

# 2008-12-22 Seven Factors of Awakening

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## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So Good evening, everyone. So I wasn't here the last couple of Monday's. So I wasn't able to follow my series of talks I gave this fall directly, I gave a series of talks here on the five hindrances. And the five hindrances are the, in the teachings of the Buddha. The five qualities or activities of the mind, the Buddha focuses on the most as that what interferes with meditation interferes with knowing what's knowing our own good, interferes with concentration. Sometimes said the five hindrances are qualities that blind us. So when we're, we can be hindered or blinded, obscured, limited By very intense, in preoccupation with desire is one. We can be hindered by a very strong preoccupation with ill will, or aversion. We can be hindered by being caught up in states of sloth and torpor, we can be hindered or the luminosity of the mind can be obscured by being caught up in restlessness and also the last one is doubt. So, these are called the five hindrances. So, I gave this fall I gave a whole series of talks on those and I wanted to cap that series of talks off with a one evening talk on a list the Buddha gave, which is the not that parallel lists but the complimentary lists to the five hindrances. And this is the list called the seven factors of awakening the seven factors Factors of enlightenment. So in one hand, the hindrances, these qualities that dark in the mind, they, the factors of awakening are what lighten up the mind. The five hindrances, what obscures our knowing what is what is the best for us knows what's beneficial for us. The seven factors of awakening help us to see clearly what is beneficial for us what is best for us. So, for example, if many people have been caught up in in strong sensual desire and sensual desire that felt so good, how could somebody feels How can we how Could something have felt so good be so wrong is the saying people say and so it feels good in the moment. But then for years afterwards, we regret that evening that night. And how awkward was I thinking of? So we didn't really see what was best for us was beneficial for us. So the desire can obscure that. And the seven factors of awakening is what helps us see what is beneficial and to act accordingly. So these two are complimentary. And as the five hindrances wane, then the seven factors of awakening wax and it's a beautiful movement to have these beautiful qualities, part of mind be developing grow in us. So the seven factors of awakening, I'll go over them a little bit more this evening. But to name them here, they're mindfulness. First one is mindfulness. The second one is investigation. The third is effort or energy. The fourth is joy. The fifth is tranquility. serenity, the sixth is concentration and the seventh is equanimity. So one hand we have the five factors, five hindrances and the other And we have the seven factors of awakening. The bridge between those two is for those of you who can put up with it, and other lists. And that's the list of the four foundations of mindfulness. So to practice mindfulness, which happens also to be the first factor of awakening, which practice mindfulness is the bridge, right mindfulness is one of the ways to get pulled out of the swamps of the five hindrances, and into this secure, stable ground of the seven factors of awakening. So we learned to practice mindfulness, practice mindfulness of the body, being connected to our body here in a kind of different kind of way, they were connected in a different way we connected to our body in such a way that wisdom has a

chance to rise. We're connected to our body differently than when we're consumed with central passion, and we feel very connected to the body. Thank you And you know, that's the whole point.

But, but you just kind of like, maybe surface body, the sensual body. Whereas we're connected to the body through mindfulness. It's a much deeper, more grounded and habited form of the body, mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of the mind, really know what's going on the mind, states of the mind, and then mindfulness of the activity of the mind. So as we become more mindful, more present for experience, we start seeing with greater acuity, what is actually going on in our mind. And one of the things we start we start seeing is how the mind gets caught up how the mind gets preoccupied. So we start seeing Oh, look at that. I'm really caught up in desire. I'm caught up in aversion anger, I'm caught up in restlessness and doubt, to really see that Oh, look at that. We really we see that clearly. One of the things that most people feel is they start feeling This is not very, it doesn't feel good. It doesn't feel good to have my mind held hostage by these very strong energies, I get pulled around my vision of what I see in the world, my perception of the world is colored. By this, the choices I make is affected by this. When I sit down to meditate, my mind spins off, it doesn't feel so good. And you kind of feel that it's not like a difficult thing to see just kind of the field very nice. As the mindfulness grows, and we see these things more clearly. Then we kind of step out of the orbit of preoccupation. We step out of the gravitational pull of thinking about what we desire, thinking about what we hate, thinking about our confusion or restlessness, thinking about what we have doubts about. Rather than being locked into those kinds of concerns. The mindfulness helps to pull us out. Unlock us from it. To pull us out of the quicksand and put us on dry ground stable ground, so we can see much more clearly. And it's a remarkable movement to feel the movement of the mind going from being caught to really being free, not free momentarily, when you can get pulled back in again quickly, but the mind has a stability and it's freedom from preoccupation. Some people will describe a mind like that, as being luminous, being expansive, being light, both in terms of weight and also to luminosity. It can feel very satisfied. I can feel very soft, stable. So variety of things. So as this as we kind of get started, the mindfulness becomes strong enough that we no longer pull into our preoccupations and mindfulness starts getting stronger and stronger and the mind This is the first factor of awakening. Mindfulness is considered to be a very simple factor of mind. It's a or, or being. It's, it's often called a presence of mind, you bring a presence of mind to what is happening in the present moment. So when you say someone was a certain certain kind of someone had, they lost their presence of mind. I mean, they weren't really present what was going on. So mindfulness meets our experience, and is present for it in some kind of quality way. Whether it's experience of our breath, or its experience of meeting a friend. There's a kind of sense of being present for the experience bringing presence to it, and really sensing feeling holding it in their experience. As that develops, as the mindfulness gets stronger, the mind is able to start making different seeing differences, making distinctions It's able to see the difference between for example, being caught up and not being caught up. You can see a difference between clinging to something and not clinging to something. You can see the difference between resisting experience bracing ourselves against them experience and not doing that. They can feel the difference between judging and being critical versus being allowing or compassionate or kind. They can start seeing the difference.

And the primary meaning in the teachings of the Buddha, or the second factor of awakening investigation is the ability to make distinctions between what is healthy for us to do and what is not. In other words, to help place us in enough presence of mind to see what's going on inside our mind instead our hearts to see where we have some choice. But what we pick up and what we leave alone, between what we pick up when we let go. So say you're sitting meditating. And it could be something very simple that you say you're sitting here meditating. And you know, you notice that when you put your shoes in the shoe rack, there are some really nice shoes. The Ducati shoes. Those are famous

these days. Right. Ducati hypnotics. You saw in the paper. It's what is what was offered to President Bush in Iraq.

He says apparently selling very well now. And anyways, you see some wonderful pair of shoes, they're sitting on the shoe rack. You sit down, meditate, and after meditating for five minutes, you start thinking about you Wouldn't it be great to have a nice pair of shoes? Or shoes I should have? Maybe I could trade shoes to that person. So you're sitting there meditating, right? Are you meditating? No. You know, you've maybe you know, you spent 10 1520 minutes years, such a long time kind of thinking about shoes or something comfortable. But hopefully, you're doing mindfulness at some point. You notice that, wait a minute, I didn't come here and think about what kind of shoes to buy. I don't think it actually doesn't feel so good to be caught up in thinking about shoes. There's a difference between being caught up in shoes, thinking about shoes, and not there's a difference between being caught up in shoes and being present. That's a very simple distinction. And in a in a in seeing that difference. It's a very simple choice that the mind can make. I don't think so. That's enough of shoes for tonight. I'll stop thinking about shoes. So the whole, that's just a silly example. But there can be, you know, a whole series of things, ways in which the mind gets caught up in things. It could be that you're sitting here meditating, and your shoulders are tense. And so your mind starts spinning out. Oh, you know, what was I doing today? You know, it's really because of those people that I feel tense now and, and what a terrible person I am have 10 shoulders and meditation center, I shouldn't be tense. And, and so you start seeing because the mindfulness is strong. See, the mind is doing this, the mind is having those kinds of thoughts. So world of difference between seeing that that's happening and having it happen and not see it. The real difference between being swept away by those kinds of thoughts, versus saying, Oh, no, thank you. I'll leave it alone. Let go of it. So it's a very simple distinction. Oh, look at that. My mind During a certain kind of activity here, I can see what's going off to do. And I can see it's not beneficial for me to do that is not the purpose I have set in mind for myself. And so I'm going to let go of that and then return to some sense of presence, to the breath to hear. So, that sense of ability to make those distinctions very simple distinctions is, is likened to wisdoms very close to wisdom in Buddhism. And as we make those very simple distinctions, it supports the mindfulness, the mindfulness and gets stronger, because you're less likely more likely to choose those things that keep you here and present in a clear way. And this ability to make these kind of wise distinctions is an almost a natural function of the mind. It's not any difference in that sense, not in different perhaps then, you know, you pull your hand off the, the stove when it's hot, you should just do it, right. So use these very simple things. Oh, no. Thank you. Don't go there. So mindfulness gets stronger. As mindfulness gets stronger, the ability to make distinctions get stronger. At this point, some people find that their enthusiasm for doing the practice increases. They can really see, oh, this is really great. I can make a difference. These just these little distinctions make a real difference. And, and I think present feels really good and it feels really good to be present feels a lot better than being caught up. And I have some ability to choose here. I feel empowered. And so there's a greater willingness to engage in putting effort into the practice. Okay, let's be mindful here. Let's do it. Let's really be doing more. So, energy effort, doozie. hasm grows and applies it elsewhere. Some people will talk about comes like CIH arising. A sense of energy will arise through the remarkable to sit down and meditate and feel Rising energy within the body, that can almost keep you upright, by can keep you upright by itself. Especially it's especially after a period of being very tired and the body keeps collapsing. The energy, the mindfulness, the really strong need there. As this as the effort, enthusiasm arises, the mindfulness gets stronger, the investigation gets stronger. So this always feeds feeds it feeds itself. It's at some point, the enthusiasm and engagement leads to something that in Buddhism is called, is the Buddhist word, non English word Buddhist word is pity. ti ti,

and usually translated as joy. Sometimes just rapture. At some point a sense of joy arises, in sense that arises from energy and enthusiasm, some people translated as zeal. sense of zeal kind of joyful energy perhaps. But a sense of joy arises in the joy can be quite beautiful, can be subtle, can be quite strong. Sometimes it can be quite intense. But it's kind of I'd like to think of it as being the joy, or delight or satisfaction well being that can come when you're really absorbed in some activity. I hope that all you have is had some experience in your life, of doing something, reading a book, doing a craft, playing an instrument, doing some maybe some sports, exercise or something. And after a while really getting into it, and getting absorbed in it and the absorption that it just feels joyful, delightful, kind of like play. So at some point meditation, as we get more and more absorbed, more engaged and involved, so more of us is involved in it. That absorption gives rise to a certain kind of joy. I don't again, I'm almost repeating myself. It's not a foreign thing to many people. Some people, if they're working in some craft can be so absorbed in what they're doing. They don't know what time it is time goes really fast. Perhaps someone can even call their name, they don't even hear it. They'll notice a lot of things around them. And it just feels really good but delightful, delighted to be there. So that happens in meditation, as well as that sense of satisfaction and joy arises that, again, is a feedback that supports mindfulness. Wow, this mindfulness is great, I'll do more of it and the mindfulness gets stronger. As the mindfulness gets stronger, the ability to make more and more subtle distinctions increases. And more importantly, the ability to have more choice around those distinctions becomes greater because one thing to see Oh, I'm caught up here. Yeah, it's not good for me. I should let go of it. Like go Come on, like, Oh, gosh. Now, you know, mind often doesn't, doesn't cooperate. But as the mind fulness gets stronger and stronger, the mind gets softer and more flexible, more adaptable and more willing to kind of let go of these things. As the joy becomes stronger becomes more part of the practice, that at some point gives rise to tranquility, to serenity. That there's something about having a sense of well being in meditation that lets us relax and let the body relax in a deep way. And profound feeling of peacefulness can settle in throughout the body, you can really feel as a physical embodied feeling of peacefulness of subtleness of tranquility or relaxation can feel very pure, very clean feeling which then inspires the mindfulness wow, this is really good. And the clarity of the tranquility supports greater clarity and mindfulness. Then that when when We start getting more relaxed, we have the joy, the sense of well being and relaxation, then it becomes a lot easier to become concentrated. Some of you have been trying to get concentrated for a long time. And you're wondering why it doesn't work. So it's hard to get concentrated. If you don't have some sense of well being substance established in mindfulness, in some sense of enthusiasm for what you're doing, and some sense of well being and relaxation. So some people who develop concentration will try to do what they can to develop some sense of inner well being first, and a sense of relaxation. The last thing you want to do if you're going to develop concentration, is strive for concentration. bear down, tighten up is more like look, concentration has a lot to do. meditative concentration has a lot to do with letting go relaxing. Why? Why concentration is important in Buddhist practice. It's kind of like the principle of a tripod. If you want to, if you're a telescope and you want to look at the moon, you don't hold the telescope in your hands because it wiggles too much you can't book you can do an instability to look at something so far away. So you put the telescope in a tripod. And then you have the stability and you can see clearly. So the same thing with our inner life, the mindfulness becomes so much more penetrating, when it has written standing on the tripod of concentration, function of concentration is great, tremendous stillness and stability. So that the insight of looking can go deep down into the mind and see kind of the, some of the deeper workings of the mind that we often don't see in our day to day life. As we

start seeing the working of our mind more clearly, and as the concentration gets stronger. So you know, it feeds back to mindfulness notice keeps developing. Our ability to make distinctions continues in our ability. Not to pick things up, leave things alone become stronger. All these things together translates at some point to an increase, equanimity and equanimity is considered the crown jewel of Buddhist

emotions. For those of you who haven't sent strong sense of meditative equanimity, it can seem rather strange to call it the crown jewel the Buddhist devotions. It seems kind of maybe aloof or cold or a different variety of different associations people have with equanimity gives a little bit of that flavor. But the reason as a crown jewel is that it's so sublime it's so it's one of the most satisfying emotional or mental states that a person can experience when it's really really strong meditative equanimity. And it's a the descriptions of it don't really do justice to what that quality is, but it's the most when a month is completely balanced and in no way inclined to go forward towards something or away from something. When the mind is not inclined to pick anything up or reject anything, the mind is not liable to criticize anything, want anything and not want anything is just willing to be economists or balanced or nonreactive to whatever is happening. It's a very sublime, satisfying, clean, pure feeling of non reactivity, kind of something like that. So, those are the seven factors of awakening, mindfulness, investigation, energy, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity.

If you grow if you have a greenhouse, and you have curtains The greenhouse gets hot, dark and wet in there. All kinds of slime mold, things you don't want to grow. But if you pull the curtains on the greenhouse and let the sunlight come in, then the slime dries up, and the plants in there that you want them to grow, they can grow. Mindfulness is light. The hindrances are the slime. And the seven factors of awakening are the beautiful flowers. So when we live without awareness and presence of what's happening here, now we're lost their mind and activity. It tends to support the growth of unhealthy qualities of mind activity. That's a tendency of that in the dark, that's what happens in the light. The light tends to support the growth of these beautiful qualities. These are called qualities of awakening of enlightened Mental freedom. And much of what Buddhism is, is not teachings is not teaching them what is true, you know in some kind of religious teachings. Buddhism is not that Buddhism is not a series of teachings about Buddhism. Buddhism is a series of instructions on awakening. That's a very important distinction and the sap that supports all the different schools of Buddhism, hopefully, these seven factors of awakening. So when the mindfulness and so forth in equanimity are quite strong, remember, an equanimity is quite balanced. When the mind is not reactive, that's when the mindfulness sees the clearest and when the mind is not nonreactive variabel says feels good. The essence of well being tremendous tranquility, peace. unreactive, very still very quiet. There's something the mind there's an activity to the movement of the mind, that the mind can do have to can do is the right word. there's a there's a there's a transformation or change or flip or, or something that happened the mind with the mind can let go a very, very deep way that you cannot do, you cannot sit there and an engineer letting go. And the seven factors of awakening are preparing the stage for this equanimity, this peace. So that this is, you know, so there's, you know, absolutely It was no, it's tremendous stillness. I don't have a good analogy for it, but imagine, maybe it's like, imagine That there's a little ball like a golf ball. Maybe it's like a golf ball, okay? And, you know, some golfers headed across the green. And it's a funny balls a windy day, whatever. And it kind of just goes this way in that way and, you know, keeps going too fast it goes over the hole because it's going too fast. And you know, it goes by the hole and spins out again. And it's but it gets slower and slower and slower at some point it gets so slow, someplace completely still. So that doesn't bypass the hole. It just falls right in. So, good analogy but something like that, at some point. The stillness is so is so profound, that the mind doesn't miss that hole. into freedom into letting go to some different level of, of opening of liberation. And then one of the one of the great things that happens in that kind of non reactivity still place is that many of the normal activities, mind that we use to support our life are put to rest at least temporarily. So for example, the activity of always, always understanding our life, from the point of view of itself. I'm here you're there. I'm this kind of self, I have these needs, I have these desires. I have these, I need to be seen this way I need to prove myself this way. I need to get all these things. The world of desire the world of constructing identities, the world of, of living in an abstract concepts, which is what most people do much of the time

that a world has a chance to be put to rest and to experience Are life free of concepts. Some people you know, just to be, is one of the great experiences to have. And it creates a very different reference point for where we can find our happiness and well being, to find that happiness and well being in being this radical kind of just sense of being without needing to build up anything at all, be anybody at all. which then leads me then there's a tendency to make another distinction. The distinction is, which happiness is more satisfying, more satisfying, is getting another pair of shoes more satisfying, or the equivalent and you'll be amazed to be already quite amazed at how amazing it is, how quickly the mind can get interested and everything else but awakening The free but that's the that's what I want. That's what I want, you know, all these things. And partly it's because awakening, that state of mind luminosity of clarity that openness of awakening is not a thing. And so it was not a thing. What good does it do for me? I can't sell it on eBay for sale on eBay, Craigslist, my awakening that doesn't work very well. So it's easy to it's easy to overlook. So, this fall, I talked a lot about this five factors of awakening these darkening factors. And now this is the kind of conclude this long series. I wanted to offer you the other half which is the other half being beautiful quality is called The seven factors of awakening. It said that one of the things that feeds or develops and develops these seven factors of awakening is learning to recognize them. And that's one of the reasons it's important to teach them periodically. Because if we don't, if they are taught or not talked about, it becomes a bit harder for people to appreciate when they're there. And they might be actually much more more present for us in our lives than we realize it than we realize. And sometimes it be quite subtle, but they're still there. And then are sometimes I have people, I've known people who felt that meditation was supposed to be a public to her a serious affair, supposed to be serious, you know, and sit down and get kind of grim and serious, serious budino Buddhist practice. And so they might feel a little bit of joy bubbling up, but a different choice. You know, people just let go, let go everything You know, joy or joy, you know, that was a Zen student, you know, joy, you know? In no way you know, I'm serious and students, you know Bodhidharma sitting here with everybody Dharma smile, upside down smile, which is just the truth. None of this kind of, you know, Joy stuff. But joy, tranquility, equanimity are beautiful factors. You're not expected to let go of them. It's helpful to recognize their presence. Not necessarily you don't have to get attached to them, cling to them, expect them because you don't want to be disappointed when when they're not there. But to know be familiar with what they are and then be able to

enjoy them, appreciate them. help support them and help them to grow. Remember that the slime grows in the dark. The beautiful plants go Go into like, the hindrances grow in the dark. And mindfulness grows. I mean, seven factors of awakening grow in the light of awareness and appreciation. So as we end this year, can we turn now towards the more light time of the year? May it be that your light can shine on these beautiful capacities that you have, that we all have? And May these beautiful capacities grow for you. And so, next June we so it's getting darker. You just keep getting lighter. So, we have about 10 minutes. anybody like to ask a question or make a comment?

What's the relationship between state of Nirvana and equanimity? In one of the classic

equanimity, the way it's talked about here is an activity is oddly enough as an activity of the mind the functioning of the mind. And the experience of Nirvana as experience of full awakening is not an activity. So there's no there's no equanimity in Nirvana. But however, in the classic disc, classic Buddhist idea of the path to Nirvana to awakening, equanimity is the penultimate stage before Nirvana. equanimity is the penultimate stage before awakening, because in order to get have arrived for the mind to drop into that hole of Nirvana, it has to it might have to be very Economists balanced even. So it gets very close to it. Yes.

You're the old one.

Answer suggests that these seven factors are hierarchical. So,

well, in the tradition, they talk about the seven factors of awakening in the way I did today, as sequential, they build on each other, and they talk about them as being a whole working all together, integrated together, both and an equanimity with equanimity, equanimity, is discussed or appears in various places, there is lists. And so, when appears in seven factors awakening appears in one understanding One way, when appears as the penultimate stage before awakening, it's a different list. So it's going to differ a little bit different understanding for it. There's something like, I don't know how many, half a dozen or more definitions of equanimity. It's like, they say that the Eskimos have all these words with snow. The Buddhists have all these definitions Breck with empty, different parsing it out. Yes.

I'm coming from a place where it felt like the shadow side or the hindrances, kind of have had a lot of power and been able to pull me under the quicksand, if you will. I'm getting to a place where it feels like the scope qualities are starting to gain strength and I'm curious if they're, I mean, just Sound like there is but is there like a Boogeyman around the corner that's like,

or like a hindrance that I don't know

about or something that's gonna kind of pull me back again. I mean, I just I don't know.

Sure. Yeah. I mean, it just seems like you kind of said it's not a linear path. It may be for there's there's a few unusual people just like a linear path to better and better. Most people that spiral and loops. You know, it's, you know, it's sometimes it's one step forward, two steps forward, one step back, sometimes it's one step forward, three steps back. It's all kinds of ways that works. But I think that that is it. It depends how you it's very hard to measure, analyze, or look at the path and how it develops for people. It's all good as long as you're practicing. And sometimes it looks like you're going backwards because now more agitated and caught up in anger. But actually, maybe it's actually part of the process of going forward having to deal with that anger. And so rather than going down Words it's actually going forward to so much so the Boogey Man waiting for you. And I think any any serious path of practice will help you meet yourself really deeply and so we'll find out what's in there and if we find their boogeymen take that as a good sign. Right now I get to practice with it a lot better to see it and practice with it then habits back there subconsciously doing its thing

They're Did you did you? Did you read off the seven? Pali words for the I didn't say the Pali words no except except for the joy thing. Yeah. Did you do that as a brief I can, but I don't quite I was thinking earlier today just before I gave the talk, and for some reason I'm a little embarrassed to say I couldn't read. I couldn't remember the I don't think I can remember the holiday for the second one. But the first one is my first Sati. The second one is I think it's Dharma beach. I think that's what it is. And the third one is viriya. The fourth one is kitty. The fifth one is passatti. The sixth one is somebody and the second one is pick up

Someday, perhaps you have a strong experience of conventional wakefulness, wakefulness, so maybe you've had a nice, you know, nice day relax day you take a little nap. You've had some good exercise, you have a little nap, you wake up, you feel rested, nothing has to happen. Just kind of there. Beautiful sunlight is coming in through your window and just kind of feel really awake and clear. Nothing has to happen. Intensive wakefulness is really strong. Conventional wakefulness was really strong. The hoped he had the experience of maybe some They have that experience or hints of it. So you might then in

that experience, look around in that experience and have clarity or openness. And see if you can identify the seven factors of awakening is there almost naturally in that state, so, quality of mindfulness, of discernment through this investigation or kind of distinctions. a certain kind of energy or effort. certain kind of joy, delight, certain kind of tranquility. Maybe concentration is a little bit hard to see that state but maybe you can find it and equanimity. I'd like to suggest that these seven factors are not something that's so foreign to you. It's probably things that you Do experience from time to time. They might be very subtle or small. But I think it's helpful to actually identify them as they occur naturally in your life. Rather than thinking that it's something you have to import from the outside or develop because you don't have them. I wish you all a happy new year and those of you who want to have a meditative New Year meditative you New Year's Eve party event, and you can come here and forget for years now as we're doing your New Year's Eve event here is very nice poetry, sitting and stuff that happens here. So many thanks