

2008-02-25 The Seven Factors of Awakening Equanimity

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

This name is evening, I want to continue and finish a series of talks that I started in the fall on the seven factors of awakening. And we had an interruption because of another series of talks I said I would do. And so for those of you who weren't there in the fall for the earlier part of the series, the seven factors of awakening are very central to the whole enterprise of Buddhist practice. And in fact, when the Buddha was getting ready to die in the last days of his life, he made a statement, which I think is quite significant. What he said that he was going to summarize he was going to summarize what he's learned, what he learned what he discovered. In his spiritual practice, and he didn't, he didn't talk about beliefs or truths or teachings and kind of conventional way. He said that what he discovered were particular qualities of mind and particular practices to lead not only specific, wonderful qualities, qualities of mind, but also lead to awakening to freedom. And that in the list of things he discovered, he gave a list of the seven factors of awakening. And the word Buddhism comes from the word Buddha, but also from the word Bodhi. Word Buddha comes from Bodhi and Bodhi needs to be awake. And in strictly in Buddhist language, we wouldn't say the Buddha was enlightened. You'd say he was awakened, he came awake and so what the enterprise of Buddhism folk focuses on is becoming awake. And there are seven factors to this process of awakening. So Buddhism is about awakening. And in fact awakening is not Buddhism. Awakening is not an ism. Awakening is not institution or teachings. Sometimes the factors of awakening awakening is sometimes treated like the sap that runs through a tree that keeps the tree nourished. The life the vitality the trees is not nourished by the you know, it's not found in the order say this differently, that Buddhism is not found in the in the trunk of all the teachings and practices institution is not in the branches all the different branches of Buddhism when the leaves in the flowers. Buddhism is the core of it. What keeps it alive is the awakening the process awakening the awakened mind. And, and that awakened mind that awakening is not meant to be something we study in books and nods Oh, that's nice. It's meant to be something refined in our own minds to find in ourselves. It's something we personalize, not by taking it in from outside, but rather something we discover within ourselves. Something is quite beautiful and quite profound, and also quite helpful for us in our lives. So these seven factors of awakening are some of the primary inner qualities that get cultivated in Buddhist practice, that lead to awakening that supports awakening. And these seven factors sometimes are offered progressively as a progressive development of these factors develop one after the other, and sometimes they're offered collectively work together balance in a balance, they work together. And the first factor is the factor of mindfulness of paying attention. And this is, of course, quite crucial. If you want to personalize this Buddhism, this awakened, waking awakens wake wakefulness is found first and foremost by being attentive, paying attention, and paying attention to yourself to the world around you. But particular not exactly to yourself, but to some quality that's very intimate. To each of us, very close and so close and intimate, we often don't notice it, because we use it

as the currency or it's the vehicle through which we negotiate our life. And that is attention. So we learned to pay attention and in a careful way and develop our attention. But as we do that, the quality of attention gets stronger and becomes not just something that's invisible to us something we use, but not really so aware of all the time, but extends out and highlight not what we're aware of, but the fact that we are aware And

it's quite an amazing thing to be aware, to be conscious. And you know, it's kind of mind boggling, I think, to consider, you know, where the universe come from and out of this universe, how is it that the universe is, you know, created these beings that are conscious, that are aware in the way that we're aware? What is this awakening? What is this awareness we all have. And it said in Buddhism, that mindfulness or attention or awareness is closely akin to the quality of being awake of wakefulness. And so it's something we already have and ignore, we already have it's relatively accessible to us. It's possible to get a sense of close at hand. So quality of wakefulness, being awake. In fact, sometimes I prefer to use the word awake To be awake, to being mindful. To Be mindful now it's pretty popular in many circles in psychology and many places. And it's become almost like a catch word. If you were to sell a book and Buddhism in the West now you put mindfulness in the title. And sometimes when a word becomes so popular, it kind of people kind of lose the real understanding what it's about. So sometimes I like to play around with using the word wakefulness to be awake, we practice being awake, and warranting the qualities of wakefulness that that, you know, we are awake conventionally. I know he's quite different than being sleepy or doe or drowsy, drowsy or agitated, or confused, when we're awake, wake up from a nice nap, and feel quite clear and the mind is quite, you know, emptied out. And it's like, you know, like the smog is left the San Francisco Bay and you can see across the day until the hills across the, across the bay, and there's a clarity, there's an ease and so Almost as if that wakefulness that we have, is not exactly invisible, but it's kind of like a glass window, which is so clear, so clean, you almost don't see the window, you know, the windows there. But it's so transparent. So the mind that's awake is kind of is there, but you almost don't see it. But it's so transparent and so light and open, and it's able to let everything through it. You see everything through is very clearly and cleanly, lots of space in the mind for things. So the first factor is mindfulness. So we cultivate mentals, we develop the mindfulness. One of the other reasons I like the word awake or wakefulness is when we try to be awake to something. We're not trying to change it. We don't have an agenda, about trying to make it go away or to hold on to it or develop it or something to be awake because just to be present for it. And the quality of presence is so special. We're awake, we're present. We're Clear, we're alert in a very nice way. Sometimes people practice mindfulness, this is such a technique and trying to do something and develop something and all that, but you just be awake. And the suggestion I have is to that kind of attention that is like, like into wakefulness is something that's accessible right here, you the second quality of awakening is that of investigation, the quality aspect of paying attention carefully to what's going on, and understanding looking deeply penetrating what's actually here, seeing a deeper, deeper way, what's actually going on here. And it's quite common for people who live on the surface of their lives to surface the ideas of their life, their ideas of who they are, the ideas Who are the people are, what the reality is, and to live kind of reacting, reacting and responding to the world through a filter of many concepts and ideas and some of those concepts are useful and some of them get in our way some, some of them cause tremendous amount of damage. And so one of the functions of investigation is to cut through the conceptual overlay that we have in our experience. And it's quite astounding, how it's it kind of almost certainly humbling, but quite astounding, you realize what a phenomenal degree we paint our reality that we look at, we see and experience through with a paint of concepts and ideas. And so to be able to cut through those ideas and concepts and see what's actually here. It takes some more careful investigation. And as we begin seeing more carefully, then we can start kind of making wiser choices about how we live our life.

The third factor of awakening is energy or effort. And so it said that often comes naturally after with investigation, we get curious and interested in paying more attention. There's energy there. So there's a kind of Energy engagement, coming forward, stepping forward into our life into our practice with mindfulness investigation. We're not going to be couch potatoes. When we do Buddhist practice, we're going to we're going to show up and be present and there's engagement here. Buddhism is not about wishful thinking, wonderful to be awake, but it's really you doing a practice you kind of engaging. Without that engaging, there is no process of waking up. The fourth, fourth factor is joy. And there's a quality of joy that comes with awakening and supports awakening. And this is very important to realize because there sometimes people get kind of grim, with our Buddhist practice, they take it so seriously. And, and, you know, after all, they're grappling with their suffering. And within then that's grappled with your sense of self and a lot of different chaotic challenges and doing the practice but hopefully As the practice develops, that comes with a feeling of being lighter, easier at ease more. And with that ease or lightness also comes a sense of joy of delight with having a practice with being present, being alive, being engaged, but also being not just engaged with energy, but being engaged in a way that we're doing something like practicing mindfulness of breathing, for example, that we're not fragmented. We're not kind of going off and distracted trips with our mind. But we're really fully present in that full presence in one thing is a joyful is joyful. If you fully engage yourself in reading a wonderful book or a craft or something you really put yourself in quickly in there's a way in which that becomes a joy for the delightful for our being. I discovered this when I when I was 18 and 19. And although it was I took the DMV test, you know, partment of Motor Vehicles test to get a driver's license. You know, I was kind of nervous before taking it. But you know, I studied up and, and then once I sat down to write those written questions, it was just everything stopped, everything disappeared, you know, the world around me, the DMV disappeared, it just me and those questions. And I was completely absorbed and taking those questions. And by the time I finished, I felt so happy. You know, that doesn't make sense, right? But it wasn't the questions made me happy. I didn't feel like I didn't get like a perfect score. But, but it's a full engagement. So there's something about the fully present engaged, which kind of produces joy. Then, the next factor is tranquility or calm, to be relaxed. So it's not just about the energy of engagement or Joy, but it's also having it with a sense of relaxation of ease. And so much of the beautiful qualities of our hearts of our minds, shine come forth easiest to come forth in a very natural way, when we're relaxed, and that for some people, it goes against their intuition or their feelings about attitudes about life, or life isn't always about doing or avoiding or resisting or somehow always engaging, engage our muscles, we tighten up or we reach forward trying to hold on. We do it with our eyes, with our brain, all these ways in which we're always active and doing and busy and filling ourselves with activities. And so there's something about being relaxed and at ease. It's very profoundly important for the practice life when people are trying to practice partly because the relaxation needs allows for something to bubble up through us that maybe is quite shy. That is can be pushed away or overlooked or Our covered over when we're always in the kind of active mode of taking charge, and doing and making things happen being successful. And so what is it that shy? What is it that's there kind of in the background that can show for what kind of inner sensitivity. And I this is important because awakening part of awakening is a very profound and so much subtle sensitivity, a wakeful sensitivity to ourselves in life around us. And it's best to have that when you're relaxed to tranquility is a very important quality.

The next quality of awakening is concentration. And then many people associate Buddhism with or meditation with getting concentrated. And concentration is another beautiful quality of mind. Sometimes people have negative associations to it if it's a lot of work and they can't get concentrated and seems like they have to kind of try so hard, but the concentration factor comes after After the joy factor, and it comes after the tranquility factor. And this is not a coincidence, it turns out that in order to be concentrated, it's very supportive, to have a sense of well being. So you don't conflict with yourself so that you kind of feel settled on yourself and contented and happy. And then it's important to be relaxed.

If you're trying too hard. You can get concentrated. There's many, many meditators who have gotten meditation headaches from trying too hard. And so being relaxed and settled is important. So concentration also very much is very supportive this process because it supports investigation presence, because it's keeping us not only very present so we can see in a clear way like a tripod helps a telescope be very still. So you can see clearly, but concentration also helps with his process of unifying the mind. word for concentration might be better translated as composure, because it would compose into composing ourselves so that there's no fragmentation or split in our being split between thinking about the future or the past or other places, other times, other desires. But we're really here in a full integrated way. The word concentration could also be called the integrated integration process. So those are the first six of the seven factors of awakening. And each of those is pretty marvelous. Each of those people can have tremendous appreciation of delight. And each of those is the background and the support for the foundation for the last factor, which is the factor for tonight we're talking about, and that is equanimity, the awake the economic equanimity factor of awakening, and equanimity. To the uninitiated, might seem like a little odd thing. Some people associate equanimity with a difference, or aloofness or kind of a coolness kind of equanimity is one of the most sublime or the most sublime emotion or state of mind or virtue that Buddhism champions Buddhism points to. So to hear that you say, oh, maybe I don't know what equanimity is, if it's Buddhism, thinks it's so special. It's certainly not in difference, certainly not aloofness. The. It's something that comes out of these after as built on these other wonderful factors when you're settled and attentive, when you're clear, but what's happening when your joy tranquility concentration from those factors, then mind has a tremendous stability. Where the mind has a stability where it doesn't get pushed around by things. It doesn't have a lot of desires are trying to reach out to grab onto something sometimes or resist things. It's not for or against things. It's like the mind now has tremendous poise, or tremendous room. It can hold anything. Sometimes they talk in zen, talk about big mind. Having a mind that can include everything within it with infinite amount of space. So we're not claustrophobic. We're not by what's going on, we're not pressed, we're not offended and afraid. Just the mind can take in everything, whatever's going on. Very open mind. The mind that has equanimity Not only is balanced, but it's very soft. It's very malleable. It feels radiant. The when it's well developed and strong and again I think some people might hear that oh the mind it doesn't react doesn't get involved that seems kind of strange it seems to maybe kind of go but to have the mind kind of shine and then there's no agitation in the mind. No movement in the mind that's gonna upset that radiance.

So you know, it's kind of like the water is completely clear and lucid on an Alpine lake. There's no wind to ruffle the surface of the lake you see this beautiful reflection of the mountains around it's just so pleasant so wonderful, beautiful to see that. It's like a jewel. And, and then you see Oh, that's really nice and put your finger in it to feel the top of the water and the ripples go out and you kind of now agitated with was so pristine. Or some kid throws a rock in Don't do that. You know, just so nice to be there that, you know, that stillness that's there. So it's kind of a profound stillness in the mind as well. Some people might say, well, profound stillness, where do I find myself in that? You know, I'm important. Where do I find myself? And? Well, to find yourself in that or to make yourself in that is like throwing a big boulder into that pristine lake. It's like that makes a lot of waves. Why would you do that? The let things be at peace be peaceful with things as they are. One of the primary causes for losing our equanimity, losing our balance with things is with some way or other we take things too personally. And one of the ways to develop equanimity is not to take things so personally not to measure things to the standard of myself in mind, what is it what is going to do to me? is threatening me just going to do the good for me? Does this? Do I want this? Do I not want this? How does this compare to other people's self? All this kind of activity activity of selfing? The mind does. And it's kind of obvious because I think but most of you, if you kind of kept the statistics of what your minds mostly thought about chances are that a majority of

you, the majority of the time, your thoughts are self referential. Somehow with everybody to yourself, and that's, you know why you'll get bored.

So, to not do not be playing the self game. Do not be selfing is one of the supportive aspects of developing equanimity. So, the balanced mind even mind, a spacious mind that can hold a lot of things in mind which is so spacious and relaxed, radiant, happy that it does not attending to be reactive to what goes on inside you and outside of you. If you are tired and frazzled, upset and someone cuts you off in traffic, it's very easy to get upset to kind of say something you wrote great later you wish you hadn't said if someone if you miss if you're in the same situation, and but you've had a nice nap, you're not in a hurry to get anywhere and you're relaxed, beautiful day. It doesn't matter if someone cuts you off in traffic you've okay I'll just back off a little bit here. Let the person in and you can handle that can hold that and then relax mind. So an economists mind can hold experiences. I remember once when I had a somewhat strong degree of equanimity in my mind I I was doing walking meditation at a retreat. And I had my I had my path for the walking meditation had my 30 feet from the universe, there was mine, to walking back and forth. And I was walking back and forth there for quite a while. And then at some point, someone entered my pathway. Now I was going, you know, to the other end away from him, he kind of kept them into him, I found that I figured, oh, he just needs to get somewhere he just couldn't go, you know, using my pathway in order to, you know, walk someplace else. And so I just kind of didn't give any heed. So I went to the end of my path and that turned around to walk back. And then it was like a game of chicken You know, I was wondering, well, what's going on here? You know, just push is not getting out of my path. I'm here, you know, I was here first, what's going on here? And so, I think it's not uncommon for people to get a little bit annoyed or angry in situations like that. So in fact, I got angry. And the anger I had so much equanimity, that the anger I could feel the anger kind of rise up out of my torso. And it kind of just floated off like a bubble. And, and just went up into my mind and just passed right through. And the idea has the moat at the time was, my mind was like Teflon, and it didn't stick. The anger rose it was triggered, but mine just had all this Roman space if it wasn't gonna pick anything up or do anything with it. And just, you know, it lasted about second and a half. And I don't remember the end of the story. I think he left eventually but But what was so remarkable to me was that time was was in that space of equanimity, I could still be angry. But the anger had no charge for me. And I and part of the lack of charge was I didn't get involved. I just had a lot of space for the mind, that's equanimous is a really beautiful mind. It's one of the most beautiful experience of mine that a person can have. It's Trump comes with a tremendous sense of well being tremendous sense of peace. So, we say in Buddhism is probably one of the most sublime experiences you can have, when your primary mode of mood of your mind is one of equanimity. It's quite beautiful. It's sometimes a certain kind of very powerful equanimity is also associated in Buddhism with love. And, and the analogy for this is, when there's a lot of strong there's a typical kind of equanimity, very strong balance of mind evenness of in relationship to others, that is likened to a grandmother's mind. The grandmothers equanimity. Some of you may be your grandparents. So maybe you can relate. And if you're a first time parents, you will understand this. But sometimes, you know, the grandparents, you know, the grandparents because they raised kids. And so they've been through it all. And so they have a certain kind of balanced understanding of what it's like to have kids raise kids. And so they don't get caught up in the drama of the kids in a way that first time parents might do it. Like I know firsthand. And,

and so, you know, the kid comes up to you and says, you know, Oh, I love you. Will you marry me? That's nice. It's cute. You know, if you don't kind of slow, not so sweet, slow that's what kids do. Because you know that administrator they're going to come and tell you I hate you. The first time you hear your kids say I hate using oh my god what a monster I made but a grandparents what kids do you know? Or they scrape themselves you know I'm amazed now that more like younger kid my five year old now falls and hurts himself I listened to the quality of the crying and Okay, I don't have to do

anything you know I'll just I'll just be nearby in case he wants me knows that I'm there but that kind of that quality of being distressed and upset and angry and attain that quality it's better actually healthier to leave them alone. And but with the first my first kid, I didn't know that. So every little squeak so important got to do something. So grand motherly love is this. The grandmother has all this love For sure, but she also has this wisdom, this understanding that she doesn't get caught up in the drama of it all the concerns of it all sees it on bigger perspective, and so is able to handle it all in a different way. So this is equanimity we're talking about in Buddhism is often is also also a kind of way to relate to other people with a kind of love and caring and you know, but it also has this beautiful quality equanimity as part of balance, even even just non reactivity. So the equanimity factor of awakening is said to be the last factor. Kind of one way of understanding this it is a kind of a progress that's in some way or other. Not necessarily so linear or so clear. so obvious always. But that's one way other as people deepen in mindfulness practice, they kind of deepen along these seven steps. It might be over a long, long retreat. It might be over years, but over Time these different qualities get stronger and kind of follow each other. Sometimes they also all get their together. And then one of the interesting elements of practice is to bring balance into them. So they're better they balance each other, they come into balance. And this particularly happens on retreats when the meditation practice becomes very deep and very, one of the very wonderful experiences in deep meditation practice is when so much of our conventional concerns almost all our conventional concerns fall away the minds I've caught up in, you know, shopping and making phone calls and getting oil change or taxes or who said what to who, when, and, you know, and our desires and all kinds of stuff, our resentments all those concerns fall away. And also so much of kind of the normal way of kind of feeling who we are falls away. Normal identity and noble cause normal concerns we have about who we are and History falls away into some very little less left, just very present with a lot of this extra stuff falling away. And the primary thing that remains in highlights, like it's like the seven peaks of the mountain that you looking up in the Alps, you know, to see these big seven mountains, so obvious you can't that's like the main thing going on just like an off the greatest VISTA is seven factors are the primary thing in your experience. And it's kind of like I was gonna rarefied everything else, because, you know, falling away. And then bringing those into balance. Having those in balance is very important. And sometimes people will kind of work on finding just the right balance. When the seven factors of awakening are well balanced, and when the equanimity is very, very strong. This is very, very, this is extremely supportive for the final step of practice, which is the step of the final awakening, the full awakening that can happen this moment of keep letting go It's kind of like, I don't know if this works is that analogy

that comes to mind. Because I went to the Exploratorium this week with my son. And they have, they're these kinds of places, they have these big kind of funnels, where you put a coin in it, and it goes right up at the top edge, and it goes around and around and around and around and around. It's kind of fun to watch. Unless you kind of think about life beings go around and around, around my life, my life has been around, it's always going around the circles. And then but it kind of follow it down, down, down and finally gets still and still it goes faster and faster in the middle. And then it comes to a place you know, in this analogy of complete balance, and then when it comes to that midpoint, it can just drop, it falls into where the money goes. So we have them in complete balance and economists when there's no the mice, not going in circles, wanting things and not wanting things and chasing Are things and has a tremendous balance employs a subtle missing piece when the Alpine lake is completely still. Then at some point the bottom of the bucket falls out. At some point you drop through the whole or at some point, the, the, everything's perfectly balanced, everything's connected. All the others are everything's just all right, the flower opens. So some point when everything's set and balanced, and there's no ruffling the wind, no, no desires that are agitating the water, no aversions outage, getting the water, no fear. At some point, the lotus blossom just opens and the mind is open, clear, free. And it's kind of like the mind has let go of itself. It's kind of like of awareness. So almost like consciousness is a very subtle

form of cleaning Very, very slow from clinging. And at some point, that last little clinging thing like is consciousness itself. Let's go, consciousness lets go of itself. And that is considered to be the step, awakening freedom. You've come to freedom and that is very significant experience, because it helps free us from from some of the primary things that we cling to in our lives. It said in Buddhism, it's very hard to let go of the route clings that support our life. And sometimes you need a very profound kind of experience of the mind opening or dropping in order to kind of uproot some of these forms of grasping, clinging attachment that we have. So the seven factors of awakening are beautiful qualities of mind. There's something that there are a list of qualities, seven qualities that anybody who is going to be doing mindfulness practice for a long time. Like you find to do it for your life for your primary practice. You should, you should memorize the list. You should know what these seven are. Someone asks you what are some factors, you can go to easy mindfulness, energy, mindfulness, investigation, energy, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. So you should have them close at hand because if you have them close by, then you can recognize them when they occur in practice. You don't want to be greedy for them. You don't want to push too hard for them to be there. But the ability to recognize the presence of beautiful states of mind even when they're very, very subtle, strengthens and nourishes them. And so we wouldn't be able to do recognize them when they're there and acknowledge them. appreciate them. And as we nourish them, they become stronger, and become something that support us in our life in general, the tremendously supportive as we go about our life, but also that they are creating the foundation for being able to let go in a way that's very, very meaningful to let go of our deepest attachments. And for those of you who are afraid of letting go of your attachments, like oh, no, that's I can't do that. That doesn't seem so it seems kind of like you know, now we're really talking about Grimm. Remember that you're asked to let go of your attachments. When all these when the mind has all these beautiful qualities in place. You have all this as strong well being joy, tranquility, concentration, integration, all those things are there. And because they're there, there's a much greater willingness Another willingness but understanding of the wisdom, the value of a profound letting go of what we're attached to.

So rather than a diminishing of yourself and letting go, it's a kind of an enhancement enhancement in a way. But we can't say enhancement of self a sense of self. Because the sense sense of self is just ripples on the surface of that lake. So I hope that makes sense. Seven factors of awakening. We have five minutes. Would you like to end early Would you like to ask questions?

I'm a little bit confused about mindfulness. Same concentration.

So she's confused about mindfulness and concentration. Many people are too common confusion. Mindfulness is noticing what's happening. Concentration is being present with composure, he will be able to focus on what's happening. So we'll be focused on what's happening and noticing what happening are two different factors of the mind. So you can be really focused, but you don't necessarily see deeply what's there. So I might, I might hold this up like this upside down, right? So I personally really focused on that. The mind doesn't waver, you're really looking on that. Maybe you know, you think Well, no, I don't know what this is. But it looks this. This looks like something dangerous. So I'm gonna go I'm not going to lose my focus and I jump up and bite me. So you really focused mindfulness is you look at this and you recognize Oh, That's an upside down bill. You really see what it is. So concentration is the ability to really focused and the stability of mind. It really stays in and undistracted way with what's going on. And mindfulness is the ability to notice what's there. Make some sense.

Yes. Can I say that? concentration is kind of action? Like I decide to focus, but mindfulness is just I see. I mean, concentration is something that I do. And mindfulness is just, I don't do it. I just look.

I think it's a good question also the degree to which there is effort and doing in all this. And I think both for both mindfulness of concentration there are times when effort is required, and at times when it seems effortless, and, and sometimes we're better off learning how to relax to let the natural mindfulness of concentration be there. And sometimes we don't. We better off actually making some effort. So, I want to stop. But I want to say one thing. Next week, I'm not planning to be here. And there's a wonderful teacher named Suzuki Caro, who will come and give a talk. And he was a Buddhist monk for many, many years. And with Buddhists in Thailand and his name, Santi Caro means, literally Pāli means Peacemaker. And he's actually very involved. He was involved still somewhat in a variety of socially engaged, politically engaged kind of Buddhist activity. And a few weeks ago, I asked he's coming down From he's visiting from out of state, staying in Berkeley in order to come down and give a talk on next week. He's taking bark down from Berkeley. And they'll take go to the Millbrae BART station. I'll go pick him up in the afternoon. And, and, but someone needs to drive them back after the talk, and I asked last a few weeks ago, someone would do it. Are you if you have your I was wondering where could I get your phone number before? That's what Thank you. That's the whole I didn't see you up there. You were sitting up there over there last time. So anyway, so Sunday car will be here next week. So if we do enjoy him, thank you so much.