Seven Factors of Awakening

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 1:02:35

The Seven Factors of Awakening

The subject of the talk this evening is the seven factors of awakening, or beyond the hindrances.

You probably remember the story that Bonnie told in her first talk about the Native American grandfather, the Cherokee grandfather, who was talking to his grandson who'd come home from a day at school where he'd had a hard time with other kids. The grandfather told the boy that he had two wolves who were battling inside him. One was angry and looked for vengeance. The other was kind and wanted to help people. The grandson asked, "Which one will win?" And the grandfather replied, "The one that I feed."

I like this story both for the amount of wisdom it holds and also because it really resonates with the Buddha's language in terms of developing our own mind. In the suttas, you find references where the Buddha says that what we want to do in practice is starve the five hindrances and feed the factors of awakening. This is the way he thought of it and the way that he described it. You start to see that most fundamentally, what our practice is about is shaping our minds in this particular direction. We develop the tools and the understanding and the skills to shape our own minds.

That's a radical understanding. Most people in the world don't have any idea, first, that this would be a desirable thing to do, or second, that it's possible. And yet with the tools of the Dharma, we are shaping our mind. The word in Pali that's used for this work is *bhavana*. It's the same root as the word *bhava* as in *bhavatanha* or the craving for existence. So it's pointing to the fact that there is a kind of development going on, a creating going on, and it's aimed at our own heart and mind. That's the beauty of our practice. Over time, a meditator can develop a great range of skill in this shaping.

I'm sure you all have heard of the Indian teacher Dipa Ma. She first came to this country in 1980. Joseph and Sharon had spent time with her in India and brought her over. Carol and I had the opportunity to spend a month living in a house with her, looking after her while she was here. She was a very impressive being.

People ask, "Well, is it possible to be really deeply awakened in this day and age?" Dipa Ma was someone in whom I didn't see even a flicker of a hindrance. I didn't see a flicker of anger or reactivity or greed or anything that was off. She was very patient. She had a four-year-old grandson with her who was a little bit of a wild being at that time. I remember taking her through department stores where her grandson Rishi would be racing out in front and pulling clothes off the hangers and bringing things down from the racks,

and they'd be falling in the aisles. Dipa Ma would sort of be trotting after him with her white skirt flapping behind her and this sweet smile on her face. I thought if she could be patient with a four-year-old, she was pretty cooled out. And she was.

She taught a number of retreats here on her visits to America. At one retreat, someone asked her, trying to get a read, "What is in your mind?" Her reply was, "There are only three things in my mind. There's loving kindness, there's concentration, and there's peace. That's it." That's a beautiful mind. And she manifested that all the time.

For those of you who are interested in her, there's a wonderful book that was written by someone who teaches here, Amita Schmidt. The book is simply called *Dipa Ma*. It's both a biography and account of some of her teachings. Very inspiring, and you know probably there isn't a surplus of great women teachers in our tradition, I'm sorry to say. It's very interesting because in our pool, the numbers of women and men teachers is just about equal. But coming from Asia, that wasn't so much the case. So among the venerated Asian teachers, Dipa Ma is one of the few women, not the only, but one of the few women. This book connects very strongly, I find, for women practitioners especially. I recommend it to all of you. A very inspiring being.

She was a good example of someone who had developed her mind so well that we could call it tamed. This was an expression the Buddha often used for the mind that was well developed.

A mind that had become tamed and free of its reactive formations. Such a mind becomes a friend and a support to one.

In an earlier talk, Joseph and I described the five hindrances that arise and how to work with them. Of all the Buddha's lists, this is perhaps the most crucial for identifying the obstacles that obstruct the practice of meditation. For those intent on developing the path toward awakening, the hindrances are the factors of mind that block that current until we learn to recognize them and work with them.

Similarly, the seven factors of awakening are the qualities that speed that current along, that truly support and strengthen and propel that movement toward awakening or enlightenment. I'll use these two terms synonymously—awakening or enlightenment—as they're simply different translations of the Pali term *bo dhi*.

As we begin to understand this in our meditation, these factors become our best friends. They are the ones that propel our path. We might say that we can't accomplish this through our own will alone, but as we generate these factors, they do the work for us. They carry out the movement toward awakening.

This quote bears repeating here: "Whoever has been liberated, is liberated, or will be liberated in the future, all will do so by surmounting 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."

These seven factors are mindfulness, investigation, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. The Buddha said of these factors, "They lead to awakening, therefore they're called factors of awakening." They're all described as maturing in release—meaning when we learn to work with them, strengthen them, and build them up, they lead to liberation. That is their destination.

They can also be understood as the factors present in the mind at the moment of enlightenment. When one is poised on the threshold of awakening, it's these factors in the mind that create the condition for opening to the unconditioned. This opening cannot happen by an act of will. We cannot choose it or dictate it. But what we can do through practice and effort is cultivate these seven factors, nurture them, and bring them into balance. Then such a mind is poised for awakening, poised for insight. That is our task.

The Buddha compared this journey and these factors to the rafters that hold up the roof of a peaked house. Just as all the rafters of a peaked house slant, slope, and incline toward the roof peak, so too when a practitioner develops and cultivates the seven factors of awakening, she slants, slopes, and inclines toward *nibbana*. These factors lead to the unconditioned, lead to awakening. That is their very nature.

The Buddha described the seven factors as sequential—one leads to the next, which leads to the next. That's how I'll explain them tonight. But we also understand that any of the seven factors will support the others. It's not merely sequential development, but somewhat circular. They continue to help each other. One doesn't need to fully develop one factor before beginning to develop the next, but this sequential understanding helps us see their relationship.

The first factor is mindfulness. It not only starts the chain but also serves to keep them in balance. The next three are called arousing or energizing factors: investigation, energy, and rapture. They all pick up the energy. The last three are calming factors: tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. They balance the rising energy and bring in calm.

The overall balance requires the energizing factors and calming factors to be roughly equal. This is why you'll hear us say in the meditation instructions, "Find the balance of mind that keeps you tranquil and alert." The alertness represents the energizing factors, the tranquility represents the calming factors. We suggest finding this balance in the body because that expresses it in the mind.

Let's examine some of the factors. We've talked extensively about mindfulness, so I won't spend much time on it tonight. I do want to repeat, or at least paraphrase, a definition that Andrea gave early in the retreat in her first talk on mindfulness.

A simple way to remember what mindfulness is—and therefore also how to practice it—is understanding what our experience is in the present moment. Or you could say mindfulness is knowing what our experience is in the present moment. Put that way, it's a very simple thing to do. You just look in the moment, what's our experience, and when we know it, that's mindfulness.

What's interesting is this very simple understanding has these profound implications and unfoldings in meditation experience. When we first come upon mindfulness, it doesn't seem like a big deal: Oh, I know I'm breathing in. I know I'm breathing out. I know I'm experiencing a pleasant feeling. I know I'm experiencing the mind affected by desire. I know that the enlightenment factor of calm is arising in me.

This doesn't seem like a big deal, but somehow this is a very important factor of the mind that leads to many, many other wholesome states. Its power is hard to feel at first, but for people who've been practicing for a while, as you have, you can start to see the tremendous power that it generates.

In the Sutta, I want to mention one little thing. The key term in my mind is *pajanati*. It's the term used again and again in all four foundations of mindfulness that Bhikkhu Bodhi has translated as "understand": One understands breathing in long, I breathe in long. One understands experiencing a painful feeling, I feel a painful feeling. One understands the mind unaffected by desire as the mind unaffected by desire.

This term *pajanati* is the key operational term in mindfulness. It's simply knowing our experience in these different domains of the four foundations. All the rest starts from there.

When we start to look at what's happening in our experience and we just know it very simply like that, we tend to get interested: Oh, what is the experience of breathing in? What is the experience of breathing out? That looking more closely is the second enlightenment factor, which is investigation. The Pali term is *dha mmavicaya*.

There's a little disagreement within the tradition about what the word *dhamma* means here. The word *dha mma* has a number of meanings. It is the Buddha's teaching—as such, it's the second refuge. It refers to the ultimate truth of things. One sees the Dhamma, and that constitutes awakening. It can be used simply as a term that means thing or phenomenon. So all the experiences at the sense bases can be called *dhammas*—t hings that are happening. It can also be used to refer to mind states. In the fourth foundation of mindfulness, the word that's used is *dhammas*, sometimes translated as "objects of mind."

When Andrea gave her talk on investigation, she described it as the investigation of states of mind, and there certainly is justification in the suttas for describing it that way. In a broader sense, I find the factor of investigation wakes up when we bring an interested, alert curiosity to any of our experiences at the six sense doors. I understand it as looking closely at our experience at any of the sense doors.

For example, in developing a relationship with breathing, one could get interested in what is the quality of the in-breath. In bringing the attention closer to the sensations of breathing, investigation is happening. This is a very useful thing to do. One reason is that investigation is a function of wisdom. In the list of the seven factors, it's the most direct expression of the wisdom side of the mind. By activating investigation, we are waking up the natural intelligence that is wisdom in us.

We recall that it's not investigation in a conceptual sense. This investigation is bringing our attention closer to our experience and rubbing against it more intimately so that we know it more fully. For

example, with paying attention to an in-breath, one of the things that Sayadaw U Pandita would ask in interviews is: "All right, you're experiencing the in-breath. Tell me three specific sensations that you feel when you breathe in." This is an interesting exploration.

A question like this invites the quality of investigation, and then you'd return for your next interview and report on those three sensations. So you'd better find them. This is wonderful when a teacher makes you accountable for something, because it really makes you look. And then he would say, "Tell me three different sensations you find in the out-breath." This becomes an interesting investigation. And then you have to report that in the next interview.

You could play with this if you like. You don't have to report it to anyone, but you could experiment with it and see what that exploration does to the quality of interest you bring to breathing in. We notice when we get interested in something that it makes the mind more alert and bright. Sometimes that interest comes quite naturally.

I was sitting at home, I think it was two weeks ago when I was preparing a talk. It was a Sunday afternoon, and suddenly two deer appeared in the grass outside the cottage where I'm staying. One of them was acting like I had never seen a deer behave before. It must have been born this year. The other was older and doing regular deer things like grazing. Basically, deer spend their lives grazing.

But this younger deer was doing what I could only call gamboling—something that lambs do in the spring after they've been born. It was running around after the other deer, kicking up its legs and jumping for no apparent reason other than the joy of expressing its bodily delight. It was running back and forth while the older deer kept its head down eating grass.

As I watched them, my whole energy and attention went into seeing those deer, especially the younger one. I must admit, I had a fondness for the younger one. This is what happens when we get interested—our attention collects around that experience. If we can get interested in the process of our body and mind, our attention will collect around that, and the mind will become bright and alert.

This is part of the increase in energy which leads into the next enlightenment factor: energy. The interest of investigation tends to bring up energy. The Pali term here is *viriya*. This is basically the root of effort, so it's sometimes called effort, or energetic effort. Other aspects of this third factor are expressed by synonyms such as strength, courage, ardor, or my current favorite, enthusiasm. When we have enthusiasm for our practice, this is the kind of inward state of *viriya*.

The root of the term comes from the Pali word *vira*, which means hero, or in the feminine, heroine. It's actually the same root as the Latin for virile—the English word virile comes from basically the same root as *vira*. This is a particular kind of energy, though. It's not just random physical energy. It's energy that's directed toward the path, or you could say toward our meditation.

Again, this is from the Buddha: "Energy is aroused for the abandoning of unskillful states and the

development of skillful states. One is strong, firm, not shirking from the responsibility of cultivating skillful states."

When we tune into *viriya*, there's the understanding that the journey we're on is a heroic kind of journey. The energy that we are putting into it is a heroic kind of energy. Having watched you all practice so sincerely for almost four weeks now, I'm really struck by this heroic quality and the courage and enthusiasm and ardor that you display in keeping to your practice even when things aren't easy. I really feel that in the interviews. It's moving and inspiring.

This ardor for practice comes out of our motivation and our aspiration, of course. You see it in worldly terms also, although it has a different feeling here. In worldly terms, there's a lot of effort going into worldly pursuits. I think about sports as one area where it's really easy to see this. I'm a fan of tennis, and I really loved the generation about ten years ago when Andre Agassi and Pete Sampras were leading the men's game. I liked both of them in different ways.

But Agassi was working with this very determined trainer from Las Vegas—you might have said he was a Sayadaw U Pandita of the tennis world. He would have Agassi run up the hills around Las Vegas until he became so exhausted that he threw up. He'd have to run every day until he got that tired, brought to that edge of what he could sustain.

And I think about professional bike riders also. I like to watch a little bit of the Tour de France in the summer, and it is amazing what those people do. They ride for basically a month full out every day. One of them said that every time they get on a bike to race, they understand that they're going to be going through eight hours of nonstop pain. They push their body through all these uphills and downhills and flat stretches absolutely as fast as they can go for about eight hours a day. At the end, they are close to passing out. Some of them pass out when they reach the finish line. So I think about that level of virya being put in just for fame and fortune.

And then I think, well, we're after something much more important, right? We're after the purification of heart and mind.

In one three-month course that I sat, virya was really being emphasized. The basic instructions were that one should sleep for four hours a night and do sitting and walking most of the rest of that time. When I went in for my interview every day, seeing Joseph and Sharon at that point, I would report every day how many hours I sat, how many hours I walked, and how many hours I slept. Again, with the accountability, I thought, I'd better work at this. I wasn't used to sleeping just four hours a night—I was used to more like six on retreat. I couldn't just do that overnight, but little by little, I worked my sleep down. I finally ended up going to bed at eleven, getting up at three every day, and finding out I had enough energy to get through the day. That's what I sustained for a long part of that retreat. If you're not getting involved in other activities, the rest of the day is mostly sitting and walking. It was difficult to get going, and then once I got it going, it was sustainable. That's one form of energy.

For me, that was really the courageous form, the most determined form of effort that I put in practice. It was very worthwhile. I'm very glad that I did that style of practice.

This quality of virya also expresses itself not always in straight courage and tremendous forms of effort, but it expresses itself as perseverance. There's this beautiful story from Tibet in the 11th century with one of the greatest yogis in all of Tibet, who was Milarepa. He's still revered as one of the greatest practitioners ever. You'll recognize him in thangka paintings because he's wearing just simple white cotton robes and usually has a little topknot coming out of his head.

Milarepa had several strong disciples, most famous being Rechungpa and Gampopa. There's this wonderful story about his connection with Gampopa, who became a very famous teacher in his own right and has left a number of wonderful texts.

Gampopa had been training with Milarepa for some time, but it was time for Milarepa to push Gampopa out of the nest. He said, "Now you've gotten all the teachings, you need to go off and practice." So Gampopa was very sadly saying goodbye because he had a great love for his teacher, but he was ready to follow the direction and go off and meditate on his own. Gampopa was starting to walk down the mountain trail, having taken leave of his teacher, and finally Milarepa called out, "Wait, wait, come back. There's one more important teaching."

So Gampopa comes back. Milarepa said, "There's one more instruction I need to give you, my son, before you leave. There is nothing more profound than meditating on this pith instruction." And he turned around, flipped up his white robe, and showed Gampopa his buttocks, on which were two very hard calluses.

Milarepa said, "The qualities in my mind stream have arisen through my having meditated so persistently that my buttocks have become as hard as a camel's hoof. You must also give rise to such heartfelt perseverance and meditate."

So, my noble sons and daughters, my calluses have worn down so much I can't give you this pith instruction myself, but I can relate it from Milarepa.

Sometimes this quality of heroic effort seems daunting, but if we just think about it as moment after moment after moment, then it seems more doable. I think we've already heard this quote from Sayadaw U Tejaniya, but I'd like to read it again in this context:

"Right effort means to keep reminding yourself to be awake. Right effort is persistent effort. It is not energy used to focus hard on something. It is effort which is 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."

When we maintain this level of energy and effort, as the mind collects around our experience in the

present moment, there's something new that starts to come in. And I know you all have experienced this at times.

As this quality of calm develops, we discover something quite remarkable. We start to find a deep sense of ease and tranquility that permeates both the mind and body. This isn't simply the absence of agitation—it's a positive quality of peacefulness that feels nourishing and restorative.

When we reach this level of calm, the body naturally begins to settle. You might notice that your breathing becomes softer and more refined. Tensions that you didn't even realize you were carrying start to release. There's a sense of the whole system coming into a state of natural ease.

This quality of passadhi is quite different from ordinary relaxation. It's not the kind of relaxation we might experience while watching television or taking a bath. This is a deeper settling that comes from the mind's contentment with present-moment experience. It's as if the whole being recognizes that it doesn't need to be anywhere else or do anything else—this moment is completely sufficient.

In this calm state, we often discover that we can be alert and peaceful at the same time. This might seem contradictory at first, because in our usual experience, when we're very relaxed, we tend to become dull or sleepy. But in meditation, we can cultivate a quality of relaxed alertness where the mind is both wakeful and at ease.

This tranquility also has the beautiful quality of being self-sustaining. The more calm we feel, the more the mind wants to rest in that calmness. It becomes a refuge from the usual turbulence of thoughts and emotions. We start to understand why the Buddha emphasized the importance of cultivating inner peace—it provides a sanctuary that we can access regardless of external circumstances.

As this factor of calm becomes established, it naturally leads us toward the next factor of awakening: concentration. But before we move there, it's worth noting how these factors we've explored so far—mindfulness, investigation, energy, rapture, and calm—all work together in a beautiful harmony. Each one supports and strengthens the others, creating a momentum toward deeper states of understanding and peace.

If there are lots of emotions, the body will be stirred with those emotions also. As the mind starts to calm, the body also starts to calm down. So we start to settle into the present moment more without so much desire or aversion. There's not so much agenda for something to happen because we're finding some contentment. There's not so much struggle with aversion because mind and body are calming more and thoughts aren't assaulting us as strongly as they did before.

Early days and weeks of the retreat, sometimes early years of meditation practice, are really dominated by the hindrances. When we first touch this period of calm, it's a little like, what is this? It's so unknown, so foreign to us at first. One meditator said that when they first experienced this, all they could do was say, "Calm?" with a big question mark—like what is this thing? But once we touch it and we realize this is

really a possibility for me now, there's something really beautiful about it.

It's kind of like a sailor. You've been out there on your sailboat and you've crossed storming seas and big waves and a giant squid attack and boat almost being capsized on the rocks. And all of a sudden you come through all of that and you come into this port with a big wide harbor. And everything can just settle down. There's something so delicious about that.

Emily Dickinson pointed to this in a poem called "Wild Nights." She's describing the other side of this, and it has this sea-going metaphor in it. "Futile the winds to a heart in port. Done with the compass. Done with the chart. Rowing in Eden." That just expresses this kind of peace where we've been battling for so long, and now all of a sudden we get to float for a while in this calm, safe, broad harbor place.

This is where the experience of meditation starts to reveal this natural peace and ease in the mind. We start to trust that this is something that we can come back to again and again. We start to understand that if we don't stir it up, that is where the mind settles. Of course, we'll keep stirring it up again and again with the hindrances, with thoughts, with emotions and so on. But we understand that there is this natural peace.

This is an instruction that Ajahn Amaro, a British monk and abbot of Amaravati, likes to give in retreats after a few days have gone by. He says, "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." It's a beautiful instruction. Rest in the natural peace and ease, and then pay attention to whatever disturbs it.

So this natural peace is some of what we're looking for through dharma practice, through meditation practice. There's something very satisfying about it. It's a temporary state at this point, so we know that it's not going to last, but there's something satisfying that for me has always drawn me to go further. It's like, wow, this is possible? How much more peace is possible? That's been a pull for me all along the way in my meditation.

One of the things that can happen when we meet this calm is not knowing what to do with it. The main instruction is just to let yourself feel that the way you feel any state of mind. You can rest in feeling the calm and knowing it, understanding this is the mind affected by the factor of calm. We know it's temporary, and yet we can experience it.

Sometimes in this Western culture we are so used to intensity that we think if intensity isn't happening we're half dead or we're missing the boat or it shouldn't be like that. So calm isn't an intense experience and sometimes we think this is not enough, this is not sufficient. It reminds me of that cartoon by Gahan Wilson. He did a whole series on the Zen monastery cartoons.

So in this one, the cartoon shows two monks sitting side by side in the meditation hall—one older, one younger. The older monk leans over and whispers something to the younger monk. Though they're not supposed to be talking, he can't help but share this wisdom. The caption reads: "Nothing happens next.

This is it."

This might capture exactly what we feel when we encounter a patch of calm. What's supposed to be happening now? Nothing happens. This is it.

Sometimes boredom can arise at this point because there's such a neutral experience. It can be helpful to note the neutral feeling tone of calm. It can be helpful to generate interest—interest is the antidote to boredom. This interest can emerge from investigation, the second awakening factor.

But soon we learn to appreciate, really appreciate, the presence of calm. It is one of the great blessings of the path and the foundation of contentment in our practice and in our life. One quotation I love from the Dhammapada has the Buddha saying that peace is the highest happiness. This is a literal translation. He didn't say "the unconditioned" or "enlightenment"—he said peace. The word used is *santi*, which in Sanskrit is *shanti*.

Peace is the highest happiness. This is a very interesting comment on human psychology, because our culture does not generally hold this as its highest value. It holds stimulation, entertainment, gratification, sense pleasure, enjoyment as its highest forms of happiness. But the Buddha said peace is the highest happiness.

It's fascinating when we start to understand the truth of this in our own experience. It really stops us from looking outside for external things and stops us from looking inside for special high experiences—states of bliss or ecstasy or rapture. All of those will pass and are not truly reliable.

Peace, although in the seven factors it comes and goes, in the deeper depths of understanding draws from the unconditioned nature of stillness. There is something more reliable in this quality of peace than simply a temporary passing state, though that's how we experience it for now.

This is a poem from Rumi called "Quietness":

Inside this new love, die.
Your way begins on the other side.
Become the sky.
Take a ride to the prison wall.
Escape.
Walk out like someone born into color.
Do it now.
You're covered with thick cloud.
Slide out the side.
Quietness is the surest sign.
Your old life was a frantic running from silence.
The speechless full moon comes out now.

This quietness and the trust we feel from it leads into the next factor: concentration. Concentration is the greater collectedness of that calming mood, where the mind can simply relax into itself. Relaxation is the key to the deepening of concentration. Concentration is not brought about through strong, forcing effort, but by trust and relaxing in a sense of ease and allowing.

Concentration is somewhat misleading as a term because in the West it has a particular meaning. When we say "concentrate," we mean to focus our attention narrowly on one part of what we're doing—like trying to focus on homework while asking someone not to distract us with the television.

It's not a translation I like very much, but we're somewhat stuck with it because it's so widely used. A better word would be *collectedness*. The Pali term being translated here is *samadhi*, and *samadhi* does not have this exclusive focus connotation. *Samadhi* is not about bringing the mind to only one point and ignoring everything else.

Samadhi is about the whole psyche that has become collected in the present moment.

Some of this confusion exists because bringing the attention down to one point can be a way of collecting the mind in Buddhist meditation. But it's not the only way, and that narrow focus is not intrinsic to the experience of samadhi. Samadhi refers to the mind that has become collected. It is not primarily about attention on a narrow focus.

I love this description from Ajahn Sumedho. One of the synonyms that's often used for concentration is ekaggata, which literally means one-pointed. Ajahn Sumedho defines one-pointed as "the one point that includes everything." That's a beautiful way of opening up the narrowness. The one point that includes everything.

So what's the one point that includes everything? How about here and now? The one point that includes everything is the present moment—one way of understanding it.

When the mind is collected like this, it has great power. You have felt it. A number of you have described this in interviews, and I know all of you have touched this at different points. When the mind comes together, it is steady. You know it because it stays in the present moment for a while—not forever, but it stays for a while. As it abides in the present moment, it's not thrown off its present-moment awareness by a passing thought or an unpleasant sensation or a little stirring of one emotion or another. It keeps its collectedness, and that makes it strong.

This coming together of the mind's energy makes it strong, steady, stable, unified, whole. These are really beautiful qualities of the concentrated mind.

I'm sure you know how different teachers transmit different kinds of energy. One of the most dramatic examples I witnessed was Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese master, who came to Spirit Rock a few times before we had built our retreat center. We still had a big open hillside that was a natural amphitheater.

We built a speaker's platform for Thay at the bottom of the amphitheater, with about two thousand people spread out on the hillside and a loudspeaker system so we could hear his teachings.

He has an amazing presence if you've ever met him and been around him. For me, he had a kind of stillness that I hadn't felt in any of the other teachers I'd been with—a stillness that radiated. His body language is very still. His mind is very still. His words come out very composed. As I sat there on the hillside listening to him speak, I felt like he was casting a samadhi spell on all two thousand people. You could just feel everybody settle into the stillness of his being.

This is the quality of concentration. It has a couple of benefits. First, it feels whole. It feels healing and it feels good. So it brings an immediate benefit of a sense of well-being and strength and confidence.

The Dalai Lama put it this way: "Inner peace is the key. If you have inner peace, the external problems do not affect your deep sense of peace and tranquility." This quality of samadhi is a big part of inner peace.

The second benefit is that it serves as the platform for insight to emerge. When we are living our usual life with the untrained mind, everything is going by so fast we can't see clearly. It's a little like we're on a merry-go-round, on one of those horses going around and around, and a friend comes to the side of the merry-go-round with a newspaper. They hold it up and say, "Read the news!" But we're spinning by so fast, we can't read the news.

With samadhi, the merry-go-round starts to calm down, to slow down, and eventually comes to a halt. We're in front of our friend with the newspaper, and then we can read the news. And the headlines say: Life is change. Don't hang on. If you hang on, you suffer. If you let go, you'll find happiness.

We can read the news. And when we read the news from that place of stillness, it really goes in. Insight penetrates deep when the mind is strong and unified and collected. So the message goes right into our heart. We can see things the way they are, and it changes us. Concentration brings the mind into this state of wholeness, peace, stillness, and receptivity.

And because of the strength of that kind of mind, it opens into the seventh factor of equanimity, *upekkhā*, which Bhante talked about a couple of weeks ago. So I don't need to say a lot more about equanimity. He spoke beautifully about it on that evening. Just to say that it is a state of real balance of mind that is not so moved by the alternating currents of pleasure and pain. It can stay steady in the face of the alternating experiences of the pleasant and the unpleasant.

Sometimes in Western language, equanimity has a little bit of a connotation of unfeeling. It's like looking at the statues of the Buddha. He looks so serene and untouched that you imagine he doesn't feel anything or care or have a heart. But equanimity is not like that.

It was interesting. At the end of a three-month course a few years ago, I asked people in our discussion group what were some of their most significant experiences on the retreat. People spoke about being in a

state of such balance that the pain in the body didn't bother them. Their emotional flow didn't bother them. And thoughts didn't disturb them. I said, "Well, you know, that's the state that's talked about as equanimity." And most of them did know that. And I said, "OK, in that state of equanimity, was your heart closed down? Were you shut off from feeling? Did you not care?"

And everybody said, "Not at all. It was just the opposite. When I could be in that state of balance, my heart was much more open and connected. *Mettā* and compassion came far more easily in that place, and there was a lot more warmth." The state of equanimity is not a state of indifference at all, but with that strength and balance, we can really move into the world out of love and compassion.

So these are the three pacifying qualities—the tranquility, the concentration, the equanimity—which are needed to balance the three arousing factors of investigation, energy, and rapture. It's mindfulness that knows the presence of all the others and can keep them in balance.

As you go about your practice, you can start to look at this balance. And in shorthand, look at three qualities in particular: mindfulness, energy, and concentration. Mindfulness is the balance. Energy is shorthand for the arousing factors. Concentration is shorthand for the pacifying factors. When I practice on retreat, I try to always be in touch with these three to the point that if my teacher came up and tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Where are your mindfulness, energy, and concentration right now?" I could tell them. It's very helpful to know.

Then you start to realize: if your energy is too high for your concentration, you need to bring in more calm. And there are ways to do that. The *Ānāpānasati Sutta*: "I shall breathe in, tranquilizing the bodily formation. I shall breathe in, tranquilizing the mental formation." And so on. Open to expansiveness.

If, on the other hand, the arousing factors are too low and the calming factors are too high, it leads to the quality of dullness or sinking mind. Then bring up the energy factors with investigation or noting or some physical movement to arouse energy. We can start to see how these factors are developing in our practice, in our experience, moment by moment. Because when all the factors come together and are balanced, that's when the mind is primed for insight. And as they come into their maturity, their fulfillment, as the Buddha said, that's when the mind is primed for enlightenment, for the glimpse of the unconditioned that is the awakening process.

Sometimes today one wonders: does this awakening still go on for people to the depths that we read about in the texts? I want to close by reading you a little story from a Thai master named Luang Paw Liam, or Ajahn Liam. He is the successor to Ajahn Chah at his main monastery in Thailand, Wat Ba Pong. Ajahn Liam is a fairly old man now, but I just came upon his biography and autobiography that describes his practice in a special year of 1969. I'd just like to close by reading some of this to you.

Around the middle of the rainy season of 1969, Ajahn Chah encouraged the monks to practice with special intensity. So Luang Por Liam increased his efforts, and as he did so, results became evident. First he

described a real growth of happiness and brightness and joy. But he recognized that this was impermanent, so he just kept practicing.

Then he became very, very sleepy. For days, this great sleepiness overtook him, but he saw that this too was impermanent. "Keeping this in mind, I kept on meditating," he said.

"Normally, I would sit meditation until about 10 or 11 p.m., and then stop to have a rest. But on this day, I continued sitting without 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, an experience of becoming completely light and at ease. Cool, peaceful, quiet, and still. The only experience left was that of utter peace and stillness.

"It feels like there are no sankhāras or proliferations of the mind now. All the suffering that arises with kilesas that had bothered me before—the attraction to the other sex, or all kinds of ambitions that I had before—they all disappeared. This is the kind of peace and tranquility that arose. There isn't anything to be concerned about as far as how any other things exist.

"As concerns dukkha, I don't know what that 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 all the way up to the present day. This same state still lasts on, and it has been stable, continuous, and without change."

So this profound awakening is still possible. When we cultivate the seven factors of enlightenment with patience and dedication, when we allow them to mature and come into balance, the mind naturally opens to these deeper truths. The path that the Buddha laid out twenty-five hundred years ago remains as vibrant and transformative today as it ever was.

Let's just sit for a minute together in appreciation of this possibility that lives within each of us.

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