The Seven Factors of Enlightenment

Greg Scharf · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2010) · 57:31

There's one place in the suttas where the Buddha made an interesting and really quite powerful statement that I think can be useful and important to bear in mind as we undertake this practice. He said that the mind, the heart—meaning your mind and my mind—is inherently radiant. Luminous is the word that's used. There's this inherent luminosity, this purity of heart and mind. And it's because of visiting forces, usually described as adventitious defilements, that obscure this clarity that we have problems, that we suffer.

The word adventitious is not one that I use a lot. It means coming from another source, not inherent or innate. So these visiting forces, these adventitious defilements, are various manifestations of what are called the three unwholesome roots of greed, hatred, and delusion, along with all the various ways these might manifest. We've spoken about these quite a lot over the weeks—the way that aversion and ill will and fear, doubt, desire, dullness, these kinds of things manifest in our hearts and minds at times.

But it's important to keep in mind that these are just visitors, that they're not inherent or intrinsically part of who we are. They may visit often, but we need to remind ourselves that they're just visiting, and that this luminous nature of the mind, of the heart, is not ultimately affected by these forces. They may have the effect of temporarily obscuring the clarity, this luminosity of the heart and mind. It's like the sky when clouds come across—they obscure the clarity of the sky, but they don't change its fundamental nature. In the same way, the mind, the heart is not changed. Its nature is not changed by these visiting forces.

It's good to keep this in mind because sometimes they show up a lot, and we'll look and it seems like that's all we're seeing. That's all we see at times. We can feel discouraged or take it quite personally and feel that this is our fault somehow, that it's just the way we are, as if somehow these states represent something ultimately true about us, about who we are. We can fall into judging ourselves, and as Joseph spoke about a couple of weeks ago, falling into these extremes of self-mortification, of doubt and self-judgment—as though if we were any good as meditators, then these states wouldn't show up. We can fall into this kind of way of thinking.

Part of what we do in our practice is to reconnect with this luminosity, this clarity of mind, this inherent purity of heart and mind. You could say it's rediscovering, reconnecting with who we really are beneath our habitual patterns of reactivity and the conditioned habits of mind that may have diminished what we think we're capable of, diminished how we hold ourselves.

Sometimes we really can connect very directly and deeply with this luminous quality of the mind and heart—this essential, primordial nature that is already aware and already free because it never was any

other way and never could be any other way. In moments of wakefulness, of pure presence, once in a while things come into this exquisite balance, this deep place of balance where there's nothing to do and no one to be and nothing to get or get rid of. We touch this purity of heart in that place. It may not last, but we do touch it, even if it's fleeting. And just because we might lose sight of it again, just because it might become obscured again, it doesn't change this reality, this truth.

It's not a sign of failure when these visiting forces show up. It's going to happen to us all, many times, as we go through the stages and phases of practice over the years. It's a natural part of the process, part of this path of purification that we walk. If we can bring more clarity and kindness, compassion and wisdom to bear, the better off we're going to be. We can learn to relate to these difficulties that arise in our practice from a place of some ease and some strength, in a skillful way that can actually allow them to become a vehicle for freedom.

This leads us to really the essential core teaching of the Buddha. He said, "I teach one thing only: suffering and the end of suffering." This goes to the very heart of what's possible for us—the full acknowledgment that there is this stressful aspect to life, this ultimately unsatisfactory quality, this dukkha to existence, and that there's the possibility for an end to this.

This serves as a framework for relating to our experience not in terms of good and bad, or right and wrong, or what we like and don't like, what we want and don't want, what we find acceptable and what isn't—all these usual ways we tend to relate to life, to our experience, at least a lot of the time. Instead, we relate to it simply in terms of suffering, of dukkha, and the end of dukkha. We can look at life in this way and see what leads to ease in our lives and what leads away from ease, what leads to freedom and the end of suffering, and what doesn't.

Looking in this way, we see that wisdom, mindfulness, kindness, and compassion lead to the end of suffering, while the forces of ill will, aversion, greed, and delusion lead to suffering in our lives. Rather than seeing these difficult things that arise in our practice, in our life, in our experience as bad or wrong, as something to struggle and fight against, or as a sign of weakness or failure on our part, we see them in terms of suffering in our lives. We see that they're impersonal factors that arise due to causes and conditions and pass away as these conditions change. Relating to them in this way allows for the possibility of transformation and freedom.

Some of the forces of habit in the mind are really old and deep and powerful. Maybe they're lifetimes old—sometimes it feels that way. We see them operating in our lives, and sometimes we find ourselves repeating some habit pattern that we've seen over and over.

We've seen through it. And still it comes up—we can watch ourselves getting caught, getting hooked again, even though we know better on some level. These things run so deep.

But we're lucky, because there are certain powerful, wholesome mental factors which arise naturally and

come to our aid in practice. They directly incline the mind towards freedom and towards enlightenment. That's their function.

The Buddha said this: "Bhikkhus, I do not see even one other thing that, when developed and cultivated, leads to the abandoning of the fetters so effectively as this: the seven factors of enlightenment. What seven? The enlightenment factor of mindfulness, the enlightenment factor of investigation, of energy, and of rapture, the enlightenment factor of calm, of concentration, and of equanimity."

That's a strong statement—not one other thing so effective. So tonight I'd like to look at these potent, powerful, helpful powers of mind.

The Pali word for these factors of enlightenment is *bojjhanga*. I like the sound of it—*bojjhanga*. Something about it sounds good. It comes from two roots. The *bo* part comes from *bodhi*, like the Bodhi tree—awakened, awakening, or enlightenment. And *anga* is a limb or a causative factor. Put them together and it's a factor of enlightenment, or a cause for awakening.

These *bojjhangas* are healthy, wholesome, useful mental factors, and they arise when the conditions are right. They have the effect of weakening—I could say even removing—those difficult, afflictive states that have the function of clouding the mind, obscuring its natural clarity.

There's another statement of the Buddha where he pointed to the natural way these factors support our practice. He said, "Just as all the rafters of a peaked house slant, slope, and incline towards the roof peak, so too when one develops and cultivates the seven factors of enlightenment, one slants, slopes, and inclines toward nibbana, towards freedom."

So as these arise and are developed in our practice, we're directly inclining ourselves towards enlightenment. We're sloping, sliding towards awakening. Sounds good—sliding to freedom.

There's a great optimism in this way of looking at things. In many places in the discourses, the Buddha spoke of the path in terms of causes and conditions, and in terms of nutriments—the nutriments which support and lead to the arising of what's wholesome and useful, and the nutriments for these things like the seven factors.

He put it this way in one place: "Liberation by supreme knowledge, O bhikkhus, has its nutriment, I declare. It is not without a nutriment. And what is the nutriment of liberation by supreme knowledge? The seven factors of enlightenment, should be the answer."

So they arise due to causes and conditions, and they're sustained by the nutriment of wise attention, wise and careful attention.

Then he continued: "The seven factors of enlightenment too have their nutriment, I declare. They are not without a nutriment. And what is the nutriment of the seven factors of enlightenment? Attention to the four foundations of mindfulness, should be the answer."

And so if we bring mindfulness in a relaxed and clear, steady, continuous way to any aspect of our experience—any of the four foundations of mindfulness, which includes the entirety of what we can possibly experience, it's all in there, in these focuses, these spheres of attention—this results in the gathering together and maturing of the factors of awakening. You could say it creates the necessary environment for them to flourish, to grow and to come to fruition.

In the same way, these afflictive states, these *kilesas*, these defilements as they're called, these things which tend to bind the heart and obscure the clarity of the mind—they're not without a nutriment either. They arise also because of causes, and they're sustained by their own nutriment of unwise or careless attention.

Another way we could put this is to say that both these wholesome factors of awakening and these afflictive states require a certain kind of internal environment to arise and then to flourish and grow. We could see a parallel to this in nature. Different kinds of plants and animals need specific conditions and environments to live, and different nutriments to support them in order to live happily and grow.

If we walk around here and go into the woods, there are ferns and certain plants that grow under the canopy of the trees. They wouldn't grow well if we moved them out into the open meadows. The same way, if we took some of the flowers and grasses that grow out in the fields and put them under the trees, they wouldn't live there. They wouldn't be happy there. Different factors require specific environments to live.

We could say that the key condition, the key that allows the factors of enlightenment to grow and to flourish, is the light of mindfulness, the light of awareness.

It's like the sunlight that plants need. And these afflictive emotions can't survive in the light of mindfulness, of awareness. They require a certain kind of darkness. They need lack of awareness, you could say.

So I'll list these seven factors again, give you the Pali names, and I'll talk about them this evening. The first one is sati, mindfulness. Dhamma vicaya is investigation of dhammas. Viriya, effort or energy—courage, sometimes it's called courageous effort. Piti is rapture, joyful interest. Passaddhi, calm or tranquility. Samadhi, concentration. And upekkha, equanimity.

Now these are one of the lists—lots of lists in this tradition. I was listening to a talk by a friend of mine, and she likened these various lists to a field guide, like we have a field guide with all these lists in it. The Buddha, as a researcher who's gone out and done fieldwork, has come back with this useful field guide. It's kind of an interesting way to look at it.

I know not everybody likes field guides. Maybe I'm a kind of amateur birdwatcher of sorts—not the kind that will drive you completely crazy, maybe. But I've loved birds, and I like to identify them and learn about them. I have some field guides. I spent the better part of a year on a long pilgrimage in India a few

years ago with a monk teacher. Some of you may know his name is Ajahn Amaro. He's recently taken over the abbotship in England of Amaravati Monastery. My friend Eric and I were his attendants, kind of splitting a bit more than a year, traveling in India with him. I had the bigger half of the year, but there was a time when the three of us were together also.

So I bought myself a field guide to the birds of India, and I'd go out and come back all excited. I'd seen a blue-bearded bee-eater, for example—a particularly cool bird. And I'd come back, and they would try to express some dutiful interest for me. But it clearly didn't strike them, although the blue-bearded bee-eater is a very fine bird. There's no getting around it, no matter how you feel about these things.

So regardless of how we feel about these lists, the Buddha did great research, and we have the benefit of that. He put his research into simple, easy teachings, which we can access. In the Satipatthana Sutta, in this sutta with instructions for our practice, he had this simple, straightforward way of talking about the seven factors. He said, "And how does one dwell contemplating phenomena in phenomena in terms of the seven enlightenment factors? Here, when the mindfulness factor of enlightenment is present, one understands, 'There's the mindfulness enlightenment factor in me.' Or when there is no mindfulness enlightenment factor present, one understands, 'There is no mindfulness enlightenment factor in me.' And one also understands how the unarisen mindfulness enlightenment factor arises and how the arisen mindfulness enlightenment factor comes to fulfillment by development." And it goes on in the same way for the other six.

So basically what we're told to do is notice when they're there, if they're there or not, detect them, see what leads to them arising, and see how they're developed. Our job in this, really, the bottom line, is that we're to be mindful—not to control our experience. We see if these things are there, how they arise and what causes them to arise, and how they're brought to development, perfected. So we're not trying to make something happen; we just want to see what's going on, get familiar with that, and begin to really know it directly and intimately.

These seven factors often manifest in a more subtle way than the afflictive states. Sometimes they're really obscured by them, because the afflictive states can storm through us and cause a lot of upheaval. So we need to learn how to recognize these wholesome factors, not through thinking about them and analyzing them, but really touching them directly.

I'll go through each one in brief. You could give a talk on each of them, and that's been done. Joseph has done a series on the Satipatthana Sutta where he devotes an entire talk to each of these, and it's a very good source for more detail.

So sati, mindfulness—this is the first factor, and we've spoken about it endlessly. But it's in its own category, I should say. It has the function of gathering together and balancing the other six.

So it stands a bit alone of the seven. It's said that it's the only one of them that you can't have too much of,

and all of the others follow in the wake of mindfulness. So it's really the key. All wholesome things flourish when it's present.

Mindfulness—this quality, this mental factor that connects us directly with our experience, free of concepts—this is what opens the door to the entire path. The Buddha said this is the pathway to the deathless. This is the key.

I'll mention a few characteristics of mindfulness. The word *sati* is related to a verb in Pali, *sarati*, which means to remember. So mindfulness has this function of helping us to remember to be present. And there's another way that it relates to memory in terms of a quality of relaxed receptivity. We could think of times when we're trying desperately to remember something we've forgotten. The more we try, the less we're able to recall it. But then when we set it aside, often the memory springs to mind spontaneously. There's a quality of memory in that.

Mindfulness also has a quality of non-superficiality. There's an image of this: it's said to be like the difference between tossing a cork into a stream of water versus a stone. A cork bobs on the surface and floats along with the current, but a stone sinks down to the streambed. Mindfulness is likened to the stone that sinks below the surface of things. It has non-superficiality, and it's impartial and non-interfering. It doesn't seek to change the experience in any way. It's uninvolved and detached, but not in a cold or indifferent or aloof way—it's totally the opposite, actually. Mindfulness rubs right up against our experience, right up against the objects of our attention. But it's non-reactive. It lets things be just the way they are. There's no judgment or preference there.

So then we have the remaining six factors, grouped into two categories. There are three that have an energizing, uplifting quality, and three that have the function of calming, collecting, settling the mind and heart. We need a balance of them. They need to be balanced in order to function well. And liberation—this sloping, slanting towards freedom that comes when these are developed—this comes out of this balance where we're not too energized, not overly excited or euphoric. And we're not too cooled out, not so chilled out that we fall into foggy stupor. It's a balance between these, because if we get off balance, we tend to disconnect with reality. It's hard to connect with the truth of things in the moment if we're off balance with either too much energy or too much tranquility. But when they're balanced, then our hearts and minds are open and receptive, and there's a strength of heart that comes from this. We're able to open to experience without falling into extremes of being too excited or dull.

So the energizing factors—I'll talk about them first: *dhamma vicaya*, investigation; *viriya*, energy or courageous effort; and *pīti*, rapture or joyful interest.

The factor of investigation, *dhamma vicaya*—I think using the word "investigation" can sometimes be a little problematic with this factor because investigation for us often has the connotation of intellectual analysis or thinking about a thing. We investigate in that way. But this really points to an intuitive kind of discerning that distinguishes the fundamental characteristics of things. It's described as though we were

given a flashlight in a dark room and we used it to reveal what's there. We can use this investigation just to see things clearly and to draw our attention near to experience. With this factor, we become more and more intimate with life, with our experience, discovering the details of things—but not intellectually. Rather, through directly connecting with things.

In a way, when this factor is developed, we plunge or dive into our experience below the surface, below the appearances of things. There's a Pali term, *paramattha dhamma*, usually translated as "ultimate reality." It means the characteristics of things that are simply the experience of things free of any concept, below the level of concept.

For example, Andrea spoke the other night about how we can relate to our experience of materiality in terms of these four great elements of earth, fire, water, and air. They all have specific characteristics. She spoke about these at length: earth characterized by hardness, solidity, textures; fire by temperature, heat and cold; water by fluidity and cohesion; air by movement and tension, vibration. These are the fundamental elemental natures of things.

These are the paramatadhammas of all things, and we can experience them directly in sensations in our body. But the factor of investigation also reveals those universal common characteristics that have been spoken about—characteristics shared by all things, common to all things: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and corelessness. It's through deeply seeing these common characteristics, through seeing them deeply, that insight arises.

This investigation brings interest because it draws close to experience, draws near to it. We touch it directly and intimately, and it doesn't really matter what our experience is. This factor can function and can grow and flourish no matter what we're paying attention to. It's really quite wonderful. We don't have to have some really cool, interesting thing to investigate in our experience. The breath, for example, wouldn't strike most people as particularly interesting. But in meditation, it can become very interesting if we really draw close and near to it, if we really rub right up against it, investigate it in this way.

Then there's the second energizing factor, virya—effort or energy. It's often called courageous effort, and sometimes there is a very courageous, even heroic aspect to it. This isn't easy, what we're doing. A lot of the time it's not at all easy. And so this kind of courageous effort is what we need to stay at it through the ups and downs, to persevere. It's a kind of enduring, patient effort that sees things through to the end, that stands firm in the face of experience—sometimes very difficult experience. I think of it as a kind of doggedness, stick-to-itiveness, where we're in this for the long haul.

There's an incredibly inspiring example of the Buddha on the night of his awakening, his enlightenment. He said this famous thing when he sat down under the Bodhi tree that night: "Let only my skin, sinews, and bones remain. Let the flesh and blood in my body dry up. Yet there shall be no ceasing of energy until I have attained whatever can be won by human strength, human energy, and human effort."

This sense of standing firm is, I think, also very beautifully illustrated by his gesture that night of touching the earth and asking the earth to bear witness—this feeling of not budging in the face of things, in the face of experience. Not fighting it and not retreating, standing firm like a mountain. There's real dignity and courage in that.

Finding balance in terms of effort, in terms of energy, is something that we're constantly refining and adjusting. We don't unfortunately just get this set and then it's all set. It's something we have to adjust and refine. At times we make too much energy, we get tense, and we eventually tire ourselves out, wear ourselves out. At other times we don't make enough energy and we fall into a lazy, dull place. Right effort, the right amount of energy, is just enough that it allows our attention to land on each moment's experience. We don't have excessive zeal, too much energy, and crush the moment. We don't slip off of it either. We don't lose touch and slip away because we're making too little effort. It's the kind of energy where we just meet each moment arising—just this moment, over and over.

Moments of balanced energy, just a lot of those, just the right little amount made over and over—that's a sustainable way of practicing. We meet each moment, just this moment as it arises. We don't tire ourselves out, don't wear ourselves out. If we try to be mindful for the whole day, it's too much. That's too tall an order—being mindful all day today, not missing a moment. But if we just say, "I'm going to be mindful for this next beginning of an in-breath, and then maybe the end of it if I'm still here"—we can do that. It's doable if we approach our practice that way, moments of effort put together.

The third of the energizing factors is piti, sometimes called rapture, joy, joyful interest. It has this quality of interest with a happy, joyful aspect. It has this characteristic of delight, of satisfaction. And it has these qualities in and of itself, but it also has an ability to pervade, to imbue other states, other experiences with the same quality. It brings this sense of delight and satisfaction to other experiences. We can get very serious in our practice and lose touch sometimes with feelings of joy and joyful interest. Piti brings this. It refreshes us with a kind of spiritual joy.

You could say it uplifts us. It can bring us out of the sometimes overly serious way that we approach our practice.

In one of the technical definitions, it's said that pīti has the characteristic of being endearing. It endears. It has the function of refreshing body and mind, and it manifests as a kind of elation. It can fill our body and mind with lightness and a kind of agility. Sometimes there are physical sensations that come with it, usually quite pleasant and delightful—although sometimes they can be so strong that they aren't so delightful.

But it's a kind of joy that comes from being really intimate with life, intimate with our experience. And it doesn't depend on our experience being any particular way. It's quite amazing in this way. Sometimes we can be experiencing something very difficult or painful, but this quality of pīti has an ability to pervade other states and infuse them with happiness and delight.

I can remember times practicing with very difficult, painful sensations in the body, and this quality of joyful interest arising. Those sensations didn't change, but the relationship to them was completely different. This quality pervades. It imbues these things with a whole different quality.

The other day, Andrea talked about these five different kinds of pīti. I'll go through those again. There's minor or lesser rapture—a kind of chills or goose-bumpy quality in terms of the sensations we might notice. There's momentary rapture, which has a very intense, flashing quality, like flashes of lightning—strong and intense. Showering rapture can feel like it's breaking over us like a series of waves or rain. There's uplifting rapture that can make the body feel very light. And then there's pervading rapture.

I'll tell this story. It brought me a lot of joy once when I was hearing it. Joseph used it in one of his talks. It's a story of a young woman who was in a village near a monastery—the village of Vatakalaka, near the Girkandaka Monastery. She was living with her parents, staying with them. They were going to go to the monastery, but she was pregnant and nearing the time of giving birth, and they said, "You shouldn't go. You should stay home." They told her, "We'll go and hear the Dhamma and gain merit on your behalf." Even though she wanted to go, she heeded their wishes.

So she went out onto the balcony of their house, where she could gaze across at the shrine in the compound. It was a full moon night, an observance night. She could see it shining in the light of the moon and see the people circling the shrine and making offerings. There was chanting she could hear drifting in on the breeze. She thought, "They're so lucky to be able to go to the monastery and wander about the shrine and hear the Dhamma, hear the chanting."

It's said that she had this vision of the shrine as though it were a mound of pearls. Joy and delight arose so strongly that she floated up into the air. She came down on a terrace of the shrine and got there before her parents did. When they showed up they said, "How did you get here? What road did you take?" She said, "I came through the air, not by the road. As I was standing gazing at the shrine in the moonlight, a strong joy arose in me with the Buddha as its object. And then I knew no more if I was standing or sitting, but only that I was rising into the air. And I came to rest on the shrine terrace."

So look and see if there are any floaters out there.

It's a lovely story, but it points to this uplifting quality of this factor. And then there's pervading rapture, which tends to fill the body and mind in a way that is somewhat more subtle in some ways.

So, summing up: these three energizing factors—investigation, energy or effort, and joyful interest. And then there are the three calming, tranquilizing factors. I'd better get going.

The first of these is passaddhi—calm, usually called calm or calm coolness. It has the characteristic of calming the mind and body, tranquilizing when things are agitated or unrestful.

In a way, it's said to suppress heat—the heat of restlessness, of worry, of agitation in the mind and heart. So it has this cooling effect, this non-agitating effect. And sometimes when it's growing and when it's strong, things seem to become, they feel more simple to us. Things seem to sometimes slow down a bit. We relax.

And calm can come in different ways. It can come in brief moments; it's not always this extended period. There can be a feeling of calm in the center of a storm, where there's a feeling of rest even in the middle of energy, in the middle of more agitated states. It's said that this feeling of calm often, almost always, follows upon the arising of strong pervading rapture especially. And when it's strong, we don't want to move at all. We feel we could just sit for a long period.

And then there's the second of these calming, tranquilizing factors: samadhi, concentration. It has the characteristic of non-scatteredness, non-dispersal. So with samadhi, with concentration, the mind tends to really stick right with the object, to not slip off. There's a quality of our attention remaining just right there, a kind of stillness. And so samadhi has the function of gathering, collecting the mind. It keeps things in a group. It keeps these factors from scattering, from dispersing. And so as it grows stronger, the mind becomes quite still, very quiet. This is the manifestation of concentration.

There are two ways that samadhi is developed. It can be developed through a kind of continuous concentration on a single object to the complete exclusion of any other, or through momentary concentration to changing objects. These can arise and pass even very quickly, but the continuity of mindfulness brings a concentration. And both are very, very powerful.

The more continuous type on a single object is a tranquility practice, a pure tranquility practice, we could say. It can lead to deep absorptions when it's developed in a strong way. It develops real strength and unification of the mind and sets all defilements temporarily at bay when it's strong. It can be a very useful foundation for insight practice.

This momentary concentration, arising from continuity of mindfulness to changing objects, can also be very powerful concentration, powerful samadhi, despite the fact that there's this attending to the flux and change. It can be steady if our mindfulness is without many breaks and gaps. And it has the same function of collecting and gathering the mind, keeping these defilements at bay.

So either of these kinds of samadhi brings a composure, a stillness to the mind. There's a great relief from wandering mind, and we're not pushed and pulled around by things. And samadhi is the proximate cause for wisdom and insight to arise, because we can see very deeply into anicca, dukkha, anatta—into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. It's hard to do this when our minds are scattered. So the samadhi collects and gathers the mind and lets it really see deeply into things.

And then the third factor in this tranquilizing group is upekkha, equanimity. It seems kind of different than the others in a way. It's this sense of balance in the face of experience, in the face of changing

experience. So it's a state of mind, a quality that rests in the center. It's not pulled to extremes. It allows us to be with things without being pulled or falling into reactivity. Things that usually bother us, habits of reactivity—when upekkha, when equanimity is strong, they don't arise, they don't upset us.

Sometimes people think that this is some kind of insensitivity or indifference, where we're not feeling things, as though somehow our goal is to become somewhat numb. But it's nothing like this. There's no indifference. There's no insensitivity with equanimity. There's no apathy. There's no disdain or numbness. It's just that we're non-preferential. We're totally present, but we're not pushed and pulled around. There's no preference with regard to experience. And it's a great relief when this is strong.

Another function of equanimity: it's said to fill in where there is a lack and to reduce where there is excess.

I like that. It adds when adding is needed and it removes when removing is needed.

So when this balance of mind is strong, we feel as though we don't have to make any effort to be mindful—as if the practice is doing itself. And this is a manifestation of equanimity. It's likened to someone driving a carriage who settles back and just lets the horses do the work of pulling.

When this balance of equanimity is strong and really developed, this is what prepares our mind to realize nibbāna, to realize the unconditioned. In the models of the progress of insight—these models of successive stages of insight—there's a name for this kind of really powerful balance of equanimity: *saṅkhārupekkhā ñāṇa*. This is equanimity with regard to formations. A deep, deep balance. A perfect equipoise.

One way I think about it is like the description of the Buddha on the night of his awakening, when he was assailed by all the different armies of Māra. It's said that the great being's mind was not moved. This kind of exquisite balance of mind is not moved by things. And it's this exquisite balance of mind that allows for sudden realization to occur.

In this list of the factors of awakening, there is a certain flow from one to another in the order that I listed them. The energizing factors, as they arise and develop and strengthen, tend to organically lead to the arising and development of the calming factors. There's a way in which they all culminate in equanimity, you could say. But at the same time, they're all present at once and they develop in a more parallel way. Sometimes we can see them all manifested—that's what we see in our experience. We see these factors of enlightenment. We see the way they inform and balance one another. So it's not altogether linear, but there is some aspect of this that we do see.

Really the most important thing to remember, to remind ourselves—because we can get a little worked up about getting these babies going and working them up—is that they follow in the wake of mindfulness, that the function of mindfulness is to gather and balance them, that it does this naturally. We don't have to make this happen.

In this way, we can't have an excess of mindfulness. We can make too much energy. We can make too much effort, bring too much energy to our practice. We can get giddy and overly exuberant. We can fall into dullness through excess of calm. Our mind can sink when there's too much concentration and not enough energy. So we can get out of balance with the others, but not with mindfulness. You can't have too much of it.

Sometimes I've thought of our practice as a process of cultivating a taste for these factors of awakening, and starting to lose a bit of our conditioned taste for other states. We begin to see through the mistaken view that desire and aversion—that the strategy of using these as a source for finding happiness—isn't such a good one. We start to acquire a taste for the factors of awakening. We start to see how the way we chase after sense pleasures, and try to avoid and run away from unpleasant things, and zone out in between these two extremes—this is ultimately an exhausting and endless and really hopeless pursuit. It doesn't ever lead us to deep satisfaction and happiness.

This goes against the culture, and it's kind of a major shift in our understanding and our relationship to things. But it's a natural thing that happens. We just see more and more clearly the flaws in pursuing these afflictive states as a strategy for happiness. And this inclines us naturally toward the ultimately more satisfying happiness that comes from the factors of awakening. We start to see how they lead to liberation of mind.

I'll end with some more from the Buddha:

Bhikkhus, these seven factors of enlightenment, when developed and cultivated, lead to going beyond, from the near shore to the far shore.

And having said this, the Fortunate One, the Teacher, further said:

Few are those among humankind who go beyond to the far shore. The rest of us merely run up and down along the bank. When the Dhamma is rightly expounded, those who practice in accord with the Dhamma are the ones who will go beyond the realm of death, so hard to cross.

Having left behind the dark qualities, the wise ones should develop the bright ones. And having come from home into homelessness, where it is hard to take delight, there in seclusion one should seek delight.

Having left behind the pursuit of sensual pleasures, owning nothing, the wise one should cleanse himself of mental afflictions. Those whose minds are well developed in the factors of enlightenment, who through non-clinging find delight in the relinquishment of grasping—these are the luminous ones with taints destroyed, fully quenched in the world.

And I recommend you let the words drift away. Anything that was useful will have gone in there, so don't think about it.

There's time now for some walking meditation.

Thank you for listening.

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