the beautiful breath." This is for those practicing breath meditation. When the breath becomes beautiful to someone, attention is naturally drawn there. We want to abide with that beauty. Discovering this possibility that the breath can seem beautiful and attractive is tremendously helpful for establishing mindfulness in the moment.

Pīti, though commonly translated as rapture, is a factor of mind that often manifests in the body. The texts describe different kinds of *pīti*. Goosebumps might arise—this is called minor *pīti*. There can be momentary *pīti*, experienced as a rush through the body like lightning. There can be showering *pīti*, which appears as waves of sensation passing through the body.

Sometimes an uplifting energy comes with *pīti*, where you feel light even while sitting with all your weight pressing down on the cushion. Then there's all-pervading *pīti*, where the whole body fills with these intensified sensations born from this deepening interest.

Pīti generally has a pleasant feeling tone, but when it becomes strong, its bodily expression can be so intense that it feels unpleasant. If this happens, simply stay with the experience as much as you can. Notice that it's arising from a deepening process. Allow it to be, and gradually that unpleasant quality

smooths out.

This is one of the factors connected with strong concentration, often paired with the quality of *sukha*, which means happiness. Together they bring a sense of contentment. This is a wonderful turning in practice, and Dawn will be exploring this more deeply in her upcoming talk.

This turning into contentment brings the next movement, which is the development of the factor of tranquility. And this is the first of the pacifying factors.

For tranquility, the Pali term is passaddhi. We could also translate it as ease, calm, serenity. Sometimes it's translated as relaxation. There's the sense that there's a kind of growing contentment that develops out of the interest being pleasurable. And instead of having to send the mind out—past and future and fantasy and imagination—instead of having to send the mind out for its fulfillment, we find a fulfillment in the here and now with our meditation.

So as that starts to happen, thoughts, discursive thoughts, distracting thoughts of past and future, just don't have as much pull as they did. So they start to calm down, quite naturally, not through any kind of forcing. They just start to calm down. And so, of course, the emotions they stir up also start to calm down.

A lot of us haven't known this experience of calm, of mental calm or tranquility much in our outside life. I hadn't before I found it in meditation. And so the experience, when we come upon it, can feel kind of new. And one meditator said that when it first started happening to them and they were using the noting practice, they noticed: "Calm. Huh? Is this what they're talking about?" Big question mark. And then as it continues or becomes more accessible, you become more confident. "Yeah, this is what they're talking about." It takes a while to get to know it.

But it's as though once we come upon it, it really feels different. And we're coming through working with the hindrances and the difficulty emotions and all of that. And it's like we've crossed this stormy ocean with all kinds of turbulent winds and pirate ships and giant squids kind of leaping out of the waters to attack us. And all of a sudden, after that journey, we find this broad, safe harbor. And so we sail into this, and there's a sense: "Wow, I can kind of relax a bit now. I can start to rest now in my practice."

And this brings about the quality of contentment. It's actually okay to be here. But there are different responses maybe before we find that contentment. And part of it is it may seem uninteresting because the calm is not dramatic. It might not seem interesting. I'll come back to this in a minute. But for now, the instruction is: when you discover this harbor of calm, let yourself feel it. Let yourself rest in it. Take it as your meditation focus. This state of mind, you can trust it.

And it's expressed well by this poem from Emily Dickinson, who, if you don't know, did her writing about a forty-five minute drive from here in the town of Amherst. Her house is there now as a museum. And this is from a poem called "Wild Nights." That's kind of where we've been too, right? We've been through some wild nights.

And she starts off: "Futile the winds to a heart in port. Done with the compass, done with the chart, rowing in Eden."

So I'll read it again. This term "futile" is a little unusual in English. If you're not an English speaker, it means useless. And then some other references are a little bit eighteenth century. The compass and the chart are ways—chart means map here—it's ways that sailors would steer their boats.

"Futile the winds to a heart in port. Done with the compass. Done with the chart. Rowing in Eden."

So you might feel this. You know, big space opens up from this calm.

And we can rest there.

So Ajahn Amaro, who's the abbot of Amaravati Monastery in England, has a very nice teaching about this. When you touch this calm, he says, use it as an instruction. He puts it this way: "Rest in the natural peace and ease that is the natural peace and ease of mind and body. And then pay attention to whatever disturbs that." Rest in the natural peace and ease—it is the natural peace and ease of mind and body. And then pay attention to what disturbs that.

When we find this element of calm, it's a lovely discovery because it is a part of what we've been looking for all along. I think most of us can relate to thinking that we came into meditation to find greater peace of mind, to find a calm place in the midst of all the turmoil of life—all the emotions, all the relationships, all the work, and so forth. And this is the start of that. This is the beginning of that inner peace.

We find that it becomes more and more available anytime we don't stir it up. And how do we stir it up? By thinking about past and future. By going off on distracting thought excursions. But as we trust in it more and can rest there, it becomes more easily available.

When we first start to notice it, however, it's a more subtle state than the hindrances. It's not dramatic. And we may think, "It's not very interesting." Sometimes we feel bored with it. When boredom comes—I think we've talked about this before—it is basically a kind of aversion to neutral feeling tone.

So when calm comes, check the feeling tone. Maybe it's kind of neutral because not much is happening. And we discover from our fast-paced life outside in the twenty-first century, we may have become somewhat addicted to intensity, looking for the ups and the downs that are more dramatic, that seem entertaining, maybe even cathartic. And maybe we weren't expecting something so undramatic and seeming almost ordinary.

But this is a big deal. This opening into calm is a big deal.

There's this cartoon—Gay and Wilson got into drawing some nice cartoons about meditation. In this one, there's a Zen temple, and everyone's sitting in robes. The monastics are sitting in robes around the edge of the temple. One of the older monastics leans over to one of the younger monastics and is obviously

speaking to the younger one. The caption is: "Nothing happens next. This is it."

So this is sometimes the first experience of calm. Nothing happens next. This is it.

So notice the presence of calm when it arises. Notice if there's a more neutral feeling tone to it, and if there's a little bit of discontent with that. But you know, the Buddha spoke rather highly of this quality of peace. He thought it was a pretty good thing to aim for. In fact, what he said is, "Peace is the highest happiness."

I think this is an interesting thing to hear: Peace is the highest happiness. And I wonder if we believe that or not. And if our practice is really directed in our minds to peace, or if what we really think we're looking for is a more intense feeling of bliss or some special peak experiences or some other kind of high. But what the path promises is peace, and that that's the highest happiness.

I think that's also a really interesting comment on our human psychology. I do think it's true. And I think it's true that the most fulfilling way to live is to live in peace, in inner peace. So it's something that we come upon and we can also develop.

Within the Anapanasati Sutta, the Buddha puts it this way: "I will breathe in tranquilizing the bodily formation. I will breathe in tranquilizing the mental formation." And then he repeats that for breathing out. So breath can be used at a certain point to bring in this sense of calm, to bring in a sense of tranquility. So you can play with that.

Think about especially relaxing on the out-breath, tranquilizing the formations on the out-breath.

As we settle into this calm, it's as though the mind starts to settle into itself. It's not pulled out so much to outside objects, to past and future, to looking for its satisfaction elsewhere. It starts to find contentment within itself. This gives us a new degree of independence from the world and from the changing conditions of the world.

And it leads into the next of the factors of awakening, which is concentration. The Pali term is samadhi. This is a state of mind that is primarily unified. The mind has come together, and that's what makes the state of concentration. In that state, it's collected, it's steady, it's stable, it's whole. It's non-distracted and therefore it's strong. This is also a very high quality in meditation, another of the factors the Buddha talked about almost more than anything else, except perhaps mindfulness.

This beautiful state of mind comes from being mindful one moment after another. It's the moments of mindfulness that bring up this state of collectedness—the mind collects in the present moment. Concentration is another of these translations that's not particularly accurate, because in English, concentration usually refers to singleness of attention. You know, like "I'm trying to concentrate on my homework. Don't distract me with that music." It's about trying to focus in one area without distraction.

But the term samadhi isn't dependent on narrow attention. Samadhi means the mind has come together in

the present moment. That could come together with a narrow focus, like on the breath. It could come together with a very wide focus, as in choiceless attention, or in sounds. It's the coming together, becoming unified, that's the important piece, not the narrowness of focus.

Before Spirit Rock built its retreat center, which now occupies a lot of land and is perched above a natural amphitheater, we had Thich Nhat Hanh come to teach a daylong on a couple of different occasions. When we had him there, the visitors were spread out on this big natural amphitheater sitting in the grass. At the bottom of the amphitheater, we built a platform for Thay that had a good sound system and speakers.

His voice was amplified. We had something close to 2,000 people that day to hear him teach. We could hear every word through the amplification, but we could also see him clearly because we were in the amphitheater and he was at the focal point of it.

It was amazing to experience him in the teaching mode in that setting because he talked dharma continuously. As the day went on, I felt like he was casting this spell of samadhi over the whole 2,000 people because he was so still. His body was still. His movements were still. His focus on the dharma was very clear and specific. We were all just getting a samadhi transmission from him. It was beautiful. The personal power that he manifested there over that size group was really impressive.

The beautiful thing was he led a walking meditation for about a thousand people to the back of the property and back. We still have photos—we couldn't get all thousand in one shot, but we got a few hundred trailing behind him on this little trail to the back of the land. It was amazing.

This quality of concentration or samadhi means that we can stay in the present moment more and more because the mind has become stable, and in that stability it's become strong. The basic measure, you might say, is how many moments in a row you find yourself in the present moment. This is not something that can be forced or willed, but it is something that develops over time with mindfulness practice.

As a measure, you can check it out: How many notes in a row can you make before becoming distracted? How many breaths in a row can you connect with before becoming distracted? That gives a rough measure, just a metric for the concentration.

It's interesting to know that concentration develops from mindfulness. That's a given. But the proximate cause—the thing that really tips it into concentration, the proximate cause—what do you think? Pushing hard? Forcing?

Strongly efforting? The proximate cause is happiness. When happiness develops, then the mind is really willing to settle into itself. It's not forcing. It's not straining. It's not striving. It's happiness. That's what grows concentration.

So concentration has a couple of benefits. One is it feels good. When the mind becomes strong and steady and stable, there is a feeling of inner peace. This is what the Dalai Lama said: inner peace is the key. If you

have inner peace, the external problems do not affect your deep sense of peace and tranquility. And samadhi is a big part of inner peace. So that's the first thing.

But more important is what the Buddha said: the purpose and benefit of concentration is to see things as they really are. That means insight. The purpose and benefit of concentration is insight. When the mind is steady, we see more clearly.

So it's like when the hindrances are active. Imagine you're on a merry-go-round and it's going round and round and round. You're on a horse. And a friend of yours comes up next to the merry-go-round and holds up a newspaper and says, "Have you seen this?" And you're going by so quickly you can't read the newspaper. But the merry-go-round starts to slow down. And then you come to rest in front of your friend and you can read the headlines. And the headlines say: life is change. If you hold on, you will suffer. Letting go brings happiness. This is what we want to see when the mind slows down. You want to see it in your direct experience.

And when the mind is still, those insights go deep. And they're really transformative. You can hear those insights now and they'll go a certain depth. But when you feel them, discover them in the depth of meditation—and all of you have had experiences like this—they change us. They go deep and they change us.

So how can we develop this factor here? There are things you can do in your daily routine that will help support the development of this quality of stability and unification. One is spending time again, as we did at the beginning, with your anchor. Whether it's breath, sounds, body, whatever helps keep you really connected with the present moment. Do that again. We don't just use the anchor for the first four days and then forget it. We use it again and again and again anytime the mind is tending to distraction.

Techniques like noting or counting the breaths are very helpful for strengthening concentration because we really know when those stop—whether it's noting or counting—we really know we've drifted off. We know we're not really present anymore. The continuity of mindfulness is really key. So this means making an effort throughout the day, not just in formal sittings, not just in formal walkings, but in all the times in between: moving around your room, taking a shower, being in meals, carrying out your work meditation, putting all the same effort at continuity there as well.

Another one we don't talk about a lot, but it is really helpful, is slowing down. When you move the body more slowly, it starts to slow down the mental activity as well. And it's also saying something. You're making a statement: I'm not here to get to lunch as fast as I can or to get to my walking spot as fast as I can. I'm not rushing. I'm taking my time. I'm just here to pay attention. So this factor of slowing down throughout the day—moving around the building, movements in your room, moving from here to your walking spot, trying slow walking when you reach your walking spot—but find the tempo that is most suitable for you. But this general act of slowing down will increase your moment-to-moment mindfulness.

Now, you want to be careful when you get in hallways, when you get around meals, when you get in the lobby. That's not the time for snail's pace.

Continue beautifying this talk (part 11/12). Maintain the same tone and style as previous parts.

So we say, if you're on your own walking path or going to your room, that's more private space. Private pace, private place. When you're in a common space, go at a common pace.

Do you ever see those signs on some two-lane roads: "When five cars pull up behind you, please pull over"? Please don't let five cars pull up behind you while walking to the dining room for a meal. Keep the pace steady and allow people to move.

Guarding the sense doors is another important practice. Brian will talk about this more in future sessions. This basically means being aware of how you respond to sights and sounds. When a sight or sound draws your attention, don't take it as an opportunity to go into greed and aversion and proliferate. Be really clear. Be mindful of the contact. Be very mindful of any reaction of liking or disliking, and avoid proliferating around it. Brian will explore this further.

The importance of formal walking practice as a support for developing mindfulness is hard to overstate. When the walking periods come, try doing the formal walking. It's a really good support.

As the days go by, you may find that your need for sleep goes down—many people do. So the encouragement is: if you're still alert at the end of the day at 9:20, 9:40, or whenever, don't feel you need to go to bed then. If the energy is still there, stay up a little later. Or if an alarm goes off in the morning, or the bell rings, or you wake up naturally, consider getting up then. Little by little, whatever is comfortable for you, out of interest rather than pushing or striving, you can try extending your practice time slightly.

The last of the factors of awakening is this quality called equanimity. The Pali term is *upekkha*. When the mind has become strong through concentration, that strength means it's not so thrown about by changing phenomena. Pleasure and pain will still come, but the concentrated mind is not so moved by them. This is the meaning of equanimity—not being so moved by pleasure and pain.

Sometimes this word "equanimity" in English has a rather cold and unfeeling connotation, but that's not the sense of it here. At the end of one three-month course, during the integration days where people are learning to speak again—and by the way, it does come back, quicker than you might like—I was meeting with a group of about twelve people here in the hall, asking them about their retreat.

I asked, "What were some of the greatest outcomes for you? What were some of the greatest benefits?" People said things like, "I just don't feel so tossed around by my experience anymore. I feel much more stability and centeredness in the middle of all the things that are happening to me." What they were really pointing to was this factor of equanimity, which might also be described as a balance of mind.

I asked, "In those periods where you weren't feeling so tossed around, did you feel emotionally shut down? Was it a cold place to be? Were you unfeeling at those times?" They said, "No, not at all. Because of the stability, I had better access to *metta* and compassion. It was a warmer place to be." We'll see in the Brahma-viharas how equanimity supports the arising of the other three.

These are the seven factors. As they all come to maturity, they truly do lead to awakening, as the Buddha said—to direct knowledge, to awakening, to *nibbana*. They're noble and emancipating. They lead the one who acts on them to the complete destruction of suffering.

In this modern age, we might wonder: Is this complete destruction of suffering still possible? Is this just something that happened 2,500 years ago with the Buddha and those disciples? I want to read you a little story from the biography of Ajahn Liam. I might have mentioned him earlier—he was the student of Ajahn Chah who became the abbot of Ajahn Chah's monastery once Ajahn Chah passed away.

This is his account of his meditation one year when he was practicing under Ajahn Chah:

"Around the middle of the rainy season, Ajahn Chah encouraged us to practice with special intensity. So Ajahn Liem increased his efforts at that time. Keeping this teaching in my mind, I kept on meditating. Normally I would sit in meditation until about 10 or 11 p.m. and then stop to have a rest. But on this day I continued sitting without moving or making the slightest change in posture.

A feeling of peacefulness shot up and pervaded throughout the whole body as if something were taking hold over it. It felt cool, a coolness that suffused the whole body, becoming completely light and at ease. The only experience left was that of utter peace and stillness. The body felt tranquil, cool, and light.

This experience continued on throughout the whole night, not just for a day or two. In fact, it has continued on unchanging for many years, all from that one time. It feels like there are no more proliferations of the mind. All the suffering that arises with defilements that had bothered me before, they had all disappeared. This is the kind of peace and tranquility that arose. There isn't anything to be concerned about.

As concerns dukkha, I don't know what dukkha is like. Questioning myself about dukkha, there wasn't any. And the experience of this feeling has lasted on continuously all the time since then. There has been no change at all, all the way up to the present day. This same state still lasts on, and it has been stable, continuous, and without changes."

So let's just sit for a minute together and let these words settle.

As concerns dukkha, I don't know what dukkha is like. Questioning myself about dukkha, there wasn't any. And the experience of this feeling has lasted on continuously all the time since then.

The complete destruction of suffering—it is still possible in this modern age.

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