

# 2007-10-22 The Seven Factors of Awakening

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

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So Good evening. And this evening I'd like to talk about one of the more famous or number a famous one of the important lists of qualities, qualities of mind or heart that hopefully get developed as a person cultivates mindfulness practice. And these, this is the list called the seven factors of awakening. And shortly before the Buddha died, he had a gathering of his monks. And he gave them a short talk. And you would think that he knew he was going to die. Actually, part of that full talk was announcing that in the next few months he was going to be dying. There's an old man. And so you use tight his time was up, he had very few very few months left. So this was maybe one of his last chances to speak to these particular monks. So it's important teaching. And he said to them, that he gave a very short talk about what he had discovered in his own spiritual quest, his own process of getting enlightened. So what did he discovered? So you think this is quite important for you to get to know the great truths of Buddhism. And what he does what he said was not true. He didn't say creed or belief, but rather what he said he discovered were particular qualities of mind or heart and particular practices. That's very interesting. He listed a whole bunch of these arbitrary numbered lists he listed The Four Four foundations of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four roads to success, the five faculties the five powers, the seven factors of awakening and the Eightfold Path. And so, in endless in all these lists one of the lists is the seven factors of awakening. So, I find it very interesting that rather than talking about a belief or creed, which in the West we often associate religion with, the Buddha wants to emphasize at the end of his life, particular practices, particular qualities of mind that arise as a person practices. So, what are these qualities of mind? There are seven of them. And the first one is mindfulness. The second one is called usually translate just investigation. The third is energy The fourth is joy. The fifth is tranquility or calm. And the sixth is concentration, and the seventh is equanimity. So now it said that these, this the that the last six of these arise kind of naturally out of the cultivation, development of mindfulness practice. So you don't have to be concerned about cultivating the others so much, but they kind of come in the wake of doing mindfulness practice. And the way to explain this perhaps, is, some of you maybe can think of some discipline you've developed. Something as simple as you know, if you've decided to develop a running practice you're going to run for you know, and I remember many years ago and I took up running I didn't like it at first. And my

it was just tremendous inner protest. As soon as I started you know, just making it the first hundred yards It was quite an accomplishment because I just felt this tremendous resistance my by it, don't do it you know you've better things to do we have a book to read. And, and then once I got past the first you know hundred yards or so then a little bit I got into it more, but then I get tired and I got distracted and my body wasn't quite into it and I got sore and it was quite a bit you know, to get into it. But as I did it every day, getting doing it every day doing every day, then we're retime the resistance to it. The distractions I had about it faded away, and my ability to kind of enter into the flow of the running happened more more easily my breath improved so I could you know, the breath was there supporting

it and the oxygen I needed. The muscles got stronger and limber and all the things that have to happen and after a while I found it was, I could really get into it, and really apply myself really to be present, who's interested in how what was going on, I could have a lot of effort and energy. You know, sometimes when you, you know, you get into the flow of something like running this kind of an effortless effort that happens, spending a lot of energy, but, you know, just kind of like gaffers to do it. And then I started to really enjoy the writing, there was joy, and it was kinda like to get up there and feel the body moving. And, you know, it's just felt like everything's kind of going along harmoniously. Whereas in the first week or weeks of doing it, there's like, things weren't so harmonious kind of scattered, fragmented mind and body. And then I noticed that as I kept doing it, that certainly, it tended to calm me down quite a bit, that a lot of the agitation of the day tend to fall away, as I kind of got into the routine of getting involved. And, in fact, I also got concentrated you know, I sometimes I getting really, really present for the simple activity of just running physical activity, the legs running the feet touching the ground, what was required as I was running up hills and things like this. And so it was concentration also involved. And then I would say, I can't remember this so well, but I my guess is that there was also equanimity that that, you know, I had certain kind of balance of mind. Maybe, perhaps, you know, on the appeals, I would stay balanced the economists downhill I stay equanimous I just kind of stayed kind of just steady, maybe a part of equanimity perhaps here just a steadiness has stayed steady without was in some days, you know, it was in better shape. Some days I was in worse shape, and I just kept it up. I'm just gonna steadiness. You know, I kind of knew that just to do it and not get caught up in my likes and dislikes my preferences. So, here what was required though, was holding steady or holding, holding to doing the running Practice I had this practice to do, I just had to keep doing it. And then doing it and doing and doing it. The various physical and psychological factors in my body, I started to kind of harmonize or line up together with the running and running became. And then as they lined up, all these other wonderful qualities began to arise as well. So the same thing happens with mindfulness. If you hold to the practice of mindfulness, and this is what you're going to do when you can keep doing it in a regular basis, then perhaps the first thing that happens is you protest, you know, I better things to do, you know, I books to read and refrigerators to defrost. And so please, you know, you know, more important things here. And, or perhaps you just have a lot of restlessness or there's a lot of that, you know, there's a lot of agitation or a lot of strong, you know, anxieties about certain things. Or maybe there's a lot of inner conflict that you actually don't want to have to look at. So initially, there's a lot of stumbling blocks that might actually encourage a person to give up their meditation practice or their mindfulness practice, because it's difficult, just like starting to run is difficult or maybe almost any discipline at all. So there has to be somehow got working through that there has to be enough understanding to know to expect that as part of the path. And to know that you have to kind of keep going through that initial period,

when people take up something like running, most people expect it's not going to be easy right away. And so something of a train and develop, and over time your lungs develop and different things developing becomes easier. So same thing with meditation, you have to keep doing it. And part of the beauty with some of these disciplines we can do is that some of the development that happens within us that allows us to have proficiency in the discipline doesn't have to be engineered by us. Like, you know, we have to keep doing the running. And we don't engineer intentionally actively how the lungs are going to adapt so they can give us the right amount of oxygen. That just kind of comes along. So the same thing with a meditation practice some of the changes, interchanges that are going to happen to allows us to kind of get into it will happen kind of on its own or the by the body, the mind kind of has own inner wisdom that comes into gear and kind of become supportive or lines up with the practice. But you have to, you have to keep doing it. You have to your job is to keep running. Your job is to hold to the mindfulness practice, knowing that they're at the beginning and other times as well. There's gonna be difficulties. And your job is to keep doing it. And then as you keep doing it, things line up, things line

up. One of my little sayings that I kind of like, is from that movie, The Field of Dreams, where some guy has this dream to build a baseball field, and this idea in the middle of nowhere, and that is, his belief is or someone says to him, build it and they will come so it seems crazy to go to baseball field but he builds it. And then these are memorable. These baseball players from the past are long dead somehow materializing. And they play this great baseball game. So build it and they will come. So perfectly meditation practice, you know, you're building it, you're building a posture, you're building a presence of mind. You're building a certain kind of engagement with the present moment. And then something something can come and, and eventually, something beautiful will come. And this is what the seven factors of awakening are. They're beautiful qualities. When they get kind of awakened within us. It's considered to be the crown jewels, what some of the crown jewels of Buddhism. It's kind of a inner lifeline of the Buddhist tradition. In fact, there's some writers of Buddhism, who have made the point that there are many different schools of Buddhism many different beliefs. However, what they and all the different schools of Buddhism Kinda like a tree with all these branches that kind of branch out from the main trunk, and all these different schools and the edge of the branches, but the sap that runs through the whole tree, that eternal flow and keeps it alive, is the seven factors of awakening are the seven factors of awakening. So we get this app running through us. It feels really wonderful when that happens. And it's all it comes in the wake of just doing a mindfulness practice. So the first one is mindfulness. And mindfulness is in this in this list, because it is considered very relatively simple practice of staying present for something or holding something in the mind. So having a presence of mind and awareness of what is happening in the present moment. And so if you want to be mindful of your breathing, you hold your breathing in mind. You don't Like your mind float away, you don't get distracted from the breathing. But you actually have the ability to, to have a presence of mind stays present for the experience of breathing. If you want to be mindful of your feet as they walk, then you hold the experience that you hold your feet in your awareness, you have a presence of mind and sense, in a sense in your feet. And you kind of let the experience of the feet kind of feel your awareness, feel your presence, fill your mind, feel your your attention, your ability to hold it, they're not so different than, you know, if you've memorized a long poem, in order to recite it, you have to hold it in mind you have to bring it to mind and hold it there. So with mindfulness we bring to mind the present moment we bring to mind some, some aspect of the present moment. And then we hold it we hold ourselves there we stay present there in in, in with that experience. That's that's what that a kind of the essence is, what are the primary qualities of mindfulness the whole something in Mind. And, and it's a training to do that, I think as many of you know, because often the mind maybe wants to hold a lot of different things in its mind, in mind have his mind as a mind of its own. And the mind wanders off into thoughts into concerns. And your ability to choose where the mind stays is often not very good. And so the mind wanders off, mind wanders off.

So part of mindful practice is maybe not like running practice. Sometimes it's a little bit like taming a wild horse. And you have to kind of use one technique I think of taming wild horses where you tie them to a long rope to a post, and they run around and gallop and do whatever they're going to do, but they can't get away they can just run circles around this post. And eventually they they calm down and slow down a little bit. That kind of mechanical approach also works for our own minds. The posts can Be the breath, we should stay with a breath, stay with a breath. And the mind is going to go wild sometimes. And you come back to the breath to come back to the breath, you let the mind go wild come back, and then you eventually the mind will calm down and settle down. Partly sometimes because it gives up partly because the beginning to understand the mind more and more. You don't really know how wild The horse is, perhaps until you've tied it to the post. And then you see how strong it is maybe, you know, breaks the rope. Sometimes you get a stronger rope. The so you learn a lot about the horse that you wouldn't learn by tying it down. When you try to keep the mind focused in the breath. You'll learn how to control the mind is how fast it is how much it's spinning around. You learn sometimes much

more much better, which would mind really is concerned about the it's kind of hard for Vinaya people in normal life to really see carefully notice what their mind is really getting concerned about, or how often concerned about the same themes over and over again, when we try to keep the mind on the breath, that highlights shows much, much more, what is going on in a way that, you know, that is helpful. So as you see what's going on better in the mind, then you can start making some choices in the mind to let go those things, you could develop some understanding and wisdom about maybe some of those concerns, you keep getting thinking about over and over again and not so useful for you. And the mind begins to lose interest or its fascination with certain kinds of preoccupations. And it's like, oh, that is easier to settle down. Also, as the mind focuses again, on that, get on the breath, you're taking the energy of the mind, and you're feeding it, it's like energy, attention is kind of like food. And where attention goes, feeds what you pay attention to. So if you're constantly paying attention to your anxieties, In a sense, you're feeling those anxieties. Or as some people would say, you're developing a habit, strengthening that preoccupation. If your mind goes regularly towards the breathing, you're strengthening capacity to be present. So there's a wonderful is very important activity of the mind of attention is a is like food. And we start taking some responsibility of where we feed it to. So we start feeding it towards something like the breathing to something healthy, healthy, helpful, then that reinforces that this strengthens that, and there's less energy available for anxiety for distractions for fi occupations. And as the less food becomes available, they get weaker and weaker and weaker. And that's one reason why with time becomes easier to stay focused on the breathing. But also as we get into the breath and hold it there, then these other factors, six factors, so vectors awakening kind of begin lining up and joining, joining forces. And they become the companions, the support for the ability to stay present. It's not so easy to stay present. So it's nice to have support. And so there's a there's a mutuality. You give yourself the practice, you keep doing it, and then build it, it will come, you keep doing it. And then these other qualities begin kind of joining in, they show up. One of the qualities is investigation. investigation has this double double aspect, where it's both something that can arise somewhat passively as we keep doing the mindfulness, but it's also something we can actually choose to bring up and apply ourselves more. Some people call, kind of shorthand call, investigation, curiosity. If you're curious about what your experience is, once you're able to hold your mind in the present moment, with your present experience, then Curiosity, what is his experience? What's going on here? Once you start getting into running on a regular basis, get over the initial hump, then perhaps you get curious about how you move your legs and how you land on your, on the balls of your feet and you know, all kinds of little tiny details, you get curious that will help you run more effectively, more efficiently.

So as you do this mindfulness practice, we start looking investigating what is my experience? What's going on here? What is the nature of my distraction? What are the hindrances that operate? What is actually pain? I keep having this physical pain, perhaps mindset. And so rather than reacting to the pain, and resisting it or something, there's a curiosity, what is this? What is what it really is the experience of pain. And it's a radically different thing to be curious about something than it is to be upset about something. It's very different to investigate something than it is to congratulate you yourself worth being there? Just as curiosity, what is this? Let's look more carefully. Let's find out. So the second factor of awakening is is curiosity is interest. The third is joy. And sometimes it said, I think it's certainly been my experience seemingly, in my experience that as I investigate and get more involved Well, there's just sure the next thing next thing is, is energy. Because as you get more interested, you're curious. There's energy there. Because you're, you know, you play yourself, you're more you kind of looking more, you know, what's going on here. And so, there's an increase of energy or application of engagement with your experience. So rather than having to force yourself to be present, be present. There's now no energy to wants to be present. You're actually there's a flow of interest of energy. Okay, this is what I want to do. Make it easier and easier as energy goes. With a flow of energy with a flow of

interest in energy, then it starts to be the arising of some kind of well being. So what's called usually enjoy some delight. And it's not such a strange thing, because I think many people hopefully all of you have had some experience in your life, of being really interested in something, and really absorbed in something interesting, and being absorbed, feeling some sense of delight or joy or happiness from that well being. Some of you maybe have the experience of reading a really good book, and just get absorbed in the world of the Good Book. And it has a good feeling that kind of absorption. Or some people have crafts that they do, and hobbies or something, or play a musical instrument or something. And part of the joy of doing this is that is that engagement or the joy arises out of this full engagement of what you're doing. I used to enjoy taking my final exams in college. Because I didn't always do well, that's besides the point. But the I prepare a lot, you know, memorize all these lists know stuff had to do. And then I'd show up, take my exam, and I would just get completely engaged in the process of doing an exam. And everything else would drop away all my other concerns and worries and everything dropped away. I just just the exam and doing as best as I could. And I felt really happy somehow. You know, it wasn't like I was happy with the exam. In principle, I wasn't happy taking it. The idea of the exam didn't make me happy. But the actual doing of it gives the activity that I enjoyed. And I'm someone who is like, maybe it's one of my little strong points is that I tend to enjoy activities I decided to do. So I really once I started do something I really want to do it and do it be involved in it. Sometimes it's a little bit hard when I'm supposed to be doing other things because I just kind of like them. involvement involvement this right now, so I just want to do it. So sometimes it's a little bit of a problem. One good quality of this kind of just enjoyment of gauging having energies involved involving something is that I believe it's good because I'm much more interested in the activity of doing something. And engagement, what's happening here now, then I am in in celebrating the results. So once I've done something, then I could just, I just kind of tend to forget about it, go on to the next thing. And that's, I think it's a nice quality. Just Okay, what's next? So anyway, so what I'm trying to say is an energy arises, and with the energy comes a joy comes to light, enjoying what you're doing? And then, with some kind of joy and delight, there comes a sense of tranquility or calmness, a subtleness kind of all the agitation that we occupy concerns the mind settle down more and more. And there's a kind of inner kind of tranquilization, calming effect that can happen. And we tend to feel very, very calm that's part of that many people associate meditation with calm A lot of people don't associate is that the experience of joy or happiness that comes with meditation,

in itself is one of the conditions for a deep, deep experience of calm tranquility. Then from that calm, it becomes a lot easier to get concentrated. And so then in the wake of those, then the mind is able to get really focused, not just simply hold something in mind, but you really kind of really be composed and focused and settled, and steadied and kind of really engaged in almost like a one pointed way to really penetrate to really settle to really become in a sense, unified is around what we're focusing on and the experience of being concentrated when it's strong. is a really beautiful experience when the great delights of meditation. And then with strong steady concentration, then in the wake of that, with a supportive supportive that there comes a greater equity, greater balance of mind, so that no matter what happens to us, at least when their concentration equanimity is strong, we're not pushed around by that. We don't get upset when things don't go our way. We don't get excessively elated when things do go our way. We don't get caught up in our preferences for how it will be like and we don't like this kind of steady balance. And the word for equanimity in Pali, in the etymology of the word means to look over, it has had an overview of something. And so this idea of, you know, strong tranquility all these factors are there, the two is strong tranquility and strong concentration. There's a kind of a sense of having an overview of the situation, the big picture of the situation. So that we're not pushed around by things we don't get caught up in, in, you know, things that are basically petty, or not so interesting for us. And for a different ways, sometimes the experience can be the mind is so spacious, so vast, that it's so much bigger than anything that anyone could say to you. So someone can say something mean to you. And

your mind just seems so big and so spacious. It's like, you know, you know, if a three year old kid tells you that, you know, they hate you. You know, it's, you know, they're usually much more spacious around that than we are about our boss saying that. So, you know, I just thought, you know, especially if it's your own kid, oh, you know, because five minutes ago, they said they loved you. You know, so you don't get caught up in these, you know, three year old changes. So there's already other candidates bigger picture. And equanimity is considered in Buddhism as one of the most sublime emotional states that a person can experience. So rather than thinking that equanimity is something, some kind of bland state of indifference, equanimity is when you're really attained from strong, is so much more, much more deeply satisfying than any degree of joy or happiness or calm, that a person can have equanimity, just, you know, I like the word sublime, just really deeply, deeply satisfying their emotional state as opposed to just kind of, you know, some aloofness of mind.

So, these seven factors of awakening are factors of mind qualities that get developed and awakened as a person has this engagement and their factors of awakening. liberation, because they create the right the conditions of the mind. The optimal make expects the optimal conditions in the mind so the mind can begin letting go. Letting go of what it's clinging to. And this is the direction of liberated liberation Buddhism is found to non clinging is found through letting go of our clean wood, wood grasping onto what we're attached to. And it's considered to be consider that some of our attachments are very, very deeply ingrained inside of us. And some of the some of them are so deeply ingrained that some people don't even see them as attachment. But take them as being this is essentially who I am. I mean, wouldn't This is what a human being is supposed to do? I'm supposed to have these things. They're so deeply embedded in this. So but when you have all this, these good qualities, very strong, good qualities there. You have strong ability to see investigation of good energy, if lots of joy and well being from Keith calm Pretty peaceful, you have lots of concentration, and you're very Aquinas about how things are, then it's a lot easier to let go. You don't have to claim and you have all these other things going for you, right? So if it's sunny outside, blue skies, it's a lot easier, a lot easier to leave your umbrella at home because you don't need it. So when it's sunny in your mind, you don't need to hold on to your, your, your umbrellas that we carry with us all the time. So the seven factors of awakening help conditioned the mind, soften the mind and repair the mind. So it becomes easier and easier to let go of clinging. Once you've let go of clinging, at least temporarily some deep radical temporary letting go of clinging and you got it gotten a taste of what that's like. Then you can start entering into a dialogue with clinging and non clinging To see whether this is something you want to try to do more often. Do you want to try to live more often from a place of non cleaning? Or do you want to? Or do you believe that cleaning is a good idea? Was it good to have experience once but now that I have to work, I have all these things to do. I think I need to click it's important to clean you know, the cleaning is you know, necessary for a consumer society. And I went to a good consumer, which the President has told us to do. So anyway, at some point they interest people into into a very interesting dialogue with themselves or investigation themselves about whether or not just to continue on the path of non clinging and that dialogue works a lot better if you had a real case of Peace or freedom of liberation. So the seven factors of awakening out there support for non clinging as you have a radically deep experience of non clinging, that allows us to be evaluate the life that we live, and start making choices about, we know where we put our energy, we're doing what's really important for us. And you might decide to continue on the path of non clinging until that non clinging becomes permanent, until you start upgrading or letting go things once and for all. And so they don't come back and bother you anymore. And so I think all of you have had the experience. know if you look back over your life, to know that there's some things you clung to earlier in life that you no longer care about, you know, like, you know, no cleaning at all. Some of you when you were teenagers were concerned about your zits. And most of you now I think would not be as concerned about going out in public who your friends are. With a zit on your nose like you were when you were in high school, or something like that, you know, hopefully some of you

have been liberated from certain kinds of concerns you had earlier in life I certainly hope so. So you're had that already had to experience is kind of a natural thing that happens. So we put his practices encouraging us to do is to take that movement that's much further. In a sense, the maturation process that happens as we become adults is speeded up through practice. So we don't have to wait until a natural kind of maturation and losing

interest to healthy losing interest in certain things were clung to fall away as we get older, but we can actually speed this up faster. And we can let go of things or clinging to certain things earlier and earlier in life, and then live a happier life as a result.

Now, some Buddhist teachers are reluctant, a little bit reluctant to teach about these seven factors of awakening, because it can seem too idealistic. And it can seem too much like all these should you're supposed to do these is what's supposed to happen to you in your practice. And then people try to, you know, try to engineer or they measure themselves or they see that mostly what they're struggling with is others struggling with stuff, not these beautiful qualities. And, and so people sometimes tie themselves in knots when they hear these kinds of teachings. So that's good, I can certainly happen it's a danger. The advantage of knowing about them is that when you know, when you know, when you put value on things, those things those inner quality, psychological qualities, those qualities have a chance to grow and develop. If you don't Evaluate, you don't even notice they're there. They're not fed. They're not they don't grow. So by no knowing that the seven factors of awakening are important qualities to be developed in Buddhist practice, then when they start appearing within us, we can recognize them more quickly, even if they're faint, and the acknowledgement of them, feeds them, the knowledge of them, get make some space for them to grow and develop. It allows us to change. Knowing the seven factors of awakening perhaps allows us to change a little bit how we evaluate the situation that we're in. And the human mind is almost always evaluating situations we're in. And sometimes we're evaluating it according to whether we think people are going to like us or not, or evaluating according to the pleasure The situation is going to give us so that a lack of pleasure we don't we get evaluated according to our status. We Get the situation, we evaluated going to how much money is going to give us we evaluate it. And there's always always been ways we evaluate things. And some of these things, ways in which we evaluate situations are not very healthy for us. And it's really good to have other healthy ways of evaluating situations. And so Buddhism offers that in the seven factors of awakening. Is there mindfulness here? Is this a place to to cultivate mindfulness? So if someone you know, some car drives down the street here and has no muffler and, you know, keeps backfiring and makes an awful noise and decides to stop right outside the street here, with the engine on and the music blaring, you know, it can be really unpleasant. One Direction the mind can go is to be really upset with those people that are judging them. How could people draw Like that And how can people be that way? And that or it can be like a How could I MC people have chosen the place where there's so much traffic those people they should know better citation center they should have, you know, been more considered and realized I was going to come sit here and and not you know chose they should have chosen a tranquil place quiet place in the world get away with the things these people are doing. So, that's one way of evaluating. Another way of valuing situation is Oh, there's all this sound, I can feel myself agitated. Now, let me get curious. Let me bring that let me bring that whole decided to my agitation in mind as we present for it, as the mindfulness will be curious to the by agitation well, you know what's going on here that I'm agitated by this the seventh out there. So the more you know, and then oh, this is really interesting to study my agitation so we have more energy. And as we get into it, you start feeling some, some appreciation or some delight that we are investigating. And then we start getting calmer. And then as we get calmer, we're able to get more concentrated. And as we get more concentrated, we're able to get become more equanimous. And then we hear this traffic car again, no big deal. So, so, rather than getting caught up in the judgments, no reaction to the event, the practice thing is to reevaluate,

evaluate the situation differently from the point of view of where we can make a real change. Where we need to take responsibility for our own well being. We're not taking responsibility for our well being. If we spend half an hour criticizing the driver of the car, being upset with them. We take responsibility for our suffering, when we evaluate the situation from the point of view of what's going on with me. And then as we enter this world of my own experience here, Then mindfulness, investigation, energy,

joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity start becoming stronger and stronger sort of hearing the beautiful qualities. So you should know about them. And the Buddha wanted to know he wanted his monks to know about it just before he died. So I think it's a good thing for all of us to keep in mind. The seven factors of awakening, seven jewels. clever enough. Sometimes I worry about giving talks with long lists. Hope I didn't lose too many of you tonight. So thank you so much.