

# I Sette Fattori del Risveglio

Bhante Bodhidhamma · International Talks · 55:42

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*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa.* Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

Up until now we've been talking about the process of *vipassanā*, how to establish right awareness, how to awaken this intelligence. And we have worked mainly with the obstacles, the hindrances. I hope now, from this day forward, that there are more and more little islets of peace and joy.

So now it's time to look at the positive side of the practice. And those virtues that we must develop. These we call the seven factors of enlightenment. And I will try later to connect them with the five spiritual faculties.

But before beginning the discourse I would like to do a small exercise in which you begin to recognise, to separate these seven factors. So if you put yourselves in a meditation posture and centre yourselves on the breath. The first position, we could say, is to become aware of the breath. And we can notice its gross attributes. We can notice its coarse attributes. If it's a short breath, if it's a long breath, how it fills the abdomen, if it fills it all or only a little.

Then we begin to feel the subtle sensations of the breath. Allow the delicateness of the breath and bring calm. Perhaps you have felt this type of calm when you have been on a beach, perhaps raising the Adriatic and watching the clouds that come and go. Perhaps you have experienced this type of calm sitting on the beach observing the Adriatic Sea and watching the waves that came and went. Let this calm bring a state of stillness in the mind, a still mind. Begin to appreciate, to enjoy these such calm sensations.

Now to begin to see a little more clearly, very slowly we focus on the subtle sensations. We begin to become aware of the beginning, of the inspiration, of the end of the inspiration, of the beginning of the expiration and of the end of the expiration.

So let that sense of interest arise with the question: what is this sensation? Make sure that you are looking, observing the breath, you are not seeking something. Develop this attitude of receiving information. As if you were listening to the radio. And become more aware of the process, of the changing nature of the rising and falling.

So we began simply observing, following this awareness. And we allowed this delicateness of the breath to bring us into a state of calm, of quiet. We developed a certain sense of appreciation for what was there, it was beautiful to be there. Then we made a small effort to focus, to see more clearly. Then we raised a certain interest in what we were looking at. Being careful only to look, not to seek something, we

remained open to what we were saying. Then we became aware or more aware of this factor of change, of transitoriness.

This is my little exercise. One of the skills that the meditator must develop is how to grow these seven factors. So let's examine them one by one, so that you know a bit about their pros and cons, or their balances, and know how they work.

Many of these enlightenment factors are also found in the so-called five spiritual faculties. The first of these is faith or *saddhā*. Faith in Buddhism is not to be confused with belief. Faith is simply confidence. If we don't have confidence we begin to suffer from doubt. How do we sustain our confidence in the Dhamma, confidence in the practice?

So through three processes of wisdom this confidence is sustained. The first process is hearing the Dharma. So either reading books or listening, but listening in an open way without being afraid to receive information because we are not asked to believe it so we don't have to be afraid of receiving a brainwashing. We can simply listen and receive. There might arise in you a sort of joy in feeling that you are listening to something that resonates.

But this transmitted knowledge must become our own knowledge through a process of thinking, of reasoning about it. And so through this reasoning about it, through talking about it with others, this knowledge becomes ours, intellectual knowledge.

For example, when I read a science book. For example, if I read a science book and read Einstein's theory of relativity, I can understand it. More or less. But when I try to explain it I can't manage it. So even though I have a certain understanding of the theory of relativity, I don't mean the physics but the mathematics, I can comprehend this knowledge, but it's not mine, in the sense that I cannot explain it to someone else.

So there you see the difference. It may have happened in your life that you have understood things but then not been able to explain them. This means that it's not your knowledge. So up to now it's at an intellectual level and it sustains faith, sustains confidence.

There's also another side of confidence that has more to do with the heart. There's another side of confidence that has more to do with the heart. So there are cases in the scriptures where a person simply seeing the Buddha has this confidence and follows him.

When I was in Czechoslovakia, one of the meditators told me that he was standing in a church waiting for the bus. And everyone was changing, moving, staying, looking and talking. But there was this Buddhist monk absolutely still and in peace, and this struck him as very admirable and he inquired about Buddhism because of this. So it's not only an intellectual process, it can also be knowing people or for example he knows a person who entered a temple simply seeing the statue of the Buddha, there was a connection.

So the third part is establishing it as our experiential knowledge. This is called *vipassanā mayā paññā*, that is, the wisdom of insight. Nevertheless faith can still be questioned until one has experienced *nibbāna*. At that point there can no longer be any doubt regarding the Buddha's teaching because they themselves have experienced it. And at that point the word used by the Buddha is not a spiritual faculty but a spiritual power.

So here we see a balance between confidence and the growth, first of all, of intellectual intelligence, but mainly of experiential intelligence. Sorry, here we see the growth between confidence and knowledge. And here we see the growth, the balance between faith and wisdom through these three processes of received knowledge, knowledge made one's own - so intellectual - and insight, the wisdom of insight.

Now to support that wisdom in our practice, now that we take this insight into the practice to get that insight, it must be supported by the quality of equanimity. This word equanimity comes out in so many different lists in the Theravāda tradition. I believe you know that Theravāda especially is a collection of lists.

Yeah, one of these, two of those, ten of them, and so on. And one cannot avoid it. So this equanimity here doesn't refer to a state of calm of heart or something like that, it refers to an attitude of openness, so an attitude in which one is available to receive whatever arrives. It can be compared to a judge who must not be confused by the clever arguments of the lawyers and must not be swayed by the movements of the crowd. Remain, remain so. "Hang him, hang him!" - the baying of the crowd like dogs baying.

So we have these two enlightenment factors. The first is this *mayā paññā*, so the power of investigation, and the other is the support. And this quality of investigation is called *dhamma vicaya*, investigating the Dhamma, and the quality of this equanimity. And remember that essentially this investigation is through the three characteristics of existence. So fundamentally this investigation is on the three characteristics of existence: *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* - impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self. There are many other things that we will learn about our psychology, but it's these three things that will change our relationship with the world.

Now the other two factors that sustain this investigation are calm and interest. So I have done nothing but guide you in meditation just as the Buddha did in his *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse. So he says to train with the breath to become calm. Calm the body, calm the mind. He gave precise instructions to calm the body, calm the mind to stay on the breath. First he said know the breath, if it's long, if it's short, such very coarse things, and then use the breath, use this to bring this calm to the mind, to the heart. And then use this breath to bring this calm into the mind and heart.

And that calm sustains interest. Some of you may know that the word for interest is *pīti*. Just as *upekkhā*, equanimity, takes on different meanings depending on the practice being done. Sometimes *pīti* means joy. But here in the practice it means interest, and it's that interest that surely you too have experienced when you have studied something very interesting or done work that interested you. Sometimes interest can be

so great that you find you are salivating, you find saliva in your mouth. So this interest is a quality of the heart.

So you see that this quality of interest sustains investigation because you want to know, the desire to know, the wanting to know, this is fundamental to all beings. All creatures want to know. I had a small experience of this type with a dog in Malaysia. And I had put a small table outside with a net and mosquito screen and I sat on the table with a cup of coffee under this mosquito screen and I was waiting to observe the sunset. It was only after a while that I realised I was sitting in front to the right.

Even in this case however I didn't get discouraged. And so I continued to sit. And there were always these two dogs that came there to the hut and they continued to play around, they were great friends and they chased each other. And so he lost this first dog and began to cry because he hadn't seen his friend. This friend didn't show up. So when this dog arrived he came from behind the house and saw this thing.

Obviously something he had never seen before. And even though his friend was around him and was jumping and doing a lot of other things, he remained absolutely still and looked at me and wondered what was happening. The incredible thing - so this intelligence is there in all living beings to a certain degree.

So now we have done four, well we have done five spiritual faculties, which are this, first of all, this equanimity, the willingness to receive, openness, balanced with this investigation. Oh yeah, well, sorry, ok, four. Let's repeat a moment. Four, ok. Sorry. Oh yes, we've only done, yes, I'll correct myself. We have now done four of the seven factors of enlightenment. Four.

The balance between equanimity and investigation and the balance between calm and interest. If there's too much interest and not enough calm then we become agitated. And this calm, if there's no interest, can bring us into a beautiful and lovely slumber. And it's the same with equanimity and knowledge. If there's this investigation without openness, then we are looking from a certain position. It's the same if there's too much investigation without wisdom, without equanimity, we will be looking from a particular point of view. So whether we like it or not our intelligence has already been somewhat conditioned by our prejudices, by our culture and education. So we put all this aside by opening our intelligence to everything that arrives, we won't use a filter to leave anything out.

So now the next two, again, that must be balanced, are effort and concentration. Now concentration presents us with a bit of problems, because the word takes us back to school and parents, and makes us very tense. Concentrate! The word concentration creates a bit of a problem because it takes us back to situations of school, family or parents, makes us very tense because we were always told to listen, to concentrate. So if you tell someone you must concentrate they probably become very tense.

So the word that I used in our exercise was to focus. So you can take for example a camera and when you want to see something then you have to turn the lens to focus. So the only effort we must make, just as we turn the lens, is to focus on the object. And also, obviously, only the physical energy of keeping the lens

upright. Clearly also the physical effort of keeping the body in an upright position. Or at least awake.

So again, if there's too much effort and not enough focus, let's say, then one becomes agitated. So when you find yourselves in this state of calm and begin to observe things and become agitated, ask yourselves: am I seeking something or am I simply observing? Because if we are only observing, only receiving, then there shouldn't be restlessness. If there's too much focus instead without the energy that sustains it, then we might fall asleep.

Then there are two types of sleep. The first is the one we know and it's when we unconsciously go down and we would bow to the Buddha. But when there's this good energy, a good meditation, then the meditator is... but has lost awareness. But anyone who sees the meditator says, ah, there's a good meditator. But they are completely unaware. And depending on how strong the meditation is they can stay in this state one hour, two hours, and the meditator when they wake up can say ah I have some of these faculties well developed but I just lost two hours, because there's no insight in oblivion. So the meditator comes to know what's wrong here and that there's not enough effort.

When you begin to understand all this it can seem very complicated. I wouldn't want this discourse to then bring you in your meditation to reason, ah, too much concentration. And so, fortunately, the Buddha made it very simple. He said that the guiding factor that will bring up all these factors and all in the right measure is mindfulness. So effectively this discourse has been a waste of time.

So all we have to do is make right mindfulness arise and then everything will arise in the right way and at the right times. So this quality of right mindfulness is of absolute importance, and it can be very helpful to have some kind of memory where you know you have been in a state of right mindfulness.

So it's very useful to have some memory of a moment when you know you have been in right mindfulness. And here we can return to the story of the Buddha's life. If you remember, he arrived at a point where he had lost hope of finding an answer, and in that sense of dejection he even left his companions and was sitting by the side of the road looking very depressed.

So they were sitting along the road with a very depressed appearance. When a woman passed by there with an offering for a nearby temple. But seeing this man so depressed, so thin, she offered to him what she was taking to the divinity. So you won't be surprised if the ambrosia, that is the food of the gods, that she was taking to this divinity, was rice pudding. It's rice boiled in milk with honey with a bit of cardamom and a bit of cinnamon. So he drank this and was reinvigorated.

He ate it and regained strength, and it was precisely eating this rice that was a delight for children that he remembered an event from his childhood. So he remembers as a child, he remembers himself as a child sitting under a tree watching his father who was performing an auspicious ceremony for the season of nature.

So it was the quality of that looking, of that observing that was so different from everything he had

learned from his studies, from his teachers, from his training. What he had rediscovered was the way of a child. I'm sure you have all seen a child of three, four, five years old when they see something they have never seen before, like an insect. They focus completely on that little creature and no other ideas arrive because they don't know what it is, and the most important thing is that their heart is touched. This means that there's no thought.

In meditation, if you relax this, you can see that thought stops. It helps us stop thought. Also the tongue. Normally, obviously, when a relative sees a child like this, they tell them to close their mouth because they seem so senseless. And so they destroy all hope of enlightenment in this life.

You remember the exercise I had you do of looking into the palm of the hand just to exercise the eye to actually see what is there. So try to develop this capacity to observe objects in this way, as I suggested to you with a flower or with a stone. So to develop this pure awareness.

I know an artist in Belgium who runs a meditation centre.

He said he spent 25 years going to the same tree in the same forest to paint that tree repeatedly, in order to clear his mind of all concepts of the tree so that he could paint the tree.

Now he paints Buddha statues, Buddha faces that have a certain distinct quality. This is what we need to be aware of in our practice.

So this is another thing we need to be aware of in our practice. We must develop these factors. Let's remember that it's good to begin every meditation with that mind which seems like that of a child - very relaxed, very open, which simply looks, which observes. And every time we lose this during meditation because we're agitated, stop and return to the beginning. It doesn't matter how many times we do this - a million times in one sitting. It doesn't matter how many times we do this - even a million times in one sitting. This is why we call it training.

If you think about athletes like tennis players, they spend six hours a day hitting a ball over a net. Backhand, forehand, over the top. And that's just for a gold cup, which most of them never get. At least we here, sooner or later, will arrive at full liberation. This is the Buddha's promise. All beings will be liberated. This is just the way consciousness evolves.

Only on one occasion was the heresy pronounced that some people wouldn't make it. These people who wouldn't make it were called, as mentioned in another Mahāyāna teaching, *icchantika*. *icchantika* means they will continue to be reborn forever. *icchantika* means going on, on, on, and it's the same word as *saṃsāra*. *Saṃsāra* is the world of eternal becoming.

We stop for a moment and let any thought that needs to arise, arise.

So the important thing to realise is that there are factors that need to be developed, and that these will develop quite naturally every time we establish this right mindfulness. And this, in a certain sense, is the

only purpose of our practice.

If you were to reduce all the Buddha's teachings to a single word, this would be *sati* - right mindfulness.

I hope my words have been of some use to you, and I sincerely hope that you will be liberated sooner rather than later.

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