

2009-10-02 Seven Factors of Enlightenment

Mindfulness Part 2

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SPEAKERS

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We do have a handout that you can pick up at the end of the day or some point that lists the seven factors. And the bottom of the handout, there's a quote from the Buddha that says, just as the dawn is the precursor to the rising of the sun. So good spiritual friendship is a precursor to the rising of the seven factors of awakening. and nice. So here we are, dummer Dharma practice day. And we can all consider each other good spiritual friends for the year. And that our exploration together of this topic, hopefully his support for each other, hopefully is the precursor for the son of awakening. So mindfulness is an awakening factor. And mindfulness is one of the Simple definitions of mindfulness in ancient tradition, is non forgetfulness. So when you can hold something in your mind, and not forget it, that's the faculty of mindfulness operating. The word from mindfulness is cognate, is closely connected to the word to remember. And Polly. And so they have similar functions of holding something in mind. When we do mindfulness practice, then we're holding, for example, the present moment in mind. Not forgetting the present moment. Or if you're mindful of your breath, you're holding your experience with breath in the mind not forgetting to be connected to your breath. If you're being mindful of, of,

you know, of a friend who's doing something, then you kind of keep your friend in mind. If you're trying to Remember a shopping list, you'd hold the shopping list in your mind, you wouldn't forget it. So this capacity of the mind to hold something is partly what mindfulness is. Even if they do choiceless, awareness, just open awareness to whatever's going on. And then we're holding the present moment in mind not drifting off into thinking about the past of the future. So his capacity to hold things is part of that is not forget what we're committing ourselves to as part of it. And what we're holding is not just sort of a holding an awareness example, the breath, that's important. But it's also the holding itself as the remembering it's the attention that we bring is also and the mindfulness factor that gets strengthened is that the capacity to hold something and awareness to stand near something. Another way of understanding mindfulness is that the knowledge of the word in Pali is a stand close to something. So if you're going to be mindful of the breath, you're going to have a certain kind of presence of mind that's close to it. Now, it's not just mindfulness, not just being aware, someone who is insane. It can be aware, you know, sometimes an insane person approaches you and, you know, they're aware of you. So that, you know, it's not enough just to be aware to be mindful. There's some other something else that goes along. And one of those one of the qualities that goes along with mindfulness is a kind of presence of mind, sense of presence of being presence, that you kind of you could you know, that you're aware. You know, that you're mindful and mindfulness is strong. You don't think necessarily this way or but but you know, there's a kind of, it's a strong enough phenomena, that you know, that your presence and that capacity to be mindful and to have that kind of strong sense of knowing be close to and hold

something is considered one of the seven jewels of Buddhism and a jewel or something. To be very valuable. So to engage in mindfulness practice is to cultivate and develop something that's very valuable. Some people who do mindfulness practice, focus a lot on the object of attention. To do mindfulness for them is to actually look at the breath and really get to know the breath, focus on the breath. It's all about the breath or some object of attention, whatever it might be. But a hugely important part of mindfulness is the other half of the equation, which is the mind that's being mindful. The attention that's that's holding the breath, the quality of the mind that is attending the attending to the breath. And that quality of attending, that quality of holding of being mindful, is the jewel. The breath is great, but it's not morning. The breath is not the factor of awakening. It's that mindfulness that holds the breath. So with that said, as an introduction, I thought we would do a little sitting

So I'm going to give you an instruction and unusual instruction from a meditation teacher. And as it when I give you an instruction, I want you to notice what happens to you. Notice what happens to your capacity to know to be aware. And the instruction is don't notice anything. Don't be aware of anything right now. Not allowed. And if you if you start noticing something, just stop it.

Some of you probably just checked out. But some of you perhaps notice that you can't stop knowing that knowing is just always there, especially if you're getting involved in the process of not knowing and knowing you're not distracted that moment. That the quality of knowing of noticing is something the mind, I would say naturally does.

Now, bring your attention to the sensations of your body, sitting on the cushion, or the chair

and focus a few moments explore that experience. The pressure, the hardness, the softness, the temperature, the vibration,

keep knowing it Keep exploring and move essential attention around the area where the contact is made. And then as you do that, notice something about the quality of the attention itself. The quality of the attend attending that you bring to noticing that contact.

Is that attending paying attention, is it relaxed or is it tense? Is it hesitant Eager.

How much thinking is mixed up with attention to the contact?

If you can separate out the thinking from the more direct experience of the contact

how does that shift your sense of what mindfulness is and being present

And then shift your attention so that you become aware of your breathing. Noticing, bringing your attention to that part of your body where you usually experienced breathing

in a relaxed way is an appropriate explore the interplay or the difference between paying attention to the particular experiences of breathing, the sensations of breathing in and out, expanding and contracting versus being aware of the quality of the attention noticing what it's like to attend to the breath

So the task is to hold experience of breathing in awareness.

Not to forget staying connected to Breathing in and breathing out.

One of the meanings of Sati putana is to stand or be close to your experience and not watching the breathing from the head from your thinking, but letting the attending the attention. Be with the breath right close to the experience.

So there's the experience of breathing and there's the tending to that, the awareness of that. And that awareness that stays close to the breath that knows you're breathing. That awareness that mindfulness is very valuable jewel. If you really knew how valuable it was, it is you would not be so interested in a lot of the things you're thinking about. Normally in your life

you'd be interested in this valuable phenomena, activity of being present, attending knowing

When the mind wanders off in thought, don't be bothered by that. But as soon as you notice it rediscover that quality of mind that attends to the breathing

As you know your experience or breathing, if you can really know what that experience is like so a little bit more detail or clarity and as you know it with a little bit more clarity Let there be a kind of a sense that you that you know that you know that you are aware that you're aware of the breathing room, be relaxed about it soft, gentle, but a heightened sense of awareness that you could if asked say, Oh yeah, I know that. I know.

Notice how the experience of breathing in is experienced differently than the experience of breathing out

notice what the experience is switching from breathing out to breathing in is. Notice what the experience of what happens as you shift from breathing out, breathing in breathing out.

Notice whether your breathing is short or why they have long breaths Notice if your breathing is fast or slow

and then continue to notice things about your breathing can be the same things over and over again, but continued noticing things about your breathing. But then maybe the side of sideways, sideways sideways glance or in some way. Notice what the knowing is like what's the quality of that knowing which actually periences the difference aspects of breathing

it's the awareness like that holds and is present for the experience.

So I'm suggesting that there are two things. There's the object of attention. And then the attention itself. So for example, they're seeing something out there. And there's the act of seeing in the eye. So there's the, what we're mindful of. And then the quality of the mindfulness the way that what goes on in the attending. And that the attending that mindfulness gets, it gets developed, the more we attend to the object of attention. So it's kind of like if you want to sharpen a knife, you have a whetstone. You know, you, the more you kind of go back and forth in the west on the sharper the neck becomes, the more you stay with your brain. They stay with the objects object, we really get to know it better and better, stronger than mindfulness becomes. However, the mindfulness is different than the object. And at some point, the mindfulness and get strong enough, the sense of awareness, get strong enough that it stands out and highlight as something in its own right. It's like we know that we know we can know something about the quality of the knowing. And if we can really begin appreciating what a valuable resources

what a valuable phenomenon is, what a jewel it is, then it may be easier for the mind to want to be mindful. Because, you know, if he doesn't know that, then thinking about what's going to be for dinner is more interesting, right? The other things, mine has a lot of things that are interesting. So the quality of the attending the quality of the awareness that knows what goes on, what's that, like? What supports that? What makes it difficult, highway value and more. How do we recognize it? What do we recognize when we noticed that That's a topic I'd like you to discuss. And what I have in mind is I'd like you to break into groups of five people. And then, as a group, discuss a little bit something about what you know, what do you recognize about the awareness itself that knows the mindfulness? What do you know about that quality? What's it like? How's it experienced? How's it developed? How's it? What does it feel like? How do you know that it's there? How do you distinguish it from thinking a lot about thinking about something? So I'm giving you kind of a bit of a wider area of exploration was to discuss as a group, not what you're mindful of, but the other half of the equation, the quality or the aspect of attending And then I'd like to ask one person in the group or somehow to take notes or somehow synthesize the discussion, make a list or something points come up with. And then when we gather here in the hall in about 20 minutes or so, and then we'll have a different people report what the highlights of what their group discussion was about. And that way we might get a wonderful wide array of, of perspectives and issues and ideas about mindfulness. The sound to your game. And now I think about I think we should have groups of six. So and also I think it's so you also welcome to use the outer Hall. There's chairs out there, you could go into conference room if you want to have a more quieter and so why don't you gather groups of six, and in about 20 minutes or so I'll ring a bell to bring us all back in here.

I hope that was nice. It sounded like it was nice. Like you're into it. And since I wasn't part of any of the discussions, I'm curious to find out what was discussed. And maybe you're just interested in what other groups talked about. And I'm hoping there's a wide range of things. And I think there were about 10 groups. So I think we have to limit it to at the most two minutes each. So if you could the person who's reporting could yet the reporting has to somehow Don't worry about getting it easy. Don't worry about getting the exact. Don't feel like you have to represent the group. Exactly. You represent your group through how you synthesize it, how you process it. That's, that's, you know, that's enough for now. And, and so if it feels like it's going on too long, don't take it personally if I ring the bell.

So who would like to start? Yes, please and wait for the mic please.

Okay, in two minutes or less,

probably the big message that we got in the conversation it was different levels of sophistication or experience with it. So the experience was different from just being new to it to a little bit more developed and that one of the questions that came up is that over time, is your awareness become more sophisticated? Are you better able to differentiate different feeling tones Do someone I can't remember brought up the concept that Eskimos have 30 words for snow, you develop that for describing feeling tones and breath. And the evolution I think was important. One of the big qualities that came up was gentleness, the sense of gentleness towards the experience and then also metaphor of being close to the breathing, not necessarily being in the breathing but being close to it. And next to it.

Great, thank you. Ursula.

We had we had a wide variety of of reactions to this. We were saying that the quality of awareness comes out of the intention that first it started out with an intention and that led to concentration and the

will to be aware then turned into being more alert and to the moment and moment actions and it had a calming for some of us calming effect the focus point in a communist. And some of us were seeing that

there was a feeling of

this jewel that you talked about. For one of us it was this getting close to the word close, it was really important. Because we wanted to feel this, this this value we wanted to have, we want to be part of this value of this jewel. And the word close actually made it possible to become closer to the to be aware of the of the awareness. And also there was a feeling of we had to people use the word Eagle less like an eagle watching the awareness itself the experience of the awareness was like the eagle watching over and I personally felt a sense of like a big black velvet mushroom like over the event is a shame that it's kind of shielding the meditation And so on one of us said there was really no separation. She couldn't separate the object and an awareness, it becomes all one. But if we use words, we have to separate it and that is not really quite even didn't even feel natural because when she meditates, that's, it's one thing. It turns out into one thing. And I, when I first, when you first said to do this, I realized that my awareness changed. And I thought, remember the Heisenberg principle, right? You have to, you know, it changes the experience if you're watching it. And so I thought, can we turn the Heisenberg principle off, you know, but since that since the effect was was really good, I decided

don't have to go with it. Good. Great. Thank you. Yeah.

This seemed to be a consensus in our group that paying attention to the quality of Attention itself allowed for more grounding and but there was it was a for some people the grounding was actually kind of like your experience of the eagle so there was some kind of overseeing everything but being grounded at the same time there was one person in the group that for whom having to pay paying attention to this quality of knowing was the little was created some struggle or difficulty or and I can't really speak for her because she even didn't have the words to describe the difficulty. And but overall, it seemed that, you know, that there was a very positive thing to do to step back and, and, and for me, it was I think you were talking about the closeness and I really felt this closeness with Breath, which I haven't felt before, which is kind of very loving, tender feeling of totally loving, loving it and not being at odds with it, and just supported by it. But yeah, Yes, right. And then then there was the problem with the concentration at the end, which is that it's a hard state to sustain this attention of your attention. It's

beautiful, thank you.

And my group, I feel like we all kind of came together to try to describe something that you know, once you get back into the mind, try to talk about it in words, you find that there you may not have the language around it. And so there was this moment when we were saying the word of and thinking as soon as you say of, then you have an object that follows that. But for the most part, in aside from the difficulty and not knowing if we really got the being aware of being aware portion, there is this there's this likeness. This quality of a piece of space, a pause is the space between thinking and non thinking perhaps. And we talked about how everything kind of seemed to stop. And there's this opening, like a suspended abyss and maybe dropping into another level or, or standing back from the separation. There's some having some separation from the experience. So

thank you. Okay, so now that we are

in our in our group, a couple of people have used the word mystifying. And

there is a idea of the preciousness or carrying and holding that is

very valuable. And then there was also The

sort of narrowing in and coming out of the field and kind of seeing that and, and the value of actually wandering from the object because then you actually get, were able to see

the qualities of the mindfulness more clearly how it changed in relation to, you know, closer in or further out or, or what the object was and how it was relating to that.

Beautiful Thank you.

We had several comments one was quality of awareness was like a hand laying on top of the breath.

sensation of the breath and the knowing of the sensation of the breath. Another person commented that it quality of awareness was a feeling of energy or provided a feeling of energy Towards, towards the awareness.

And then if

mindfulness is remembering to observe, and meditation is the actual observation, it almost seems like the awareness and meditation are almost the same words I couldn't in the quality of awarenesses, kind of like just a neutral observation of whatever is going on at the moment. Exactly the opposite of thinking. Thank

you. Our group also mainly had a consensus which seems to be very different from everything else I'm hearing which was that paying attention to the quality of the awareness was an invitation to really start thinking and it wasn't all Was, it sounds for several of us it was. There was a judgment involved. For others, it was just, you know, sort of the agitation of trying now, what do I do?

And

also, towards the end of this discussion sort of floated the idea that maybe we were also skilled at and used to thinking that we were trying to make this into something way more complicated than it really is. That it's that it's much lighter. But the other thing we found is that, at the point, where for a couple of us the thinking did drop out that there were really sort of significant body sensations, either a sense of really expansive opening or a sense of sort of a

deepening and a more kind of contained to Thank you.

Okay.

Our group talked about a bunch of things.

But the one of them was just the general difficulty distinguishing a direct observation or not having a direct observation without some sort of conceptualization, being tied right at the moment with it. Another thing we talked about was what a good tool This is and how learning this is new to us, and probably something that

we've been trained our whole life not to do.

But the third thing was

that at least with me, when I'm really with the breath, there is no other observer or no The only other character I can find for the benefit of this group call it a gentle watchdog. But I'm not sure how gentle it is with me that notices the wanderings and brings it back to try again in some way that I don't really understand to simply be in it with with the breath.

Great. Thank you.

We had a whole lot of input to and

it seems neutral. It's almost as if

there's a spotlight and spotlight moves and it's just what the spotlight observes. And just that sort of naked, look at something. It's got a pre verbal quality to it. And adding words to it can obscure what you're seeing

We've read that awareness

seems to start working when you're, the storytelling is turned off. There seems to be a freedom, equality of freedom to it. It doesn't have judgment, attachment, good or bad. It's just there. It's spacious. Again, no stories. And we kept on commenting how we kept on seeing things that it was not rather than qualities that it had. There's a quality of gentleness. There's a distance a feeling of space between the observer and the observed, but not a detachment, a negative sort of detachment. There seems to be a quality of interest

A simple observer seems to be there

or an observing function rather than an individual that observes. And there's a functional quality to it, where it can direct you to functional uses of what's going on that you can do something with it.

Great, thank you.

So our conversation seemed to flow kind of naturally into four through four areas, the difficulties, the effects, the qualities and how it's supported. We thought it was very hard to articulate the ineffable. And the attempt to attach words to it kind of made it seem flatter and one dimensional, whereas it's not really when trying to pay attention to the quality of attention. In itself, it's hard to avoid analysis, the critic rears its ugly head. And we found it was much easier to describe metaphorically than directly. There's effort involved, but then that can lead to goal orientation. So a quality but also a barrier. The effects of becoming aware of something seems to release you from it, you're no longer caught by it. The qualities of mindfulness itself is not self. Again, it's easier to describe metaphorically, people said like other groups, it's sort of be a simultaneous closeness and distance. And the way we said that it's kind of like an intimate bird's eye view. It has the qualities of clarity, peacefulness, liberation, neutrality, not self vastness and it's energetic. And it's supported by practice, both daily and on long retreats.

Thank you. So that everyone. Well, thank you so much. And there was a lot. And it wasn't maybe a lot to digest all of that information or ideas all at once here in 20 minutes. But maybe the overall sense of it is valuable for each of you individually, to get a sense of the wider richness that's there in the in the in mindfulness practice in mindfulness, perhaps as you get a sense of the wide, wider richness of qualities of it, that, in turn will support your mindfulness and be easier to be mindful and more interested in being mindful, more engaged in the process. So any questions or last Comments you'd like to make before we stopped for lunch.

So we're often asked to watch your breath but I was wondering so during the practice my awareness actually wanders off to either to sound or to sensations in my legs, which to me are more vibrant than the breath itself. And I was wondering if that is okay, both in terms of meditating or aware, being aware of something other than the breath

and the fact that my awareness switches

from different sensations, a different

question. The there are different schools or approaches to mindfulness meditation, some would emphasize much more staying with the breath, coming back and doing that. And others I count us here at IMC is this other kind, where the instruction is to be mindful of whatever is the most compelling experience we give. So we give some emphasis to the breath But, but if something else is more compelling than we let go of the breath and attend to that develop mindfulness there. And mindfulness can be developed in anything that's happening in the present moment. And so we tend to focus on what's compelling. And if you don't do that, then there's a tension set up between what's compelling, and your attempt to be with the breath. We do like to give some some emphasis to the breath, because what's compelling is partly a function of what we find interesting. And so I try to tell people when the breath is really interesting, so that so that they're less like less likely to get interested in other things. But this is that good answer is understandable.

Maybe it's because I'm close to the window. There's a lot of interesting sound.

So you could just sit over in the corner and do this thing meditation. It's a great meditation, just sound the beep just you know, be present for sounds and just let sounds quote wash through you In your mind your hearing mind be as as expansive as the distance it is to the sounds very nice. Yes. My Karen,

to follow up on that last question.

For me, that was sort of exactly what was going on. Also, that made it a difficult exercise was that my leg was I was in some pain with my leg. And that was very interesting to me. And I've, you know, worked on that a little bit in meditation in terms of recognizing the pain and not trying to identify with the pain. But that was one of my struggles was, you know, that was the more compelling thing for me was my leg. And so in that situation, where the instruction is come back to the breath, it was competing with with that, so But we're going to focus on the pain Could you just or the sensation that I'm feeling in my leg,

so so probably I should have done the exercises, giving people the option to pay attention to something else didn't really matter what they pay attention to. You know, I just chose the breath because it's common. And, but you can develop a very good mindfulness and sense of mindfulness by focusing on pain. And some of the things you did is part of what we do, but to bring attention to pain and be able to

distinguish our reaction or relationship to the pain, the pain itself is very freeing, because often the relationship which is a problem, not the pain itself. So in mindfulness, you can explore that. And you can also explore the, the quality of attention the quality of attending can be sometimes very important to notice when there's pain, because that's really maybe the real issue or contracted, retire or versus or self pity or it's all Because of other things added, rather than just simple awareness. So it's fine and what someone said, you know that being distracted is actually interesting or helpful. You know, he said that because sometimes you you're sometimes in being being pulled away and distractions, when you come back from that you can actually notice sometimes the better the quality of attention. And because of that contrast, then you can apply it to the breath again or something. Another way of doing this exercise which I kind of started by doing the contact with the chair first to the cushion first was we could have just I could have just had you guys move around to direct you to be aware of different things, the sounds and your pain in the breath and this and that. And as you do as you choose and directed and different director different things. Sometimes it gets clearer and clearer that awareness is distinct from what you're paying attention to. Because, you know, that's that's what's moves, you know, and then he starts noticing something about the quality of that attention itself. So his answer Your question adequately or do you want to ask? Yes,

thanks.

Great, thank you. One more over here on this.

In my group and Deb had mentioned kind of coming to that suspended place and feeling like there was no thoughts and, and just an almost like she had zoned out, you know, like she just dropped out and there's nothing but there's this element of pleasantness that she felt, and I was wondering if if that pleasantness and of itself was the awareness that the pleasantness that she could be aware of and having that, that no mind state was the awareness?

No, probably not. I don't know. Probably not. It can be very satisfying to have a strong sense of awareness, a feeling of rightness of satisfaction of it's wonderful for you to come nice feeling, but I wouldn't necessarily characterize as pleasure But pleasure can is separate from the separate experience that can happen as we meditate. As mindfulness gets stronger, there can be pleasure that it bubbles up that happens. But it's not directly in the awareness itself. It's more like, you know, bubbling are a diffusive kind of nice, elated, elated feeling and like bubble up or suffuse your body or your mind

the knowing knowing that you have that pleasure. Is that is that part? Yes.

Yeah, so so. So whatever is going on. So if there's a lot of pleasure, then mindfulness would know that pleasure, or be mindful of the pleasure. And so the so the mindfulness is distinct from the pleasure because it knows what knows to pleasure. And there were some comments about people who become one with a breath or one with their experience in this. And those are beautiful things to have happen and it certainly is very satisfying and, and worthy of approach to meditation. But we understand that to be more of a concentrator Meditation, where we have that kind of oneness with experience. Mindfulness with mindfulness meditation, there can be a great intimacy almost like a oneness. But there's also a clear sense of that there's something distinct between what is known and the knowing itself knowing is distinct from what is known. And so mindfulness practice unfolds when that distinction is there in a very natural way. We're not trying to make a distinction disappear though sometimes it does. In concentration practice, that distinction is disappears and we kind of merge with the experience much more