The Seven Factors of Enlightenment

Greg Scharf · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2012) · 59:04

There are two short statements that the Buddha made in one teaching that are deceptively simple, but I think they're actually quite profound. I'd like to read them to begin this evening.

"Luminous, bhikkhus, is this mind, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements. Luminous, bhikkhus, is this mind, and it is freed from adventitious defilements."

These two short statements, one following the other, are part of a longer teaching. The word *adventitious* is not one we use often, so it's good to define it. It means not an inherent part of something. In essence, more simply, you could say it means visiting. It's transient. In this case, these defilements he spoke about are not an inherent part of the mind.

I love the fact that both of these statements begin with the words "luminous is this mind." In the first, the mind may be defiled by these visiting forces. In the second, the mind is freed from those same visiting forces. In both cases, the mind may be defiled by them—they may be present—or it may be free of them. But this luminous quality is there in either case. That's the starting point. That's the basis for this teaching.

This word *luminous* has to do with light, a quality of being suffused with or glowing with light—clear, enlightening, shining. These are definitions from the dictionary.

These adventitious defilements, these visiting forces, are of course the various manifestations of what we call the three unwholesome roots: greed, hatred, and confusion or delusion. That's what he's referring to with these adventitious defilements, and all the different ways those can manifest—as ill will and fear and doubt and desire and dullness, stubbornness. They show up in all these ways.

I think it's really important for us to reflect as we go through our days here, to remind ourselves that these are just visitors, that they aren't an inherent, intrinsic part of who we are. They're not inherent to the mind. They may show up quite a lot, and at times they do cloud the mind. They do obscure, for periods of time, this natural luminous quality of the heart, of the mind. But they don't change anything fundamental about its nature. The mind is not changed by these things that show up at times.

One aspect of our practice, one part of what we're doing here, you could say, is reconnecting with this inherent luminous quality of the mind, of the heart—rediscovering who we are beneath habits of mind, beneath patterns of reactivity that often diminish what we hold ourselves capable of, what we believe to be possible for us as humans.

All of us, I think, can reflect on moments—they may be brief and fleeting—when we do have a connection

with this empty, aware, luminous quality of the mind, of the heart. This essential nature that's already aware and already free, because it's never been any other way. We touch that at times in our practice when we connect with just pure presence, knowing the moment just as it is. And even though this connection may not last, may be fleeting, just because we lose sight of this luminous mind does not in any way negate the reality of it. It does not diminish that truth in any way.

The forces of habit, these deeply conditioned mental patterns that we have, are very powerful. Maybe they're lifetimes old, some of them—many lifetimes old, if we hold that kind of view. We see these patterns operating in our lives, some pattern that we feel like we've seen through from every side. We know it up one side and down the other. And yet we still find it arising. We find ourselves getting hooked again in something that we can watch ourselves doing. It's like rising to the bait—I'm going to bite it—and we can see it happening. That's the power of these things. These habits die hard, some of them.

The power of these adventitious defilements, these visiting energies, is strong. They're very strong. They're not to be underestimated. We have been engaging with them for a long time, and in many ways we've held them as a strategy for how we have lived in the world. So of course they arise. Of course they're there. Of course they visit and obscure this luminous mind at times.

Luckily, there are powerful, wholesome mental factors that naturally arise, that come to our aid in practice.

And they have the function to directly incline the mind towards freedom, towards awakening, towards enlightenment.

Another statement of the Buddha's: "Because 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 are the seven? The enlightenment factor of mindfulness, the enlightenment factor of investigation, of energy, of rapture, of calm, of concentration, and of equanimity. These seven.

That's a powerful statement. Not one other thing so effective in leading to the abandoning of these fetters that cloud and trouble the mind and heart. It's worth having a look at these factors of awakening, so we'll look at them this evening.

The Pali word for these factors of awakening is *bojjhanga*. *Bojjhanga*—Mr. Bojangles. Now you're going to have that song in your head. Some of these Pali words are really nice; they roll off the tongue. The *bojjhan gas*. *Bo* is the same root as *bodhi*—awake. And *jhanga* is like a causative factor, or a limb. It's a factor of becoming awake, an awakening factor.

These healthy, wholesome, beautiful factors arise when the conditions are right. Their effect in our hearts and minds is to weaken and even help to remove the afflictive states of the *kilesas*, the defilements. The Buddha spoke to this natural way that 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 towards *nibbana*."

Like that. We're slanting and sloping towards *nibbana*—this natural inclination in that direction with these factors. As we develop and cultivate them, or as this happens as a natural part of the deepening of our practice, we are inclining towards awakening. It's a very optimistic point of view.

Often throughout the suttas, the Buddha would speak of the path and various factors within his teaching in terms of causes and conditions that would lead to their arising, often in terms of the nutriments that support and sustain them. In another place he said, "I say, bhikkhus, that true knowledge and liberation have a nutriment. They are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment of true knowledge and liberation? It should be said—the seven factors of enlightenment."

These *bojjhangas* also have their causes and conditions for their arising. They're sustained by nutriment as well—the nutriment of wise and careful attention. Again he said, "The seven factors of enlightenment too, I say, have a nutriment. They are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment of the seven factors of enlightenment? It should be said—the four establishments of mindfulness."

Well, that's wonderful, because that goes to the heart of what we've been talking about this whole retreat and what we're practicing. Mindfulness of the four foundations, the four *satipatthanas*, the four establishments of mindfulness. Whether you notice it or not, that's what you're doing all day long—engaging with that practice. So that's good news for us.

If we bring mindfulness in a relaxed, clear, steady, continuous way—and it doesn't have to be perfect, it just has to be pretty good—if we bring mindfulness to this flow of our experience, to our life, then these factors of awakening arise. They're gathered together and arise as a natural result. It's an organic process. What we do, in essence, is create an environment where they will arise naturally, organically. It's all natural process. The whole deal is just a natural process.

In the same way, these defilements of mind—the fetters, the *kilesas*, these energies which bind the heart—they obscure this natural luminous quality of the mind, of the heart. They also have their nutriment, causes and conditions that cause them to arise. They're sustained by unwise or careless attention, by heedlessness. That is what sustains them.

You could say it another way: the factors of awakening and these defilements of mind both require a certain kind of internal environment to arise and then to stick around, to flourish. We could make parallels for this in nature. If you walk around outside here at IMS, if you go into the woods, there are ferns and other kinds of plants that do well in there. If you were to transplant them out into the full sun in the field, they wouldn't do well.

They wouldn't flourish there. And if you took some of the field grasses or the plants that do well in meadows and put them under the trees, they wouldn't do well there. Different animals, too—animals that need it to be cool and damp, like slugs and snails, they don't do well out in the sunny pastures. So we see

this is just the kind of environment that they need to be able to live and flourish and live well.

And so the key condition for the factors of awakening, the factors of enlightenment, to flourish, to grow, to come to development is the light of mindfulness. They need light the way plants need sunlight. And the kilesas—they don't do well in the light of awareness. They need the cloudiness or the darkness of unawareness, of heedlessness, to flourish. That's the nutriment, the environment you could say they need.

So I'll list these factors again. The first one is sati, mindfulness. The second is dhamma vicaya, investigation of dhammas. The third is viriya, effort or energy, courageous energy. The fourth is pīti, rapture, sometimes called joyful interest. The fifth is passaddhi, calm. The sixth is samādhi, concentration. And the last is upekkhā, equanimity. So these are the seven bojjhangas.

Sometimes—I know for myself—in the early days when I would hear a talk on this subject, I would hear it as a list of qualities that I didn't have and had never even had a glimpse of. That's how it would strike me. We may hear this kind of talk and think, "Well, there's another list of things that I have no idea where they are or if I've ever seen one of them."

And so it's important to remember that these things have a subtle way of manifesting. They show up in a much more subtle way than the defilements. They're often obscured by these defilements. The troublesome mind states are like raging storms, while the factors of awakening have a more subtle manifestation. We need to start to be able to recognize them. They may be somewhat hidden in our experience. We start to get to know them.

So I'm going to talk about each one, at least briefly. One could easily give an entire talk on each one of them, and that has been done. But that's not what I'm going to do. I'm giving a broad overview of these seven factors.

Sati, mindfulness, is the first one, and in a way, it's in its own category. It's funny—we were talking the other day, the teaching team, about different ways that thoughts manifest. For some people it seems to be words, and for some more images, pictures. We all have both, of course, but it seems like certain types have more of one or the other. I don't know. I see a lot of pictures. When I think of these seven factors, there's a picture there. And mindfulness is out in front. It's like a boat, and the others are pulled along behind it.

So it's in its own kind of category because its function is to gather together and balance the others. And it's the only one of them that it's said we can't have too much of. We can have too much of the others and things get out of balance, because the way they function well is when they're balanced. But mindfulness—we can't have too much mindfulness. And so it's as though the other factors are pulled along, following in the wake of mindfulness, flowing along behind it. That's the key. And all good things flourish when mindfulness is present.

We've spoken a lot about mindfulness over these weeks, talked about it in various ways. I'll mention a few

of the key points.

The very word is related to a word for remembering, and that's a big part of its function—remembering the present moment, remembering to be here. It's what gets us to show up; this is one of its primary functions. It connects us with the moment in its present arising.

Mindfulness has a non-preferential and non-interfering quality. It doesn't choose anything. It's like a mirror—it reflects whatever's there, not picking this and leaving other things away. It can be aware of anything, and it doesn't choose. It doesn't interfere with experience. It just brings us face to face with this process of our mind, body, and heart.

Mindfulness is characterized by a quality of non-superficiality. There's an image—I'm not sure where this comes from—of the difference between throwing a cork or something that floats easily onto a stream of moving water versus throwing a stone into the water. The cork just rides along the top, bobs along and flows on the surface of the stream. But the stone would sink right down to the bottom of the streambed. Mindfulness is likened to the stone in that it sinks below the surface. It's not superficial. It goes more to the heart of things.

So this quality of mindfulness functions to gather together and balance these other six factors. The others are grouped into two categories of three—three that have the function to energize the mind, the heart, to bring energy and uplift, and three that have the function to bring calm and tranquility. This balance of energy and calm, energy and tranquility—this is a lot of what is being worked with in our practice as we cultivate these factors. They have to be balanced to function well, and that's part of what mindfulness does. It takes care of a lot of things for us.

You could say the mind that opens to liberation arises out of this balance in the mind and heart, where we're not too high or blissed out, not too caught in analysis and thinking about—that comes with energetic states—and we're not too cooled out, where we slide off into dullness or stupor or fogginess. Because if we're out of balance either way, we tend to disconnect from the moment, to disconnect from the truth, from reality.

This balance leads to a mind and heart that are open and receptive—this balance of energy and calm, of tranquility and energy—leads to a mind and heart that are open, balanced, and receptive. There's a real inner strength that comes from this balance that allows us to open to things. We don't go into extremes of agitation or restlessness or worry, or fall off into dullness and stupor.

I'll start with the energizing factors. The first one is investigation of dhammas, of things as they are. It's a factor of investigation. Sometimes using the word investigation can be a little problematic in talking about this factor, because for many of us, we tend to think of it as more of an intellectual analysis, a thinking about, a figuring out on that level. I think it reflects a lot of our training, our schooling—to look at investigation this way. But this kind of investigation is an intuitive, direct discerning. It's a direct touching.

It distinguishes the characteristics of phenomena in a direct way, not in an analytical way.

Someone once used a description as though one were in a darkened room without light, and were given a flashlight and could turn it on and begin to shine that light around and see what's there. We use that kind of image for this investigation. It points to things, shows what's there—a direct seeing of it.

So it has this quality of drawing our attention near to whatever's happening in our experience. It increases our connection, our intimacy with it. You could say it functions in that way. There's a sense, as this factor is developed, of really connecting or plunging into—almost a kind of diving into—the flow of experience a little more directly and deeply.

It connects us with what are called the *paramattha dhammas*, which are usually translated as ultimate realities. We could say it connects us with the direct knowing of things free of concepts about them, of ideas—beneath our concepts and ideas, you could say.

I guess last week I talked about the four elements, this way of investigating or relating to the experience of materiality in the body, in the world, internally and externally, in terms of the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water. These are said to be the paramatthadhammas, a really fundamental way of seeing materiality in terms of these qualities. Investigation helps to reveal those.

And it also reveals what are said to be the universal or common characteristics. It doesn't stop at these unique individual characteristics of things that arise—like hardness and softness, coolness and warmth in terms of the material elements. It then also touches into the common characteristics of all things, of all phenomena: the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and coreless quality or characteristic of all things. It's through seeing these universal characteristics that liberating insight arises. All of insight arises in relation to seeing deeply into these three universal, common characteristics.

This factor of investigation tends to immerse us more in our experience. There's a quality of interest and curiosity that comes along with that direct touching, that direct intimacy with our life. And it doesn't matter so much what the experience or object of our attention might be. It doesn't have to be something that we would think of in everyday life as interesting.

You could see this in terms of mindfulness of breathing. Most people, if you stopped them on the street and said, "Well, isn't the in-breath interesting? The out-breath?" they're going to slowly back away and say, "Have a nice day." They're not generally going to agree that it's a really fascinating subject to think about or have any relationship to. But in our meditation, it can be fascinating, can't it, if we're really there with it?

So the interest is not in the object. It's in our relationship to it. That seems obvious, but actually it's quite an important point. Where does the interest come from? That's a mental factor. It's in the mind. It's not inherent in any particular object.

The second of these energizing factors is viriya. Joseph already spoke at great length in an entire talk on this quality of effort or energy, so I'll just reiterate a few key points. Joseph spoke a lot about it in terms of qualities of courage and perseverance—two key qualities. There's a kind of bravery with this quality of energy and effort that's actually really important, because this isn't easy. Any of us who have been on this path for any length of time know that often it's not easy. A lot of the time it's not easy. We need to have qualities of courage and real perseverance, the steadiness, a steadfastness that keeps us going through the ups and downs.

That's a very key part of this quality of energy or effort—a feeling that we're not faltering in the face of the ups and downs of our life, of our practice, of our experience over the day and over the long haul. We're not fighting against it and struggling on the one hand, and we're not shrinking away and retreating in the face of changing experience. We have a certain kind of strength there, a bravery, a courage, and a perseverance.

There's a key to the use of effort or energy: finding what is right effort. It would be nice if we could just get it and then say, "Okay, this is right effort, and it'll just work now for the rest of this life." But it's a constant process of balancing. What's right effort in one moment may not be in another. This is a constant dance. We don't just get it in place—it's constantly being refined and adjusted as our practice unfolds. Too much effort and we can get tense and tired and restless, and eventually we wear ourselves out, get exhausted. Too little effort and we fall into a dull, sleepy place.

So it's that balance of effort. And then with right or wise balanced effort, our attention lands right on the object and doesn't crush it with too much zeal. It doesn't slide off and lose touch. It just lands lightly there, like a bird. In this way, when effort is balanced, there's a sustainable quality to our practice. It's doable.

Too much effort might be thinking, "I'm going to be mindful for the whole day." That's a tall order. But we can be mindful for this moment, and then the next one. It's this light effort made repeatedly over time—that's more sustainable. That's really key. Just this moment. That's all we're doing anyway. And if we hold it that way, it's much more doable. It's this moment, and then the next one if we happen to still be here. And if we're not, we will show up sooner or later, and we'll do it then. We bring our sincerity to that.

The third of these factors is pīti—rapture, joy, or joyful interest, as various translations render this word. Sally spoke about it the other night as one of the jhānic factors of concentration. These qualities show up on more than one list. So it has that function there, and it's also here on the factors of enlightenment list.

This quality of rapture or joyful interest has characteristics of delight, of happiness, even of satisfaction as part of its experience. It possesses these qualities in and of itself—you could say those are aspects of its own characteristic. But it also has the ability to infuse other objects or other experiences with these qualities of joy and happiness and delight. It pervades them. It can bring a real deep delight to practice.

This is really useful because we can get very serious in our practice. I think it's good to look at the word

"serious." We are sincere. We're committed. We're dedicated. Those are all good things. So if that's what we mean by serious, fine. But if it means we're serious in a way that involves a kind of heavy bearing down, then that's not such a useful quality of seriousness. Sometimes we can lose touch with the quality of joyful interest.

Pīti is a spiritual joy. It's not just having-a-good-time kind of joy, even though it may be quite delightful and pleasant in the mind and heart. It can sometimes lift us out of an overly serious way of approaching our practice.

There's one definition, more of a technical definition, of this quality of pīti. It's said that its characteristic is endearing—I like that. It has the characteristic of being endearing, of infusing things with an endearing quality. Its function is to refresh the body and mind. It has a refreshing quality. And its manifestation is a kind of elation or uplifting.

When pīti is strong, it can fill the mind and body with qualities of lightness and agility, flexibility. It can enhance that. There may be physical sensations that come along with this. It's a mental quality, but it affects the body, the way I was talking the other day about how mind and body condition one another. When this is strong, there may be very pleasant physical sensations in the body, although at times the physical sensations may show up as things that are not that pleasant—certain kinds of pressure. It can be too strong sometimes and not always be experienced as pleasant.

Pīti is a kind of joy that comes out of the quality of intimacy that arises through our mindfulness, through investigation, through effort. All of these bring us to more intimacy with life. And pīti arises from that intimacy.

And as I was saying, qualities of interest, joyful interest—they don't depend on what we would conventionally call interesting objects in some traditional way of thinking. This quality of piti can even arise in relation to something we would describe as difficult or painful. But if we're really there and connected, this quality can arise even at those times. That's really interesting. Even when we're being mindful of something we could describe as very strong, unpleasant, painful sensation in the body, this quality of joyful interest can arise even then. And it pervades our experience with this quality of delight. It has a transforming effect in those moments. It's quite amazing, actually, to see this. It infuses things with happiness.

It's said that there are five kinds of this rapture, this joy of piti. There's minor or lesser rapture—sometimes goosebumps and chills and shivering feelings in terms of its physical sensation. You don't have to worry about these, but they're kind of interesting. There's momentary rapture that's said to come like flashes of lightning, intense jolts of it that come through. There's a showering rapture that comes like waves and showers down. There's uplifting rapture, and sometimes the mind and the body can feel very light, almost like a floating quality with that uplifting rapture. And it's said that when it's really strong, it will actually lift us up off the ground.

I have a sweet story. I might not have time, but I like it. I'm in the mood. I heard it once—it's a story from the Visuddhimagga, and Joseph used it in one of his talks. At the time when I was listening, it brought a lot of joy into my heart right in the hearing of it, because I'm a devotional kind of guy. So maybe it'll do that for some of you.

This is a story of a young woman back in ancient times—the time of the Buddha, let's say. She was in the village of Watakalaka near a monastery, the Jirkandaka Monastery. Her parents were going to go to the monastery because it was a full moon night—even though the moon's not out now, it was a night like tonight—and they were going to listen to the Dhamma and visit the monastery. The young woman was pregnant. She had gone to her parents' house to give birth, as was the tradition. And her parents said, "No, you should stay home. It's not a good time for you to go out because you're near the time of giving birth. We'll go listen and we'll get the merit on your behalf." She wanted to go, but she said okay and stayed home.

She went out onto the balcony of their house, which was somehow on a hill where she could look down and see the monastery grounds and the beautiful shrine there, the Akasachitya Shrine glowing in the moonlight. People were making offerings and circumambulating—quite a lovely scene. She could hear the chanting of the nuns and monks. And she thought to herself, "Oh, they're so lucky that they can go into the monastery and wander around this beautiful shrine and hear the sweet chanting and beautiful preaching of the Dhamma."

Then, watching this, she had a vision. The shrine looked like a mound of pearls—they get quite flowery in these things. And she had such joy and delight in seeing it that she rose up into the air and came down on the terrace outside the shrine. Her parents came up and said, "How did you get here? What road did you take?" And she said, "I came through the air, not by the road. I was standing gazing at the shrine in the moonlight, and a strong joy arose in me with the Buddha as its object. I didn't know if I was standing or sitting, but only that I was rising into the air. And then I came down to rest here on the terrace of the shrine."

of the shrine.

So I hope you all have this strong, uplifting rapture. Come in later, and you'll all be floating around.

The fifth kind is pervading rapture. This is said to pervade the entire body and mind. When it's strong, we can really feel a lot of ease and comfort in the body.

So these are the three energizing factors: investigation, energy or effort, and piti—rapture, joyful interest. And then there are three calming ones.

The first is calm. Passaddhi is the Pali word for calm. It's sometimes called cool calmness, and the coolness has to do with how it dispels the heat of an agitated, restless mind. Its characteristic is calming both mind and body. It will calm unrest, unease, and agitation. Its function is said to be to remove or suppress the

heat of agitation. So that's this coolness of calm. You could think of heat as arising from restlessness, worry, and agitation. Calm removes this heat and replaces it with ease and coolness.

There's this non-agitation in the body, in the mind, and in the heart as calm grows strong. It really rests in the present moment. Often, as calm becomes stronger, it feels as if things become more simple—a simpleness to our experience. Or things almost slow down in a certain way. There's a relaxing into the moment when calm becomes strong.

Calm can also arise briefly. It's not always that it arrives and stays for long periods of time. There can be brief moments of calm, like a sense of momentary calm within a more stormy or energized state—like resting in the center of a storm, where there's at least brief resting within a highly energized, agitated state.

It's said that this calm invariably follows after the arising of joy, of rapture, especially this pervading kind of rapture that infuses the body. Calm is said to often, almost always, follow on from that. When it's strong, there can be a lot of sense of being able to sit in meditation for longer periods. There may be no wish to get up at all. That's a factor of calm.

The second of the tranquilizing factors is samādhi, concentration. We've talked about this as well. Concentration is characterized by non-distractedness or non-scatteredness of mind. The mind tends to stay with the object. Even if it's changing objects, the mind tends to stay there, not wandering off, not slipping off. So the attention has a kind of stillness and connectedness—really connected with the moment just as it is.

This quality of samādhi gathers together and stabilizes the mind and mental factors. Things are not scattering off. It keeps them in a group. They don't disperse—non-dispersedness. The mind tends to really remain with the object, and there's a movement towards greater stillness and quiet in the mind as it strengthens.

As we've mentioned, there are two ways one can develop concentration, samādhi. One is on a single object to the exclusion of all others, where we keep the attention on one object, turning away from any other—that kind of continuous concentration on a single object. And then there's momentary concentration, what's called khaṇika samādhi, which is concentration on changing objects, momentary objects.

You can think of samādhi as born of the continuity of mindfulness, whether with a single object or changing objects. That's where samādhi comes from. It's that continuity of connection; it grows from that. And that can be even with objects that may be changing very quickly—samādhi can grow and strengthen.

The jhānic factors that Sally spoke about apply in either one of these ways of developing concentration, whether it's on a single object or this khaṇika samādhi. Those same factors of vitakka, vicāra, pīti, sukha, and ekaggatā all come into play. They develop and strengthen in either way of practicing.

So it's this continuity of mindfulness that has fewer and fewer gaps or breaks in it that develops this quality of samādhi. When it's strong, it brings great tranquility and connection to the mind, brings strength and power and composure. It's a great relief from the wandering mind.

from the restless mind. It's like we're settled into a kind of zone when samadhi is strong. We're not pushed and pulled around by experience.

Concentration is really said to be one of the keys to the arising of insight and wisdom—the proximate cause for that. And we can see how this would be the case, because when the mind is stable and still to some extent, it doesn't have to be perfect, but this stability and calm collectedness of samadhi allows for there to be space for insight to arise. The mind is not running all over the place. Insight into the more subtle nature of things can show up when the mind is more stable.

So then the last of these tranquilizing factors, the final factor of awakening, is upekkhā—equanimity. This is the sense of balance in the face of the changing nature of our experience. Equanimity is a state of mind that rests in the center of things. You could say it's not pulled to extremes. It allows us to be with things just as they are without falling into reactivity in relation to them.

As equanimity becomes strong, as it begins to develop, patterns of reactivity that we may have seen in our hearts and minds tend to not arise so much. As it becomes stronger, they don't arise at all. The mind is not moved by things. Things that can often bother us just lose all power to upset us.

Sometimes people worry that this quality of equanimity points to some way that we become indifferent or not connected, that it has a quality of not feeling, of numbness. This is not at all the case with equanimity. It's not a numb, indifferent state at all. Indifference is actually said to be the near enemy of equanimity because it can sort of resemble it. But indifference is actually disconnected—it's not there. Equanimity, however, is totally connected. It feels everything intimately, just as it is, but from a state of balance in relation to what's arising. So there's no quality of indifference or apathy or disdain. It's just not preferential. This non-preferential quality is strong.

And it's a great relief when this factor begins to strengthen. It's said that equanimity will fill in where there is a lack, and it will remove where there's an excess. It's a quality of balance that comes with this—it fills in where something is lacking and removes when there's too much.

When this balance of mind is strong, it can at times feel as though we don't have to really make much effort to be mindful. The practice starts to feel as though it's just doing itself. There's a kind of momentum, but a balanced kind of momentum. This is part of its manifestation. There's an image that's used: it's likened to someone who's driving a wagon or carriage pulled by a team of horses, and the driver just lets the horses do the work and settles back. It's a quality of settling back and letting the mindfulness carry us along.

When equanimity really begins to become very strong, very powerful in our practice, in our minds, it

develops into what is sometimes called high equanimity, or sometimes it's called equanimity regarding formations—sankhārupekkhā ñāna, the insight knowledge of equanimity regarding formations. Sometimes it's also called six-limbed equanimity because it arises at the sixth sense door, as you could say. There's equanimity arising in any aspect of experience at any sense door—this six-limbed equanimity.

At times when equanimity really is characterizing our practice in great part, when it's very strong, things can become very smooth. The mindfulness becomes very agile, you could say. It just stays with the object very easily. It does it itself. The mind is not moved by anything. Pleasant, unpleasant—it does not move the mind. It's a very high quality of balance. There's no chance for attachment or aversion. They can't arise in that. They just don't show up.

It's said that when equanimity is very highly developed, it's similar to the mind of a fully awakened being, of an arahant—this unshakable quality of balance.

description of when the Buddha-to-be, the Bodhisattva, in the night of his awakening was sitting under the Bodhi tree. And he's assailed by the armies of Mara, all these different weapons and things to try to get him to move—everything possible. And it's said the Great One's mind was not moved. It's this very refined, powerful equipoise of high equanimity.

And it's this balance, this great balance of mind, of heart, that is what prepares the mind to let go into the unconditioned, you could say—to open to the realization of nibbana, this great balance of mind, of heart.

To a certain extent, there is a way that the development of these factors of awakening does flow in the sense that I've spoken about tonight. In some ways, that is true. And yet at the same time, they're all present. So it's not like this one and then that one and then that one in a stepping way. But there is a bit of a flow, the energizing ones tending to lead to the calming ones. There are times in our practice where we see them all there and we see them balancing one another. You see that just as a natural process. So it's not that it's only a linear progression—it's not that. But there is a certain aspect to that organically culminating in this quality of high equanimity.

I want to say to end tonight that the key thing to get out of this talk—at least one thing—is the understanding that the continuity of mindfulness is what gathers together and develops and brings these along. They flow in the wake of that. So we don't have to do them all in any kind of a doing. We just have to keep going steadily with gentle perseverance with our practice. And they come along. They flow along. Be sure and remember that it's not a doing of these things so much.

We start to learn to recognize them, to taste them, to develop a taste for them. In a sense, that's part of what happens in the practice. Because we've been using strategies of greed, hatred, and delusion as strategies for finding happiness—going for the pleasant, getting away from the unpleasant, falling into confusion in between those two. That's been our strategy for a long time in some ways. So we have a certain taste for those things, even if we see that they don't really work.

Part of what we do is develop a taste for these more subtle qualities of heart that are actually, in the long run, in the end, more useful. They actually lead us onwards. They slope us and slant us towards awakening. It's their function.

And this is not easy to do. This is a real shift in orientation, a shift in our consciousness. It goes against a lot of conditioning. That's a radical shift, and it takes time for that. But we start to develop more of a taste for these things and for the deeper happiness that's possible through the development of these factors of awakening.

I'll end now with more words 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.

Having said this, the Fortunate One, the teacher, further said this:

Few are those among humankind who go beyond to the far shore. The rest of the people 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 person should develop the bright ones. 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 person would cleanse herself 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, are the luminous ones with taints destroyed, fully quenched in the world.

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