

2007-12-03 The Seven Factors of Awakening Joy

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SPEAKERS

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This evening, I'd like to continue with my series of talks on the seven factors of awakening. And a little bit of a background for these seven factors. The movement of freedom, the movement of deep, liberating insight, in its most deep transformative way, takes just a moment doesn't take long. And to really be able to see through the illusion that we cling to, often, the delusions we live our life by the things that we grasp and cling to, that can cause tremendous amount of suffering. And in the moment, it's possible to experience the freedom of just letting go of opening up the hands of the mind and just just being free and open, receptive available. empty, empty of support clinging, empty of greed, hate and delusion they say. So it's a you know, it could take just a moment. However, to get to that moment, can take a while. And the different people, different lengths of time. It's like if you want to go to suppose if you want to go visit the Pacific and you go over there, you know, come around the bend over the crest or clay on San Gregorio road, and you suddenly see the Pacific you see it suddenly, you don't see it gradually. might see a sliver first, but it's a sudden sliver. And, but depending how long you have to drive, you know, if you're living in Redwood City, it takes 45 minutes to go over the hill. If you live in, you know, in Fremont, it takes longer If you live in Las Vegas, it takes longer. And the further east you go takes longer to get to takes a while. So we don't know where we're at. But the analogy for the path of the progress of development practice is sometimes it's a path is a road. But I like the analogy or the metaphor of a farmer planting a seed, which the Buddha gave that story, that metaphor for plants the seed and keeps the seed watered, and fertilized and things and the plant will grow and eventually it bears fruit. And you can't really hurry it along. You know, you can't go along and, you know, little seedling and pull out the roots and see how it's going, you know, that it just, you know, then you'll have a lot going, it's gonna die. So you have to kind of leave it alone. And you have to trust the natural process of this inner growth and in that regard, Buddhism these teachings of the Buddha focuses on the kind of inner growth that's kind of organic or natural, like a plant, but also looking at like a human being, like a child that's growing. There's the standard, the growth of a child with interest and developmental psychology, this child develops in various ways over time. In in Buddhist spiritual life, that development continues. In fact, all organic things evolve in variety of ways. And we can allow ourselves to be the victim or the victim's right word, we allow ourselves to be the be the recipient of just the natural growth and development as it you know, as it might come to us, or we can participate in it. And just like the farmer participates in watering, and fertilizing the plant, and you can participate in the process. So some people grow is too And perhaps until they're 18, or 21, or something magic day, and then they stop growing. And some people kind of stagnate, there's kind of reached a plateau in their life and not much further development that goes on the major big movements happen, you know, finished by time they come out of teenagehood. And, but it's also possible to have tremendous motor growth

going on into adulthood into old age. Some people have a big gap from you know, to turn 20 they stopped growing until they turn about 75. And then there's a rapid growth again. And so, I think spiritual practice of any kind, hopefully, is a way of continuing a natural process of development. It's not like adding something strange, but it's taking where we're at as adults, perhaps, and letting that continue and fostering a continuation of what I would like to believe just a natural process of growth and development.

So in this process of growth and development, in the Buddha talks about the seven factors of awakening. And these can be understood as seven different factors of mind or heart. psychological factors that get activated. When a person does meditation practice in a consistent deep way. And as these inner qualities, they're all qualities we all have. So the qualities of mindfulness paying attention, qualities of investigation, quality of energy, quality of joy, joy is a topic for tonight. And then tranquility or peace, serenity, the quality of concentration and the quality of equanimity that seven so these are all capacities we all have their potentials we all have. There's the mechanism inside our minds instead of brain or body, for those things to be there to be evoked and be strong, for many of us that can be dormant capacities. But with practice those capacities can be evoked, can be activated can be watered and developed. And in particular, seven factors of awakening are very important factors for meditation practice. And in their own time, they become stronger develop. And when meditation practices at its strongest, in particularly on retreats, then these seven factors can become so strong that they become the primary experiences primary thing person people are aware of. So, you know, you're not really aware anymore necessarily of people around you the room, your history, what's happened to you yesterday, we can cook breakfast, what's happening tomorrow, you know, that, you know, you have to worry about your taxes or something. You know, a lot of things fall away. And remarkably, what you really engaged in something's very much in the present moment. And remarkably, in very deep meditation, it can be these three factors become your primary experience. So it's quite something, you know, the experience of strong mindfulness, strong powers of investigation, strong sense of energy engagement, strong joy, strong tranquility, strong concentration, and very strong equanimity. Now, in it's a developmental model of Buddhism, the things develop over time. The seven factors of awakening are also presented in a developmental approach, where mindfulness is first. And when we start paying attention, and with a paying attention with enough attention as we pay attention to what's going on here, we get kind of interested what is going on here, not just paying attention to what's here, not just being present. When we get interested. What is this really what's, you know, it's just life about what's our experience, like What's it like being human being And that sense of maybe curiosity or interest or investigations process of wanting to discover much more deeply, perhaps even a kind of love of discovery, what is this? What is what's going on here. And that's a, that becomes the foundation for energy. Because if you really want to discover if you get interested, you'll apply energy. If you're not interested, you know, you're not gonna apply the energy. And then when the energy comes joy, which is we'll talk about more today, when you're energetically engaged and involved attempts to bring up joy. With strong joy and engagement. Then there's a way that morphs into tranquility and joy and tranquility together are wonderful conditions are the ground for strong concentration. And then strong concentration is the ground for the seed or the water for equanimity to to sprout, and equanimity sometimes just considered to be one of the crown jewels or one of the greatest fruits that the plant can produce. So it was kind of a developmental approach where they kind of build on each other one leads to the other. And here at IMC, we focus a lot on mindfulness practice. That's kind of the entryway to all this the beginning the entry, and then with that entry than the others with time as you do this practice, thoroughly, consistently, especially on the set on retreat where you can devote yourself to it all the time. These other factors grow.

So today's factor is joy. And people don't always associate joy with Buddhism. And some people think that we Buddhists are kind of you know, especially to come by IMC, you know, in a day we do have they said one day sittings like you know, on Saturday, and people are doing walking meditation out on the sidewalk here. And you know, you wouldn't sure people urban city don't think that we're joyful. Zombies out there, you know, strange people IMC, who walk around really slow night to the living dead, you know, walking around. And, or we keep talking about suffering, suffering as Buddhists, there's nothing less suffering. Give me a break. You know, we should do some, you know, positive thinking of affirmations that'd be good, but the suffering things wears me down. So sometimes people don't associate Buddhism with joy. But in fact, I hope that joy is a strong hallmark of Buddhist Buddhist Buddhist practice overall, even though we can't expect joy all the time. And sometimes, in fact, Buddhist practice does take us into the dark night of the soul takes us into the fire takes us into the recesses and monsters of our psyche and that's an important part of the process that sometimes But overall over a period of time, hopefully there's joy as part of it. And certainly in the early Buddhist tradition, the records that survive, that's written by the Buddhists themselves, so maybe a little bit biased. They write that the Buddhist community of the time, or at least Buddhist community was recognized for his joy and its lightness, and smiles and friendliness. And it was little bit surprise to people who were there was a very strong aesthetic tradition in ancient India. And people kind of expected the renounces the people and serious spiritual practitioners to be redundancies. And they were kind of surprised when they kind of came to the Buddhist monks and found them kind of, you know, just light and happy and smiling. What's going on? A lot of people will, you know, put a lot of emphasis on the Buddha's awakening and awakening. The Buddha the name for the Buddha comes from the word awake body, and the one who is awake and the seven factors of action King has the word Bodie and as well to focus sometimes on the awakening, but there's another earlier point in the Buddhist practice, which is very important, which was the Buddha's entry, or the door that he took it took to follow his path to awakening. So he searched, he was casting about searching around for some way to become free, you're liberated. And he wasn't finding anything. And then he found the key. And the key that he discovered was joy. Isn't that interesting? So the joy was the way in, what happened was that, as a story is told, you know, he, he didn't. He was about 35 or 36 years old, he had been practicing some six years, seven years, aesthetic practices, different meditation practices at the time. And then he was about to try it all. None of it seemed to go where he wanted to go. And then he remember a time when he was six years. is old and he was a spring day, assuming nice weather. And he was left outdoors and edge of a field where his farmer, his father was doing the ceremonial plowing first flowering of the year. And he was kind of forgotten in the ceremony of the first plowing. And he was sitting under the shade of a rose apple tree. And sitting there, maybe in a way that sometimes children can experience he sat upright and inexperienced entered into a kind of state of concentration, where there was joy that arose. And sometimes children can have this kind of spontaneous, seemingly spontaneous experiences of their life for joy or concentration, that are quite meaningful. And sometimes as adults sometimes sometimes are forgotten. And I think a few people when they start meditating, remember rather remembering dark memories and difficult memories. They remember the joyful ones that arise. So give you one example of my own life. When I was about 10 or so, I took this public bus to school, in a city in a city in Twister city in Italy where I lived. And I lived kind of the end of the bus line. So in the afternoon, I'd come home from school and buy my tickets and everything. And the way they had the buses back then they had a driver and they had the conductor, the conductor who sold the tickets.

And, so you know, so we were discovered was I should always sit in the same seat on the bus, because like maybe four seats back from the front. Because as we got to the end of the bus line, and the bus conductor was not going to sell any more tickets. He would come and take a seat near the front of the bus. And he hit this ledger. And he would write down a record of how many one way how many

doubles how many children, how many old people whatever, you know, different tickets that you sell. He had his ledger go down and if I saw just the right place I could look over his shoulder and watch him do his luxury, his record record recording and, and all I knew was a 10 year old was I would feel really good I would just feel kind of status kind of everything became whole complete, I my body kind of started feeling really warm, and full and light. And everything kind of fell away from, you know, from my faith, any concern or thoughts or worries or anything. And I just felt kind of just everything was good. And I think when I look back at that experience as an adult, it became a reference point for me for meditation practice, I can reference points of what's possible that I'd forgotten about. And also it became I understood it. It was very simply that I was getting concentrated, I was getting absorbed. There was some way in which I was kind of completely absorbed in that kind of pulled in to his keeping his record with his pen. That everything else around The way why I got so absorbed I can't tell you. But you know. And then when I was in college, I remember I love to take, I would say love exactly, but I couldn't look forward to taking certain exams, especially exams where you had to write little essays. And like I took these history classes and filled my mind with all these historical facts that would only stay in there for you know, as long as it needed for the exam minute was gone through was there long enough for the exam? And then I would, I would take an exam, there's so much concentration in the exam, you're involved, everything else falls away. And in that complete absorption and taking exams, I would feel so good, especially when I left. I mean, not nothing relief, but I was relief of the exam. That being done, but feeling completely empty, or purified in that process. And how to leave these classrooms and look around and just felt so cleansed and everything was so beautiful and sparkly and so full. So, this idea of getting concentrated and then having joy, some kind of joy and well being arise is something that even a six year old child can have some different people can have a times can happen. And, and the Buddha remember that he had that experience as a child. And he did and what he what he how he analyzed that was, he said that kind of joy was a non sensual joy. This was very important because in that ancient Indian tradition, there were asceticism was very important. sensual joy was mistrust, getting massage or, you know, all that kind of sensual joys we can have was mistrusted. And so the idea was was to not not engage in there because that was unreliable and not a source of ultimate happiness. But he found this particular joy or happiness came out of this concentrated state that wasn't born from sensuality, was born from it. And it was called noncentral. Joy's the technical word, Buddhism. And so it, it arose from that state of concentration. And the Buddha said, because it was taught himself because it's not essential. It's not to be blunt, it's not blameworthy or it's not unreliable. And so he decided that that was the door. And so he entered into that joy into that state of concentration, and use that that, that absorption with that joy, as a way of getting his mind still enough, quiet enough and insightful enough penetrating enough to see deeply into the roots of a psyche. So here we see in some ways, the beginning of Buddhism can be said, was the door into Buddhism. The Buddha was through the experience of joy. So that's one workplace we see joy as being important. You see Joy, the emphasis in joy and well being appearing in many different places in the Buddhist teaching, number of different lists has joy as an important part of it. Joy, delight, happiness are all important terms. Sometimes in English, these terms are translated as rapture or bliss. I prefer to be more low key about it.

So, joy, happiness and well being I like the light, gladness use sometimes. And what's interesting is that some people associate meditation, Buddhist meditation with concentration. And, and some people who sit down to meditate feel like I have to get concentrated and they bear down. That's what the whole name of the game is concentration. I got to get concentrated. It has to be now you know, for my neighbor at least. Or you know, because we have such a strong association with some people. concentration. It turns out that one of the ways to get concentrated a healthy way to get concentrated, the healthy kind of concentration we're talking about in Buddhism arises out of joy, out of a sense of well being and happiness, that if you, if you don't have some modicum of well being of happiness, then

it's difficult to get a strong healthy concentration going. So some people buy that forget about the joy part. And just try it again. Okay, let's just get this concentration thing going. So it's certainly easier to talk about having joy than doing it. And I can well imagine that some of you now feel oppressed or discouraged. Because you know, gee, you know, I don't have much joy. And now I'm being told Joy's important thing. I guess I came into the wrong place. And maybe I should have thought that old school Buddhism was better for me to kind of talk about suffering. Because there I just I don't I saw myself but I don't see myself today is joy thing. So, but again remember it's a developmental process. So that joy itself is conditioned in other things being in place. And so, it's a matter of kind of finding the right nutrients they can nourish the arising of well being and happiness. So one of them for example, is living ethically having personal integrity. This is one of the one of the nourishments for joy. If you expect to have joy, and you going around lying, stealing and killing, you know something is not right. You know, so you got to clean up your act. Another source of joy is certain kind of healthy faith or confidence. Confidence in the practice confidence in the in the goal confidence in yourself in the conference itself can bring a kind of certain level of well being so if you don't have confidence, then maybe that's what needs to be addressed is to look at confidence. In this list of the seven factors awakening, energy is a precursor for joy. And how I understand that is that as you're practicing mindfulness, as you practice mindfulness and really be present with the experience of your life, and you're here enough to notice what's happening, you get interested, you can look more deeply investigate, as you investigate this energy that arises. energy of engagement, of questioning, of wondering what is the experience what's going on. And as we have energy and as we investigate, one of the things we start discovering is all the ways in which we are fragmented, all the ways in which our mind goes off in all kinds of different directions. And we notice how easy it is the mind to go into the future, the past To fallacy to thoughts of other things. And we had cut up, we get caught up in all these different worlds of thoughts and thinking. And it disperses our energy disperses our, our mind our attention. And so you start noticing that and at some point as you engage more fully in your present moment experience, two things can happen. One is you start naturally or you start choice fully, letting go of all the distracting movements of the mind, you start to do start stopping interested in thinking about your, your list of your planning list you're making for tomorrow, you let go of your resentments from yesterday or 10 years ago. Because you're you realize that that's not the present moment that keeps you scattered, it keeps you distracted, keeps you removed from a deep entering into this present moment. So you let go of these things. The second is that even if you don't let go of them intentionally, they fall away as you get more and more engaged and interested in this present moment experience. So even if something is as simple as your breathing, if you get really interested in your breathing, and really committed to your breathing, say, I'm going to be so committed to getting more committed to my breathing than I am to all my resentments. I'm going to be more committed to committed to my breathing than to all the fantasies I have about what's going to happen in the future for me,

I'm more committed to my breathing, then all my What else? All my self preoccupation. I'm more committed to my breathing than all the ways in which I am critical of myself or critical of others. I'm more committed to my breathing than I am trying to figure out how far I've gone in my concentrate. Issue, a measure for Africa. So video is to be completely committed, if you're really committed to your breathing in a strong way, then naturally, the preoccupation of things will fall away. And when we get really involved in that kind of, then we in Buddhism, we talked about a unification process happens, we get unified, where our intentions are, our bodily sensations, or emotions, our thoughts all are working for the same in the same direction for the same purpose. So if you're following your breath, for example, focusing on your breath, your intention is to be with your breath. Your body sensations are not only the stations of your body breathing, but also as you get concentrated. There's your sensations of energy, sensation, sensations of lightness, of warmth, vibration of different things like beginning In your body that are a result of getting concentrated, that all kind of come along with holistically your whole

holy come along, around or with the focus on the breath. So the bodily sensations there are your emotions or feelings joy arises into well being arises in connection to it. You're and then your thoughts if you're thinking at all, then you're thinking also you're thinking about the breath, you're engaged in the mental your cognitive life is focused on the breath experience itself and what's happening for you here now. Now, I could from a distance seem very boring, to have your life organized around your whole body or being organized around something as simple as a breath. But it tends to create a lot of strong sense of well being or pleasure to have your whole body harmonized, working for the same purpose at the same time, concentrate in the same way and attempt to and everything else falls away. The forces of distractions, the forces of irritation, the forces of worry, the forces of, of preoccupation fall away, then it gets replaced by sense of well being. happiness, joy, delight, just to delight to have all everything you who you are working harmoniously together in the same direction for the same thing. It's easier said than done, of course. But that's the direction in which the practice can go. And so it takes a lot of mindfulness to see what's going on. Well, it has to take a strong commitment to notice what's happening and stay with the noticing, as opposed to getting carried away into the thoughts and concerns we have. And then it takes a real interest to discover what's really going on here in the mind. How does the mind work? I'm like, Am I pushing too hard? Am I too complacent? You know what's happening in the mind investigation, the qualities of the mind as you're doing it. And as you get familiar with your mind, get familiar with yourself, we tend to find the right balance. Lots of energy, not pushing too hard, not pushing too little. But we feel ourselves engaged. And when there's joy, some people will call joy. zest or, you know their word they have is wrapped up attention wrapped in closely connected to rapture. So your attention, your interest, your energy is all connected and engaged in an energetic way, and your attention is wrapped. And in rather than the breath being boring, the breath now becomes so amazingly interesting, because the sense of well being and joy that you have, is so much better than almost anything else you can experience. It's can be different than other forms of joy. It's different. There's noncentral joy that can come out of meditation is a different kind of joy than sensual joy or condition, joy, joy that arises because the conditions of the world are still are giving a cause to be happy. You know, if you win the lottery, some people get happy. But I've been told that I read someplace that a year after winning the lottery, most people that won the lottery are not wish they hadn't. You know, their life is not any happier than it was before, especially worse. So we think the lottery is a good thing.

So there's a lot of happiness that can give us a real kind of rush, even, but the rush of happiness because, you know, we get praised or something is not considered reliable or as clean, a kind of happiness and joy is this noncentral joy that can rise in meditation, it's very, it's very clean. So as it arises, rapt attention arises. Different people experience it differently. But sometimes there's a shift and change energetically in the body where the body gets more kind of energized. In a kind of like, you know, really clean strong way. Sometimes the posture changes the posture sometimes gets, because more upright and straight. And I remember I sat years of Zen practice in Zen practice, where the emphasis was on sitting, you know, very, very particular meditation posture, you have to sit, ideally, full half lotus or full lotus, and you have to kind of sit up straight, really good, straight back and have your hands together like this. You know? And it's a great way to sit. But, you know, my body just wasn't interesting when I was young, and, you know, tight and everything and he's just, you know, like, you know, as I was in, the teachers are always coming, adjusting my posture and helping straighten me out. And, and then I did this Vipassana practice, on retreat. And when this energetic joy is joyful energy kind of kicked in. It's like this force that kind of kicks in My body by itself and I had a straighter posture that I ever had in Zen. And it wasn't because I was trying to hold it that way with my mind. It wasn't from the from the outside in that way there was from the inside out. This energy is current was arising within me and holding me up right and presence. Some people that report that can feel like for some people, doesn't matter, everyone. So if you don't like this image, you have to have it. But sometimes like, your

body's a rocket and the Rockets taking off. And some people smell like quieter than that. And, but can feel very light, very warm, usually feeling very whole. Sometimes the feelings are very beautiful, beautiful, feeling very clean. Some people talk about a process of purification in the process. So a sense of joy. And so mindfulness, if you do it diligently, hopefully will lead to a sense of investigation. Investigation hopefully will lead to a heightened energy engagement effort. And as you get more fully engaged in the process, hopefully you start getting absorbed in what you're doing. And you're interested in other things. They're not the meditation, fall away, fall away, fall away. And when that falls away, and you're really they're fully there with what you're paying attention to, like the breath, that then it opens up these channels of joy of the light of well being. That becomes something that's very helpful for this practice here.

It's very important not to be in a hurry. It's very important not to judge yourself or criticize you Because it's not happening for two reasons, one, because it's not a good idea, I guess. And the other is that it just it actually moves you in the direction in the opposite direction you're trying to go. We're trying to unify the mind around something, and you start criticizing yourself for criticizing how poorly you're doing and how you're not going far enough. That almost guarantees it's not going to happen. You know, so you've kind of you've muddying, muddying the water just kind of interfering with the very process as soon as you start doing self criticism kind of things. That make sense. So don't bother and if you can, and, and the important thing, in any case, I believe, is not having joy. The important thing is to be mindful and present and through your mindfulness. Understand how you can free yourself from the ways in which you're clinging, your resistance, your judgment is causing your suffering. That's the key thing to be mindful and to see with your mindfulness, learn how to be free of suffering of clinging. That's the key thing. If you keep that in mind, then if you practice and you start thinking, that joy Gil's talking about I haven't gotten it yet. boy am I allowed a meditator Wait a minute, he said more important than joy was to notice where the clinging is and here's an example. I suppose to let go of that okay, like oh, that okay. That is a lot better now. Good. Let's try it again. I'm sure it's easier now. They're not judging. I wish it was that easy. So So, one of the reasons to talk about the seven factors of awakening and today joy is that Some of these potentials, these capacities, can begin showing themselves sometimes very subtly, very slightly at first. And in a very open, generous, light way, without clinging or holding on or building a whole case around it. It's very helpful to learn to recognize the presence and appreciate the presence. If you don't appreciate the joy is there to appreciate the value of joy, then you might not actually pay much attention to it, you might not give it enough time in the sun, you might not give it enough attention to feed it. So it's healthy to when the joy arises. To have very light on clinging, appreciation of it. Oh, yeah, this is good. I want to push it away. I've known some people who've tried to push away joy in meditation. Like it's not good. Some people because of their religious upbringing they've had in their religion that they grew up in. Somehow joy was considered to be kind of Same there's something wrong about supposed to always be kind of suffering. This is not even Buddhism. And so I've had people that I've had to I've had the privilege of telling some people who were meditators, that it was okay to experience joy. Because they were they have strong message they weren't supposed to experience it. And then I had the problem once. of so in this developmental approach, approach, see, Joy is right in the middle of the seven factors of awakening. And there's other factors that go beyond that high above that. And there's much better things in meditation, enjoy. So at some point, I knew that I had experienced a better, better, more more more satisfying, deeper, more satisfying experiences enjoy. So I started having this meditative joy arise and I repeated Press that I pushed it down, I kept it at bay. And now I'm thinking about that stuff, I want the deeper stuff and holding it down and this force was inside of your joy and I was doing walking meditation at some point through this and I started feeling a headache, the headache of resisting by joy, silly right can be pretty silly. And and, and I noticed that after a while I had this is this is silly. So I let go of my resistance to the

joy and the joy kind of swelled up and once I gave it room to be there, then stay for about a minute or two and then I dropped down further

You know, this whole resistant thing so you know, as soon as I opened up to it allowed to be there, then the practice unfolded went down to the next level. So don't resist your joy. Appreciate it. But don't always expect it either. Just you know, mindfulness has there's a certain different kind of joy in mindfulness practice, which is different than his meditative joy that comes with energy and all that. There's the joy, a certain kind of sublime happiness or joy or well being or satisfaction of knowing that through mindfulness, you're in touch with what's true. So even if you are feeling lousy, and all the different forms of laziness, there's a certain satisfaction that can come to knowing Yes, I'm in touch with what's true right now. This is right now here and now this is what's true. And there's something very valuable and important is connecting and being present with what's true. into real to have the trust and the understanding come valuable. To connect with what's true, can also bring a certain kind of joy. So one way or the other. I hope you leave tonight. A little more joyful than your king. Thank you