

2007-11-05 The Seven Factors of Awakening Investigation

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SPEAKERS

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Good evening, everyone. And so I'm going to continue today with the series I'm giving on the seven, seven factors of awakening. And so I think two weeks ago or so, I gave a broad overview on the overview of the seven factors of awakening. And then last week I gave a talk on the first factor which is mindfulness. And today's topic, usually, in English Dharma circles, it's called investigation. And this can everybody hear okay? So the seven factors of awakening are considered to be beautiful qualities of mind or heart. They get awakened or get developed in the process. of becoming awake, becoming liberated. And they create the kind of ideal conditions in the mind to let the mind take that leap of completely letting go of what of the deepest things that were attached to. And it's quite significant. I think that that the this very challenging thing to do is to let go of what we most cling to is that ability to do that is the most supported by having the presence of these beautiful qualities of mind. So mindfulness is one second topic tonight is investigation. The third is energy effort. The third is the fourth is joy. The fifth is tranquility. The sixth is concentration, and the seventh is equanimity. And These are considered kind of like the jewels of Buddhist practice. It's not necessarily easy to have them become strong and stabilized in our minds. In particular, they become strong and stabilized in the minds of people who are meditators, especially on meditation retreats, we have a long time to do it. But they also they can be something that becomes present people's lives as well. And, and part of the reason to talk about them is that the recognizing of these qualities, when they're present, strengthens them. If we don't recognize them, you know, they're, they don't get strengthened, don't get nourished. They the word awakening I'm very fond of. And I like the idea of sometimes talking about mindfulness is about the practice of being awake, to what is happening. And what I like about the word awake, is that it really stresses a subjective Presence is subjective quality, of alertness of clarity that we can have in the circumstances we find ourselves in. So we could say we were awake to, I was asleep, but then I was awake. And that could happen, you know, waking up from night sleep. But also people can go around the days are living in some kind of delusion living some kind of fantasy, living in some kind of projection. And then with a puff, the projection, the fantasy can vanish. And we kind of wake up and we see Oh, it's a different place. And to give you one example, in my life, my moment where I kind of many moments of kind of waking up with one example. little example of when I was a Zen student at Green Gulch farm. They have a very big meditation hall. And they have a big altar big, big statue of a Buddha and the way is this the altar situation It's not up against the wall, but it's a little bit away from the wall. And so you could actually walk behind behind behind it to the back of it. And then there was a slide, they went from a midpoint to the Buddha, straight away from the Buddha to the opposite wall. And from the, from the Buddha to the opposite of wall opposite of the Buddha, you weren't supposed to cross that line. Because somehow that was disrespectful to the Buddha didn't walk in front of the Buddha, there was a kind of etiquette to the place.

So if you want to get to the other side of the meditation Hill, you have to walk around the back of the altar to get there. So sometimes it's kind of silly, because, you know, you know, you're needed to go like two feet or one foot. But there's a big hall. So you have to walk into, you know, 50 feet around, you know, all the way around, because you couldn't cross that line. And so in my mind, that line became Electric, you know, became like his forcefield like, you don't cross that line. And I was you know, I get close to that line and I kind of feel Oh, you know, I should cross that line. And, and it you know, it was a real thing was really strongly present for me. And then one day I was on one end in the corner of the meditation hall just doing something cleaning or something. And some Dharma tourists came in. They just were kind of visitors it was checking things out and they were kind of walking around the meditation hall was off hours and they didn't know anything. They didn't know anything about the etiquette of the place. And they certainly knew nothing about this line. And so they crossed right in front of the altar, and there was no lightning and they didn't get electrocuted, nothing happens to them and NET NET was the moment I kind of woke up, realized, oh, there's no, there's no forcefield there. It's all a function of imagination and the collective imagination of all these people are projecting this line is the significance of this line. There's nothing there beyond what we're kind of making it up as we go along. So I felt I woke up to that projected quality of that line. And it felt kind of awake. Oh, and I kind of felt like I saw the room in a new way and it clear away. One of the reasons I like the word awake, is awake doesn't imply that anything in the world has changed. Our projections might have changed, or delusions about my changed, but you know, it's not like we're trying not to necessarily think God has gone away or made happen. It just kind of is it's kind of very lucid quality of kind of, oh, oh, this is what it is. clarity and it's another word for mindfulness because sometimes instead of mindfulness because sometimes mindfulness has such big, such baggage with it, that some people, after many years of doing mindfulness practices, only associations what it means to be mindful. You have to kind of try hard, you're supposed to know what's there, you label it, you're supposed to do this and that with it. And, you know, penetrated, you know, and mindfulness is like this complicated thing for some people after learning all these things that I'm trying to teach you. And, and just to be awake, is much more simple, it's clean. And so the seven factors of awakening. Now another reason I like the word awake, is that to be awake in some clear way, crisp way. You can kind of feel that comes with other qualities as well. It comes with a kind of alertness, in comes a certain kind of energy. energized, it comes sometimes with an ability to be a little bit more balanced in the situation more spacious. When you really awake and clear, something, unfortunately can happen. And you're more balanced and we're able to take and receive it without getting reactive and caught by it and you're both weapons pushed. And so there's different qualities that come with the seven factors of awakening. I think you can kind of maybe Intuit or feel that the deer they're there in some conventional sense of really being awake, you know, if you take a really good nap and wake up in the middle the afternoon. Wow, I feel really clear. You kind of look around inside your mind. Maybe you feel so mean intonation of these seven factors right there. So one of the factors is called investigation in English is often translated as investigation, and the Pali word is dhamma vecchia and I will first give you the, what I learned to be the kind of basic when I was kind of learning this practice in the Buddhist tradition I've learned it in. And when I learned it from Western teachers, I'll give the kind of basic way I was taught first, and then I'll give you the more ancient way that it's taught.

If you go back to the ancient Buddhist sutras, sutta teachings of the Buddha, and both are instructive, both are helpful, and both have their place. So the way that I was taught, this dhamma vecchia means to investigate the factor investigation and investigation is can be summarized by having the kind of the approach or the question in your mind. What is this? So not what is that that happened yesterday? What is you know, something abstract, but in the moment, if you're present for something, then there's a simple question, what is this? And that question kind of like, helps you kind of look let's look more

closely. Let's not assume we know what it is. Let's find out a new even though I've seen this maybe 10 times went into like meditation hall hundreds of times. And I never saw that meditation hall in a new way. Until the Dharma tourists helped me. And in theory, I didn't need the Dharma tourists I could have somehow woken up in my own if I somehow understood the nature of that line. So, the ask the question, or don't have to ask the question, but that kind of approach what is this we look more closely. And this is particularly important in Vipassana. Because what we understand Vipassana practicing mindfulness practice, is a big part of the way we experience life is a projection. We all have a lot of assumptions, beliefs, interpretations of events, of ourselves of other people. And some of those many of those interpretations and projections are not really accurate, but they might be partially accurate. And so to have the ability to see through the projections, the interpretations, the ideas and allows you to kind of connect more fully to see more clearly what is actually happening. And one of the things to see that's really helpful and seeing more clearly, is to see when a projection is, or an assumption is arising in the mind, the ability to see Oh, I seen so and so. And now I have this thought that so and so is that kind of person. And you can see the mind producing that thought, and say, Oh, that's a thought in my mind. It might not be true, it's a mind thought. Who knows if it's true out there. But you see is a product of the mind. And as you see it as a product of the mind, then there's a possibility of analyzing or questioning it. That's a thought. Let me look around that thought to see if I can see the person directly. So let me hold that thought that interpretation likely, and look for further evidence. If you don't have that capacity to look carefully at the rising of an idea and assumption and belief, then it's all too easy to assume that the They have this kind of deep underlying, or these deep kind of assumption, unconscious assumption that my interpretation, my assumptions are really what's out there. And so we have all this projection onto people all kinds of projection. And so part of the ability to see what's really happening is also being able to see how the mind creates its assumptions, reputations, its beliefs, its ideas. And then beyond that, is to look behind or beyond the interpretations, assumptions, the beliefs, the concepts, and sort of seeing more deeply what is actually here. And, and in Buddhism, we say, or we say we, you know, it's kind of supposed to be it's a deep insight in Buddhism, that if we're able to look deeply beyond the layers of concepts we paint reality with. One of the things we'll see is how Much our experience our world what's going on is arising and passing is in. In constant, it's constantly invoked motion of arising appearing is impermanent, deeply impermanent. And this is considered to be one of the really important insights in Buddhism, to see the impermanent nature of our experience of life. It's very fascinating to, to understand the impermanent nature of ourselves and ourselves our self concepts. And, you know, we change quite a bit. In many ways we don't see or change, sometimes if we kind of lock into certain assumptions and beliefs about ourselves. But human require human beings are also quite fluid.

And so what comes to mind as an example here is maybe a doesn't doesn't speak very well about me in this example, but sample myself You know, I was a, you know, by once I left home when I was 18, I basically was a poor hippie for a long time, hitchhiking around stuff, going to college, college hippie. And then I went, became a Buddhist practitioner and became a monk and had very little money. There was a period of time where my stipend as a monk was \$60 a month. But then I was doing really well. Because even bigger period where I didn't get any stipend at all. So you know, didn't have much money. And then so then when I came to in 1990, I came to Stanford to study at Stanford, a doctoral program, and my mother gave me her old car. I was very happy with your old car, you know, just pattered around, it was red this was kind of cool. And I was driving around, you know, in Palo Alto area for a while for a number of years and that old red beat up car. And I noticed after a while that in Palo Alto Back then, I haven't been there for a while, so maybe changed. But back then there weren't a lot of old beat up cars and what? And actually just before it before I live and live in that it was this area. I live in San Francisco. And I had my car there. And, and having my car there. That you know, was one of many old cars, you know, and it never occurred to me I should have it should be any different way. But

once I was hanging out in Palo Alto You know, it'd be good to have a new car. A new car would be a good thing. New Car, new car, new car thoughts. And so what it was an example of, I think, was the way in which I was influenced by my environment. And my desires, what I wanted, and what I thought was cool or no good or something, you know, it's kind of embarrassing thing was, was influenced by the environment that I was in. So as an example of kind of impermanence. And I'm going to give you that's maybe a silly example, but I can give you a lots of examples of how fluid the I am innocent and adaptable we are and what the normal assumptions and beliefs of who we are often tend to be kind of locked in. I'm no good or something, you know, I'm not good enough for something all kinds of ideas people can have so what are the very interesting things that begins happening? If you look deeply investigate deeply, and you see the right you can see the rising and passing of identities. And they change over time. And sometimes the identities that we have are a little bit of antiquated, antiquated, antiquated, antiquated. Some sometimes we keep holding on to an old identity. And actually, we've changed. And I say that to myself some some of my various identities. And sometimes I'm surprised to find out that I'm 53 because there's a part of me that still thinks I'm 21 not like, you know, I just talked about kind of fumbling and bumbling, kind of not quite sure what life's about. And it was a little bit strange to go to, you know, it was in the early 20s, I was a new student at Zen center, Zen center, and they're all these, you know, great Zen teachers there. And I was just looking at, you know, looking up at this great Zen teachers And then now I go to meetings where they treat me as appear the same ones who have a great view of my great teachers. And it's kind of strange, you know, I'm still like a little kid, you know, and they looking at me as a teacher now kind of an equal and I'm still like, I haven't caught up to myself in that, that identity. So sometimes we have these old you know, old ideas or identities, we're still kind of haven't learned to shift and change. And sometimes we're ahead of ourselves, of course, you know, all kinds of ways this, this, this happens.

So the investigation qualities to look more deeply, and what are the qualities we can see behind in the way we're stuck on concepts, you start seeing how things are impermanent. And one of the really fascinating years of impermanence, is to notice our own impermanence. We change over time in all kinds of different ways. And then, the last one The tasks of practice, I believe, is to learn to be more at peace or comfortable with all the changes. And if you're not going to be comfortable or at peace, or if you're not going to learn to be to not feel better, if you're not going to learn to let go of conflict with change, then you really do well not to age. But, you know, if you want to learn how to be peaceful in your life, and not in conflict with yourself, then you will learn to be gracious with the whole aging process. So the investigation looking deeply What is this? What is our experience? So it could be as simple as you know, he had physical pain. And I think a lot of people who've been meditators for a while have hopefully learned how to do this might be some pain is to be able to identify the way in which we relate to that pain to see the concepts, the ideas, we have. They will overlay the pain and then be able to look behind the concept and experience the pain as a direct experience, below the concept below the idea of pain and to start feeling the pain in the detail, the details of sensation and make up that experience. And to see the see the arising and passing of pulsing and tightening and searing and twisting and pulling and all the things that can make up the pain experience. And it's actually very, can be very fascinating to get in there really, really close to investigate investigative mind and really see and feel the tremendous detail of experience of sensations that go on in a experience of pain. And normally, people hold themselves at a distance from pain and don't enter into it in a deep way. And sometimes the experience of pain transformed itself changes itself, and it's no longer pain if you get really down deep into it. That's interesting. So, that was how I was how I was introduced to the whole, this teachings on the factor of awakening called investigation. In the in, as I said earlier that in the Pali language nation language of Buddhism, the term translators investigation is called Dhamma v Chaya and the Chaya means could mean investigate. It could also mean analysis. Analysis investigate, be discerning. And Dhamma has it has the word Dhamma is the Pali word for dharma. Dharma has a range of

meanings. And in one meaning is means qualities like the qualities of the mind, so investigation or analysis of your own qualities. So it isn't simply just looking at the pain are looking at, you know, you hear a sound outside and you listen to the sound. You don't simply look at, you know, physical sensations. But you look at the quality of the mind the qualities presence in the mind as you experience something. So, for example, perhaps someone walks in here late during the morning meditation sessions, and they have lumberjack boots on. They have you know, Velcro Velcro coat and, and they snort whatever and they do so but anyway, so they come in and they slam that door open and they slam the door closed. And so one direction the mind can go is who's that jerk. How could they let someone like that into a quiet meditation center? Though isn't the person know where he is? You know, this shouldn't be this is really a travesty. And I'm gonna have to write a letter to the president of the board of IMC. I was at board meeting tomorrow night, and give them peace of mind about these people that can't believe those people. That's one approach. The other approach is, you hear the bang, you hear you feel yourself kind of energized. You feel your mind, thoughts of anger and thinking about this person, that jerk arise. And then you say, Oh, this is interesting. Let me look at this. Let me look at the qualities of my mind, what's going on my mind. So rather than staying lingering with judgment and ideas out there, turn around and look at yourself. See what's happening here for myself. In other words, it's one way of saying taking responsibility for how you're feeling and what your mind is doing. That event out there. So once hopefully, once you realize that you know, you're safe, the person that could attack you, then you will. Okay, let's look here. Let's start taking responsibility here for what's happening for myself. So this is the turn look at the qualities of your own your own experience in your own mind. So you might feel yourself tight, you might feel yourself a little bit afraid, you might feel yourself judgmental, you might find that the mind has gotten small, you were very soft and relaxed. And then with this experience, you feel kind of jolted. But as you start thinking about this, how terrible this person is, it contracts your belly and you get all types you feel a tightness, you feel, how you're holding on to ideas, you feel maybe you notice how you have certain assumptions about how precious and important your meditation time is. And now someone has ruined it. You feel like clinging to my meditation, this was supposed to be my salvation from a busy day. And so is he really attached to so you say oh, this attachment so you look at that, Oh, look at that I'm attached to this bill. Leaves ideas, they run around. So you look at all that. So to look at look at look to go in with look at yourself to really understand what's happening here. Now this is a very important phenomenal thing to do very helpful. And the way to get to how it's a helpful simile analogy is that if you go into an ecosystem, the stable stable ecosystem, and you introduce introduce a new species, like a new weed or something, the whole ecosystem might shift and change with that with this one simple change. So we have an ecosystem of the mind. In some ecosystems are stabilized in ecosystems of neurosis or something not so interesting, sometimes not so healthy and introducing new species into the ecosystem, the whole thing changes. And so the new species in essence can be investigation. If you introduce investigation, into the ecosystem of your mind, the whole mind has to shift and change. And so there's a variety of things and it is investigations, not a weed investigation is a good thing. So it's maybe introducing an almost extinct animal to back into this system. So for example, so if you bring investigation into your experience in the in that moment investigation, you're not identifying so strongly with your thoughts and beliefs. And so you step back a little bit. And that's stepping back. And getting kind of a little bit of a bird's eye view a little bit more dispassionate view of what's happening is very radical shift in the mind. You know, so caught anymore. You bring the quality of investigation to your experience, it can also come sometimes to the feeling of strength, that's a strong thing to do you feel strength or stability in a situation where you've held may be unstable. Okay, I'm going to invest Again, what's going on here, they can create some space space, you can create some little more ease, it can create a little bit distance, healthy distance, it can create some strength, inner sense of strength or stability. And then on top of that investigation actually shows you something, then you start understanding what's going on, and the understanding of something and you understand what's there. If you're standing what's there, then you're not going to be pulled around by your thoughts, your beliefs and your feelings, but rather, you see how they operate. And then there's

more choice in how you choose to act and respond. So this area of choice is very important. Because one of the meanings of one of the meanings of dharma. So remember, its analysis or investigation of dharma. One of the classic meanings is, is it's a form of wisdom or to utilizing your intelligence to analyze understand And to be able to make differentiations in your experience, to discover where your choices are, that you can make, that you make, that influence your suffering, or help help cause more suffering or cause more happiness or freedom.

So as we so what it means is that we, so Dharma also has the meaning of teaching in the Buddhist context of the teachings of the Buddha. So it's analyzing your experience, through the perspective of Buddhist teachings. So, now, that doesn't mean you know, getting a PhD in Buddhism and then overlaying on your experience, the whole Buddhist framework of you know, abstracting Buddhist abstraction in your experience. What it means is taking a very simple, the simplest concepts of Buddhism and using that as a frame of reference, to understand better what's happening here and now in a way that's helpful for you. And the frame of reference is The four noble truths. That's the Dharma and the essence. So you analyze your situation you're in. You look at it, you investigate here now, how do the Four Noble Truths, how are they playing themselves out here and now in this situation? So, you know, back to that green Gulch Zen meditation hall with that line in front of them there. You know, I was the custodian of the meditation hall for a while and, and back then I wasn't so mindful in this kind of way. And I remember people would kind of some people didn't know, we're kind of get close to that line. And I would tell them don't go there, which was my job partly, but also remember that sometimes I got kind of tense. If I was practicing mindfulness of, if I was looking at using the Four Noble Truths, I would have noticed my attention. And I would have seen that I had a choice whether to stay tense or to let go of it. If the person comes in here really loud, I can see the place of choice where I pick up again attached to cling to some resentment or get cling to hold on to them painful where some idea that someone else is responsible to fix this problem. Or if I'm sitting here with physical pain when I'm meditating, I can feel the quality of self pity that might arise and actually see that and see the place of choice worth picking up those thoughts and going away with them. Or I see the place of choice where I can let go of it, or I can let go of that clinging I see how that what I'm clinging to, brings me that suffering. So part of the function investigation is to help us understand, in practical, immediate, real way, in our experience, how we're doing this, how the Four Noble Truths are happening for us, we have to see where the suffering is the tension, the discomfort, see where psychological discomfort is. To see the cause of it in the kind of clinging, the kind of grasping that's going on in your mind. And then to see the possibility of letting go of that. That's, you know, it's that is it easy to say sometimes it's very difficult to do. But it's a very simple analysis. And part of the value of this analysis is that it helps us take responsibility for our experience what's going on. And it helps us to find the place of change in life, where we have the most, most ability to change things. We can always change things in the world. But we can look at if we want to be happy, we can look at ourselves and see how we contribute. And so the investigation of the Dharma, we're using these Dharma principles to analyze their experience. Slowly bit by bit over time, you start getting into very small steps, becomes a stronger and stronger capacity that allows you to notice very quickly, the ways in which you get caught, the ways you get, cling the ways in which you resist In unnecessary ways, and you can start to slowly, slowly it gives you a greater capacity to relax, to release, to let go. And at this is really at the heart of Buddhist spirituality is the ability to see where we're responsible our contribution to our suffering. It's not to deny that other people sometimes are conditions for our suffering. And so something has to happen out there. But Dharma practice unfolds when we look at our contribution to the suffering. And so it's a very adult thing to do to turn it and what's my contribution to this? You're in a huge heated argument with someone and you're right, they're wrong. The Dharma thinks you do the analysis of Dharma using the Dharma investigation is not to that investigate all the reasons why they're wrong. The Dharma thing to do the path of freedom is found not by justifying your stance, the path of freedom is found, by turning your attention here and

seeing what am I doing to contribute to my suffering in this situation? You might still stay in the argument of is it necessary to do that, but maybe you don't suffer that you're more relaxed, clinging and you know, self righteous in the process of doing. So Dharma v Chaya, has these different meanings

and has the meaning of just simply to look more carefully, what is experience, look more carefully, try to look, understand the nature of concepts, interpretation, look behind it and actually see what's happening more deeply. And that's applicable in all kinds of situations in life. Next time you're in an argument with someone, step back for a moment, and try to look more carefully what's really going on here, rather than racing ahead with your beliefs. So investigation means to look more carefully. Investigation also means to look at the quality of your own mind. What's happening, your mind starts to start to start becoming sensitive to the range and changing qualities of your mind as they arise and pass. A lot of information about yourself is available if you notice the shifting qualities of your own mind heart. And then the third meaning of demo of each Ayah has to do with using the basic dharma principle of the Four Noble Truths as a way of understanding what's happening to you here now take responsibility for your contribution to the suffering here. And in doing that, doing these three things is how you could find the path of practice. So the Buddhist path is not found not found in a book, but it's rather found in your application investigation. No investigation in this way, uses your intelligence investigation in the classic ancient texts is a close partner to wisdom. As an has kind of an analytical can have an analytical quality to analyzing you're looking to understand. Some people don't like this because it agitates their mind. And they think that meditation is all about getting us calm and serene and empty in your mind. And it was to think about things. So two things to say about that. One is that one of the functions of investigation is to bring energy into the meditation practice or into your life. investigation is considered to be an energizing factor. In sometimes, there can be a lot of sloth and torpor, a lot of tiredness in meditation, but not a lot of energy to the practice, and one of the ways to bring more energy in is to investigate or to analyze or to look murky, you know, these these things. That's one thing you're going to say. Is that the goal is that the goal of this practice is become free, free of suffering, the goal is to experience peace. Part of investigation, then is to look to notice how we might be investigating in a way that is making us more agitated to those triggers the quality of agitation arising because of the way you're investigating. And then you do a course correction. investigation has in a built into its self correcting system. So if you're doing it, you're supposed to notice when you're doing it wrong, when he's making that kind of, and then and then try to relax, soften, relax, let go of something and then see how soft and how you know how relaxed you can be about your investigation you're looking, maybe stop investigating for a while, because maybe you're trying too hard. But slowly over time, if you do mindfulness practice, you will naturally learn How to be more discerning how to be more understanding of all these things, and how to differentiate between the ways in which you use your mind, the way you pick up things involving things, so they cause more suffering, and the ways that you could let go of things, you can move towards greater peace and happiness. So, last example, as you know, I use this almost some a second nature for me to do this, sometimes meditations have this happen. Early in the sitting today, several times, my mind started drifting off into some kind of concern that I have in my day. And, and I could see, so I could notice that my mind drifting off not concerned, and I could see the tension connected to that being around that concern. And I have this very simple understanding that this isn't the doesn't serve me right now this is not what I'm interested in doing. I could see it, I could see the tension that could arise, you can see the concerns arise, because it was relatively mild, I can just simply not continue with that train of thought wasn't even a matter of letting go of it to just not not not continuing, and then coming back and being here with my breath. So that's involves a little bit of intelligence, a little bit of discerning open investigation, it was almost second nature to do it.

And with the, with that ability, then the path of practice opens up. And we go further. And one way of talking about going further is to talk about the factor of awakening called energy or effort, which is for next week. So I hope this was understandable and useful. What if it was then you might spend the week exploring investigation Whereas right away, just look for ways in which you can bring, like your assaulting a suit or something. Why don't you try to bring some investigation into various variety situations in your week, we normally wouldn't occur to you to investigate, you would just kind of Bumble along, do what you normally do or something. So take and try at least once during the week to look for some really juicy situation. really juicy, like something that really would really, really kind of gets you really irritated or get your you know something going really powerfully. And you're ready to you know, and something really get caught and do your very, very best. She was a good one. And then she was you do your very, very best to not react. Just, you know, you know, get a straitjacket whatever it takes there's no gray out. And, you know, sit on your hands. I don't know what you would take instead of react. Investigate, look more carefully with a question What's going on here? What's going on you step back is not doesn't notice for a while. Let's look at investigate, understand. So that's your homework if you'd like. And so thank you very much.