

The Seven Factors of Awakening  
**Concentration**  
Practices and Reflections

In each of the following weeks repeatedly spend time with the reflection and practices for that week. It would be helpful if you also discussed your reflections with others.

**Week 1: Experiencing absorption**

**Reflection:** Can you remember a time in your life when you felt really present, composed, calm and absorbed? This may not have occurred during a meditation session, but perhaps when you were in nature or perhaps waking up after a very satisfying nap, for example. How did it feel to be calm and absorbed? How did it feel in your body? How was your mind state?

**Practice:** During your daily meditation practice, see if you can evoke the feeling you had earlier in your life of being really present, composed, calm and absorbed. You can use that feeling to guide your meditation by noticing when you feel more composed and less composed and the conditions that preceded it.

**Week 2: Hindrances to concentration**

**Reflection:** It is difficult to become concentrated or absorbed when our minds are filled with the hindrances of (1) sensual desire, (2) ill will, (3) sloth and torpor, (4) restlessness and worry, or (5) doubt. The hindrances operate in everyone and are not a personal failing when they arise. What is your relationship to the hindrances? Are you aware when they are present? What is your attitude towards them? Is one hindrance more persistent or prevalent than the others?

**Practice:** This week notice when the hindrances are present and take the opportunity to investigate them. What are their emotional, physical, energetic and cognitive aspects? What is the difference in your experience when any particular hindrance is present and not present?

**Week 3: Memorization**

**Reflection:** Memorization and concentration are related skills. How do you feel about focusing and memorizing something, whether it's a grocery list or a favorite poem? Do you feel you don't have the capacity or don't need to memorize things?

**Practice:** Memorize something that is meaningful to you and supports your practice this week. It could be a favorite poem, a passage from a sutta, or a chant, for example. How does it feel to make the effort to memorize something meaningful? Does what you memorize affect you in any way?

<b>Week 4: Concentration practice</b>
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**Reflection:** Do you intentionally cultivate one form of meditation or do you allow your meditation practice to unfold organically? Do you have a preference for open awareness insight practice or focused concentration practice? Do you have any hesitation around becoming concentrated or entering into deep states of absorption?

**Practice:** For these weeks, intentionally do concentration practices during meditation. This can be done by choosing to ignore other stimuli and focusing on your breath. It can be helpful to count your breaths from one to ten repeatedly. Alternatively, if you're familiar with them, you can repeat the Brahmavihara phrases while meditating.