

2007-10-29 The Seven Factors of Awakening Mindfulness

Fri, 7/31 6:13PM • 39:37

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mindfulness, present, mind, situation, reacting, happening, greater, attention, attentive, gatekeeper, recollect, stay, awareness, function, sacred, factors, sheep, practice, thoughts, nonreactive

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So Good evening. And this evening I'm going to talk some about mindfulness as a factor of awakening. For those of you who weren't here last week, last week, I gave an introduction to what's called the seven factors of awakening. And the seven factors of awakening, sometimes seen as the sap running through the tree of Buddhism, with nourishes it, makes it flower, makes it grow. It's kinda kind of the essence.

It's interesting to think of it this way or that way that the essence of Buddhism is not a belief, but rather our psychological factors, mental factors, factors of the heart, which get which grow and develop and nourish us in the world.

So today's topic is The factor of awakening called Mindfulness and as part of introducing this topic, I have a question for you.

So, imagine yourself in a difficult situation. I purposefully am not going to describe the difficult situation in very vague. So you can fill it in. So some difficult situation what might be the benefits of doing nothing but paying attention? What are the benefits of not saying anything? I'm not doing any But to offer this difficult situation or full presence, really be present for it really pay attention, but not act. beyond that. What? I'm sure you can come up with some disadvantages doing that. It might be the truck is barreling down at you. But what are they? What are the advantages of just staying there? aware, attentive presence. Nothing beyond that. If we can pass the mic around, I can either call in some people or some brave people can volunteer

Just in the process of time itself, it may resolve on its own.

So getting situation difficult situation time, things can resolve. Like outer Hall in the outer Hall,

you might be able to see and understand the situation more clearly.

see and understand the situation more clearly.

It might be a means of camouflaging oneself

in a good way and talking about good things now, that's a good thing to explain.

On

I believe that expression

not getting much yourself over,

keeping, keeping out of the

fire of whatever's going on.

Also, if you don't act and don't react to the situation, don't say anything, you not going to cause any more problems. So you stay out of trouble.

Yes. dig the hole any deeper

to dig the hole any deeper. Okay, but maybe you can do that by this a little bit different because you could do that in by running away as well. Right? So here you're being also being asked to stay present. So what's the difference between staying present and, and you know, and not getting in trouble because but versus running away. And so you're not there to cause trouble but you're not present. You have any thoughts

and perhaps the advantages When we don't react we can feel, feel where it is.

In the body. In other words,

I was imagining the situation, and I feel it on in my chest.

So by not reacting, not speaking or do anything but just a present, you can feel we're in the body, you're experiencing it the subjective feeling. And that might open up to a whole bunch of things to your whole subjective experience of whatever the situation might be your feelings, your thoughts, your beliefs, your you know your motivations. Thank you, right behind you. I

find that if I'm just being present, I notice that the difficulty of the situation is mostly in my imagination. The suffering comes from either projecting into the future or recalling the past or having other considerations about it. But if I'm very, very still,

as much as I hate to admit it,

it really mostly is mental.

The present moment, it's very rare that

that you really be devoured by the tiger.

So much of the difficulties you're thinking about are projected imaginary difficulties.

Yeah, most most of the difficulty is illusion. And so

things stay present. And you can maybe see through that imagination and see more clearly what's here. Yeah, thank you. Behind you.

Will if the difficult situation involves another person, perhaps by not reacting and being still It would completely change the dynamic between yourself and this other person. Perhaps the situation that's difficult is one that has occurred before, where by reacting, the other person perhaps expects you to react. And so if you don't react, it puts a whole different dynamic there and causes

both parties to reflect and

in the dynamic to change and, and perhaps has an impact on the other person who expected differently. And now, no intention on reflecting, expected, let's say conflict continues and it does so now. Another person might all benefit from you not doing anything

reminds me that there's a system of therapy called family systems therapy. When they look at the whole family's a system rather than looking at the individual client, they think of the client as part of the system of the family and the whole family kind of has to somehow be dealt with as a system rather than individuals their own inner psychological problem. And one of the little sayings, I've been told and family systems therapy is that if one member of the family practices nonreactive awareness, the whole system moves towards health. So, like what you said there was only thing which which which was emphasized, mostly I think the gentleman here did was mostly in some sense, which emphasized is not reacting. And I'm adding another element to the question to the question of actually staying public. Wasn't attentive. So your answer was great. But there's another piece of seasoning in the soup. And that is that little piece of now he's gonna try to move it up here the mic

notice I didn't reply. So I guess I let everybody else answer for me. Uh huh.

Didn't in fact have to

stay anything but present. But that wasn't deliberate. So I'm claiming.

I would say though, that

I've seen and witnessed that not just happened in families but in Dynamics where you don't even know the person in passing, where in just a few seconds of awareness or attention, you might be able to shift that dynamic.

Beautiful. Save me just a few seconds Attention of awareness nonreactive awareness, you can shift the whole dynamic over any relationship at all. And one of the things that I've seen is that sometimes through just being present in a full way, and even pausing sometimes even two seconds just kind of making eye contact connecting the whole relationship can deepen very quickly. The whole different kind of felt heartfelt connection or deepening sense of meaning or presence or things can shift very quickly.

There Michael,

by not reacting It might also give you a clue as to a clue in an answer as to, to what got you there in the first place. That it completely has nothing to do with everybody else.

Beautiful, so if you're not reacting with staying present that attention Exploring investigating situation, you might have a better chance to understand what got you there the causes and conditions that brought you there. Great. Good. In the background, maybe one more

I think if you stay open and present during a difficult that it has something to teach you and you can, if you stay calm, you can learn from it.

So difficult situations can be teaching teaching situations for us. If we are calm present and mindful of the situation, as opposed to what

as opposed to reacting and and

leaving your body and not not staying present. You you might miss what University training. Yeah, give you

a great. So many ways of not being allowing that to happen. And there's reacting, there's giving advice there is stating our opinion quickly there is giving people a peace of mind. There is certainly running away there is getting frantic and calling for help. There is daydreaming in the mind drifting off into thought there is, you know, we live reliving the past over and over again and losing touch with what's here in the present. Maybe doing that perhaps projecting some old situation onto the new situation. There's so many ways in which the mind can not be present for the situation not really have clear present awareness. So the practice of mindfulness, the function of the function and mindfulness can describe a menu of things we're talking about here. And that is that when we've there's something very, very powerful significant that can happen if we allow ourselves to be very attentive, very present, for experience for ourselves and allow something to reveal itself and show itself that maybe won't show itself. If we're just constantly reactivity in to what's happening. And this possibility of something seeing deeper, understanding deeper, allowing deeper things to move through us to happen to unfold is so significant. I believe that the practice of mindfulness I consider as a sacred practice. And when I talk to people who are Christians sometimes, and they ask, What are you looking at? What what kind of practice do you do? Sometimes, occasionally, I'll tell them, oh, it's close to what you do when you practice in the presence of God. Because sometimes Christians have a practice, they practice the presence of God and it And because not that, you know, God is present for Buddhists. But that it seems so sacred is so profound, so significant, this very simple act of staying present and attentive to what's happening. The word for mindfulness Sati, which also has the meaning of to remember, it has both meanings mindfulness and remembrance. And I like that, in calling it remembrance, I like to kind of change the word a little bit, or it is a slightly different synonym, which is a recollection. And part of the function of mindful is just to recollect, to collect together and is collected as a chance to collect together the situation that we're in, when we're often situations are quite fragmented or divided. So if we're thinking about the future, in our body is here, then there's a fragmentation between our body and In the future for last in the future, if we're projecting the past onto the present situation, then we're not we're kind of disconnected from what's happening here. Many times we're disconnected to our from our feelings. We're disconnected from our thoughts and beliefs disconnected to our from our body. Our mind state does many things we're not often not connected with. And part of the function of being present attentive is to kind of create the space the possibility for all the disconnected parts to be collected to recollect ourselves. And one of the functions of mindfulness is to make our psychophysical sense of self psychophysical kind of operation, be harmonious and collected and connected. So to recollect ourselves, so we talked about mindfulness practicing the four foundations of mindfulness, practicing the recollection of our body, to collecting together our bodies or our bodies. Here we're

inhabiting our body we're here present for our body. We talked about recollecting our feelings, recollecting our mind states, moods or emotions, and recollecting the basic truths, the basic patterns of relationships that go on in the mind and the heart, some that lead us towards freedom, and some that lead us to, to greater suffering. One of the patterns that we start seeing in the leaders to greater freedom is the seven factors of awakening. Part of what we're recollecting in Buddhism are those wholesome factors, beautiful factors that lead the mind to greater and greater freedom, greater and greater sense of well being. Now, it's quite beautiful. I feel that mindfulness in being a recollecting phenomena, or saying different way mindfulness is kind of creating a space in which things can flow in and grow and develop. It has a very strong tendency To draw towards it.

The other six factors of awakening. And as as this practice of just staying attentive and present, Can we stay present is a difficult situation or it's a beautiful situation, I'm going to stay present and attentive chances are if we do that, other things will follow in the wake of that. And the tradition talks about greater curiosity or investigation happening, kind of looking more closely. It talks about greater sense of energy, or vitality that comes with that. And I've seen that many times in difficult situations that I know in one way of reacting I can be drained. But if I stay present, without reacting, I often feel kind of nice. Energy begins happening. I feel more alert, more alive, more vital. There can be a sense of joy, that can happen to delight can feel kind of delightful. There can be greater sense of tranquility or common situation, there can be greater concentration and focus, okay? Now, I'm going to apply myself the task at hand. And there can be greater sense of equanimity or balance in situation. We're not pushed around by situation and that's what it means kind of not be reactive. So, part of the function of mindfulness is to recollect and a lot of that happens somewhat organically or somewhat, little bit passively at times, simply by bringing yourself to the situation more fully, and staying present and not reacting. But being attentive, bringing attention to it. So one of the meanings or the meaning of mindfulness, this recollecting is to is to not have these to recall is to recollect, not to collect the whole situation, but to recollect certain things to bring to mind certain things and hold it in mind, hold it in the mind, so the mind doesn't wander off. to skim off to skim away or slip away from what we want to pay attention to. So, to bring something to mind, like so, we bring to mind like you might bring to mind a poem that you read. So, you recollect the poem you brought to mind. So, long form, you have to kind of keep the focus, get the concentration to kind of go through the whole poem as you recite it. So, the same thing, we can recollect the breathing. So, in order to recollect the breathing, we have to it has to be certain kind of focus, you have to let go of or a lot of other things in order to stay, keep the breath as a primary focus, be mindful of the breath to hold the mind that the breath in the mind it holding the breath, for example, in the mind, in awareness, to recollect it. It also involves beginning to understand all the different things that are going on in the mind that keep you from being present for the breath. This is true for anything you pay attention to the part of the function of mindfulness This is to help us become aware of all the different forces that keep us from being attentive being present. And some people see this as being very unfortunate that your mind is so distractible in the practice of mindfulness, we take that as part of what we're trying to learn about ourselves. So the very attempt to try to be attentive, shows us how we're not attentive, it shows us the ways we react, react, it shows us the ways we want to kind of jump in with some statement shows us the way we want to kind of fix a situation or do something. So just simply recollect and try to be present, we start seeing all these other ways in which we are. And part of the process of mindfulness meditation or any kind of mindfulness practice, is the beginning, beginning to winnow out to separate out all the activities that we're doing, which are not needed, which are extra. So even when I was sitting here with you meditating this evening with you, I could see the big especially in the beginning of meditation, that I was trying to be mindful present here. But some point I was paying attention, enough to notice that I was also kind of pushing a little bit, trying to push and trying to get concentrated. And you could feel the tension of this little tension, leaning forward pushing it to get concentrated here. And there was extra that was needed. And so when I saw

that tension, I could soften and relax. And then the mindfulness became clear, more stabilized, more open. There could be other things that go on, there could be there could be fear, there could be ambition, there can be judgment, there can be all kinds of judging going on. Oh, you know, that wasn't a good breath. I'm sure the person next to me had a better breath. And, you know, maybe I can borrow theirs.

And so those judgments, the stories that start my source making stories, and so as we try to stay attentive and present, we start seeing more and more clearly, all the things we're doing is extra. And one of the remarkable things I believe that happens over time, if you'd give yourself a kind of a long time to be mindful, not long time not to be nonreactive. You start settling away settling way settling way, deeper, deeper layers of extra activity in the mind, as part of one of the reasons why people get so calm and meditation is because a lot of the extra stuff that's not really needed, falls away, falls away. And it's very interesting to sit down. And maybe for some of you today, sit down after a busy day, and then be surprised by all the momentum that's still going on in the mind, all the activity is still going along the thoughts, the concerns, the feelings and all that, that aren't really needed, sitting here in this room. But they're going on the kids still happening. And so we get to see that and some of it will be starts falling away, falling away. And then we can mindfulness becomes cleaner and clean. We're more pure. So part of the process of mindfulness is the clarification of awareness itself. So awareness can rest. Without a lot of the extra baggage, it tends to come with it. We're always attentive manoli pretty much always attentive attention is kind of always here. But attention often comes, yoked connected to a lot of different beliefs, reactions, agendas, different things we're doing. And so the process of mindfulness is to clarify that attention. So that becomes clear and clear. Is begins to stand alone, without all that stuff that we tend to bring with it. So as we do this, there are a few things that can happen. The

they say they say one of the ancient analogies for mindfulness is that mindfulness is like the gatekeeper of it. For the fortified city, and because the fortified city with walls all around with only one gate, the gatekeeper watches everyone who comes and goes. And the gatekeeper decides who can come and go. And so mindfulness is when you really present when you could be collected the present moment, really the present moment, it's like this gate. If you're really there in the present moment, you can see what comes in and out what moves through the gate of the mind. You can see what you want to say, you can see what you want to think. You can see what you want to do. You can see the impulses that the sensations the feelings that happen in the body, and how they come into the mind and how they're going to influence the mind how we pick them up. You stay in the present moment, the mind becomes like a gatekeeper. And then there's almost like a natural, easy sometimes choice in the mind can make about what it wants to pick up. And wait, what it doesn't. What Let's go. What do let's come into the mind into the city. What it keeps out. So you might, for example, be sitting here. And you might start thinking about about the World Series next year. Who's gonna win the World Series next year? This is a really important question for some people. And, you know, the World Series is totally you don't know just ended yesterday. So it's not we have 360 days until the next one. I don't think sitting here meditating is a particularly great time to be thinking about who's going to win the World Series in a year from now. So those thoughts might bubble up and the gatekeeper of the mind because your presence you see it coming up soon, No, thank you. Not now. You let go of it. It's very it's a very wise thing to do. You're trying to be present, not get lost in real serious thoughts. So there's a whole series of things that that great with diverse The number of things that can happen the mind and the heart, that with little bit of wisdom, you might decide, I'll leave this alone. No need to pick it up. In ordinary ordinary mind, the mind not be might not mind it might not have the stability or the concentration focus, to notice things coming and going in the mind, where we're picking up and where we're putting down. The opportunity meditation is actually watch in real time, the picking up in the dropping real time making these choices. Oh, like I can go, Oh, that's a good one. I'll pick it up. So we like something's come in, something's

gonna go on. And that's one of the functions of mindfulness is to be that gatekeeper. The other function of mindfulness is again, an ancient Buddhist analogy, is to be like a surgeon. Probably what you want, my guess is least back in the old days, they did. If you have a surgeon cut you up. You would like to surgeon to kind of take their hands and kind of feel around the place first and get a sense of it and poke around and really investigate kind of understand what's there before they just kind of just wither you know, just slice away. They want to you want the detergent to probe and feel, get to really know the place. And so mindfulness has also that function is to mindfulness as it is to begin, sometimes in certain situations, to probe investigate, feel your way and what is the situation here, which would be going on here, this investigation getting to know better what's happening. So before we act before we slice,

so is so mindfulness as a presence of mind, then we have a presence of mind about what we're doing and what we're saying and what's going on. So we can talk without a presence of mind You know, people who are crazy, often can pay attention. But sometimes I think one of the definitions of being crazy, there's not a real presence of mind, then a self kind of self reflective awareness and understanding of what's happening. with mindfulness, there's a self reflective awareness that understands what's going on in here within the gatekeeper. And then there's an ability with mindfulness to differentiate between those things, which are healthy for us. And those things which are not those things which cause us to suffer more. And those things that aren't that don't. So one of the functions of mindfulness is to make this distinction between in the mind between what helps us and what doesn't, with movements, which thoughts which feelings with activities, or health was not. So mindfulness has a lot, a lot of different functions. A lot of those functions can operate somewhat passively. You're kind of naturally organically if we just keep showing up and paying attention. And some of those functions involve kind of the use of our wisdom understanding as we go along. So as mindfulness gets stronger, it tends to pull towards it. These other factors of awakening the other six factors, these beautiful factors in mind. And

let me think here, maybe I should be nonreactive we were forbidden to see what my mind is going with this talk.

I think I'll give you an analogy for mindfulness. Another that kind of comes from the ancient Buddhist tradition as well. And some of you have heard me say this before. But I want to give you this analogy. Perfect for this beautiful analogy, I believe, but also for the sake of the punch line. So those of you have heard before, maybe don't remember the punch line. So yeah, be on the edge of your seat. I have your attention now. The has to do with herding sheep. And the Buddha said that in the growing season if you are shy shepherd, and your sheep for your cows, whatever wandering around the rice fields, eating along the levees, I guess, or whatever, the shepherd has to be very attentive, that the sheep don't go and eat the other farmers, rice or their crops that are growing there. And so the farm has to ride the sheep really close and push them away from there and there and keep them on the right path where they can eat the weeds. But at the end of the growing season in the harvest and the crop has been harvested, then if there's no need to watch the sheep so carefully, the sheep can go wandering around the stubble and eat as much as they want. So at the end of the end of the harvest, the shepherd can sit up against the tree in the shade of a tree and just very kind of relaxed way. Look out across the countryside and keep an eye on the sheep but doesn't have to be worried about it doesn't have to be right in writing and really close shooting in this way in that way. Just relax open kind of taking them all in. When mindfulness is strong and well established, and the mind is not wandering off into all kinds of unhealthy places, unwelcome places, then the mindfulness is kind of like that relaxed Shepherd that sits against a tree and just very open and relaxed. It just watches all the activity of the mind and all the things are going on around us just kind of present relaxed open here. So it's not I think it's a nice analogy, you know, the idea of mindfulness is being relaxed, open spacious. Now, the punchline is that

if you do this carefully, relaxed, open and very attentive, watching everything. Then at some point, the attention also the microphones also will turn around and look at the shepherd and you realize The shepherd is just another sheep. What do you think of that? It's opposite also just cheap.

That can be held and seen in a great space of the mind, great openness of the mind. The mind, which is the mind, which has developed mindfulness has a lot of space. I was almost gonna say, as a lot of space in it, but I don't think it has any boundaries to say in or out. There's a tremendous amount of space. Some teachers like to do a little wordplay or question kind of question

they'll ask

are you in this room Or is this woman you?

Which is it?

You know, you know, I mean, rationally that we're in the room right. But the room that we're in experientially, the way it's experienced, it has to be experienced in the field of perception. And where does perceiving happen? Where's that field of perception occurring? Is this room in your field of perception? And if it's in your field of perception, are you in the room or is there room in you? So how spacious how open can the mind be? How wide can it be? So I said earlier that I consider mindfulness as being sacred and in particular, I feel mindfulness is sacred, or touches what's most sacred, at least in Buddhist terms, when the mindfulness when the awareness includes everything, when nothing's excluded, when there's no movement in the mind to exclude something, I shouldn't pay attention to that. Not that that's outside. That doesn't really count. That doesn't really matter. This is better over here. Then mindfulness is sacred when there's no divisions in the field of awareness. And the mindfulness of contract doesn't resist. The mindfulness has no location. The mindfulness, the awareness has no location, the awareness has no movement, because it encompasses everything. So when everything's included, then we touch what is sacred. As soon as the mind has a division, it says, oh, that doesn't count. That's wrong. That act excluded Then we'd like to sacred. Now, the thing important to say here is that your, your thinking mind or your thinking or your action body might have to sometimes say no to things. exclude things. But there's no need for the mind the awareness, to say no. For the purposes of attention. Your actions and your attention are two different things. So the sacred world has to do with an attention includes everything. In zen, they call it sometimes the big mind. What you do with your actions to different question, so your actions might say, no way you can come in here. But the awareness hasn't said that awareness is actually doesn't contract doesn't resist includes everything. So part of what we do in mindfulness

is,

is to engage them Mindfulness, developed the mindfulness. And with the mindfulness we can see more clearly what's actually happening. As we see more clearly what's happening, all the things which are extra that we do is not needed, in any given situation, have a chance to fall away. We drop the drop them, we don't pick them up, the gatekeeper leaves them alone. As as we leave things alone Don't do all this extra stuff. Then we have this greater space in the sense in the mind, greater openness, greater potential in the mind that's kind of created. And in that potential in the field of openness can come other factors, beautiful factors, the other factors of awakening. And as the other factors of awakening are there to support the mindfulness, the mindfulness gets stronger and stronger. The factors the other factors awakening, or supports for the developing cultivation of mindfulness. And then when the other

factors are strong enough, in the mindfulness becomes really truly amazingly all embracing all humans. elusive, so all embracing all inclusive, that there's no center for it.

And if no center for it, where are you? You're free,

which is a nice place to be. So that's some thoughts about mindfulness. And I encourage you to during the week to reflect further on this question of what benefits might there be for you in practicing attention, bringing presence to a situation, attention and presence, first and foremost before speaking or acting. So think about that, but more importantly, think about it. Why don't you think about or look for some situations over the next week, where normally you would rush in with words are rushing with action. And then don't do the normal thing. And rather

like that

I got left ready, some of you that was unexpected. So thank you very much