The seventh factor on the Eightfold Path is right mindfulness. And now we're coming to the heart of the mental cultivation as part of the Eightfold Path. Whereas the previous factor of the Eightfold Path is right effort, developing mindfulness is one of the preeminent right efforts. Mindfulness, right mindfulness, is considered to be a wholesome and skillful state of mind to develop. It's healing and helpful. It's greatly beneficial. And it creates a very good foundation for all the things we do in our life. It's a foundation for wisdom, for compassion, for care. But as a foundation, it's good to put the foundation in strong and well first, and really have that as a foundation. To have evaluation, wisdom, about the world, to have compassion and love for the world, without a strong foundation, it's a little bit dangerous. It might be that actually, the wisdom and the love is not quite wise or loving. It's easy to be fooled or to be a little bit off.

Or it might be that the wisdom and love is unstable, easily succumbing to something different. So we cultivate mindfulness. And it's helpful to really cultivate it for its own for its own sake first. And so to keep the simplicity of it. And part of the reason for that also, is that on the path to liberation, the spiritual liberation that Buddhism is talking about, mindfulness is that pre-eminent mental state, mental practice that leads to liberation. And at all the stages along the way mindfulness is important, right up to the brink of awakening, mindfulness is there.

And so to really learn the art of mindfulness is so helpful. And that art of mindfulness is an art in part of being very simple with experience. Not evaluating or making a complicated, just being with the present moment experience. As if there is no past, no yesterday. As if there's no tomorrow, no future. Of course there is and of course wisdom will operate to help us understand what to do in relationship to the past and the future. But the simplicity of mindfulness to get established here, without the mental activity required for thinking about the past and the future. And it's really a delight. To really let go of so much. To really take in this moment. The beauty of this moment, the fullness of this moment, the depth of this moment. And the miracle of mindfulness. The miracle of being conscious. And it's one of the great miracles or the great wonders of the world. To be conscious, to be aware. And it's often probably one of the most overlooked wonders of the world. And people can spend all day busy with their lives without ever really being cognizant how special it is, how wonderous it is, to be conscious. In fact, if you pointed out to someone busy with the fears of daily life, they might even think you're crazy. If I go down here, downtown, and come up to a stranger who's busy going around their day and say, "Wow, you might want to take a moment and be aware that you're conscious. That consciousness is here and that you're aware." I don't think it would be well received. I think that they have important things to do. But to really
find this foundation and value it, opens up a wide possibility. Opens up wide possibilities. And one of the greatest ones is freedom itself.

So what is mindfulness? And there's a difference between how mindfulness is taught in the teachings of the Buddha, and how it's often taught in the modern world, especially in the modern world where there's a secular mindfulness that's being taught. And they're all good. It's all helpful. But there are distinctions to be made. I think it is helpful to understand what the Buddha was teaching. First, the Buddha never told anyone, gave no instructions about doing mindfulness. You know, my mother growing up, might have told me Gil, be more mindful, because maybe I was tracking mud into the house. And you should be more mindful, you know, what you're doing there. And, so that's an activity what you're saying is be more attentive. The Buddha never taught it to anyone do mindfulness. What he said, the verb related to the word Sati, one of the ones is to establish. And the second one is to dwell in, to abide in. One establishes and abides in mindfulness. And to establish something, you're not necessarily doing it. You're bringing it in and rooting it here. Letting it be here. And a lot of that has to do with letting go. To establish being aware, a lot of it is just letting go of the preoccupations so awareness can really be there, be here.

So the Buddha never said "do mindfulness", but he say to establish it and then to abide in it. I love the expression abide, the word Viharati can also mean to live in, or to dwell in. And to live in something kind of implies you're kind of in a state. And so in a state of awareness. Now, mindfulness practice is different than mindfulness itself. And the distinction I make here is that if one person could be running. And you ask, what are you doing? So I'm just running. Another person is running, and you ask what you're doing. And they say, I'm training, I'm training to run for a race or something. The first person, you don't know if they're running away from the police, if they're just running for the fun of it, running for exercise, or what they're doing. They're just running. The second person, you have a sense that running as a training is more than just running. It involves maybe endurance running, speed, alternating how fast you run, how far you run, the way you run. All kinds of things go into the training to run. It's much more complicated than just running. So mindfulness training, the mindfulness practice, involves other elements besides being mindful, resting in awareness. And in fact, those other qualities is what gives the mindfulness strength, develops it and makes it stronger, so it's more present. And so in the Buddha's instructions on mindfulness, he doesn't tell anyone to practice mindfulness, to do mindfulness, as an activity that you do. You establish it enough. And then what you do and he gives a series of different verbs for what you actually do. And these can be seen as kind of ways of being mindful, of practicing mindfulness.

One of the first ones he says, one of the things he does is to cognize, to know, to recognize what's happening. And that's a cognitive capacity of the mind. To know what's happening as it's happening. And that's often represented in mindfulness practice by doing simple mental noting -- itch, hearing, breathing, thought. Just kind of recognizing what's there. Another practice or activity for cultivating this or establishing mindfulness is to experience, to feel. And whereas the first one, to recognize is kind of a mental thing, to feel is more of a physical thing. To feel with your body. So with breathing, you can recognize that's an in breath. That's an expansion of the chest as I breathe. But one also can feel that expansion. You can feel the stretching, the movement of it, and those sensations of the breathing occur in the torso, if that's where you're focusing on. And so it's a sensing. And so part of mindfulness practice is to sense experience. And the balance between how much we're cognitively noting and aware. Oh that's in, that's out, that's an in breath, that's pressure, that's really so pressure. And how much we're letting the mind be quiet, just sensing the experience. That balance is different for different people. It's also different for different stages of concentration as we're practicing, as the mind gets stiller and stiller.
And also, we use whatever it is that is helpful, that helps the mind become more mindful and more still, more open, more inclusive.

Another way, another activity of mindfulness practice is to observe. To watch the experience. And this is kind of around many different religions, they emphasize the value of watcher, of seeing. And when you watch something, when you observe something with a mind's eye, or with their physical eye, you're not really interfering or changing or acting on what you're observing, you're just seeing it. And so when we observe breathing, observe thinking, we're not acting on it or changing it or anything more than just seeing it, observing it. In the Buddha's teaching, the capacity to observe, non reactively, relaxed way, open way and seeing clearly, is understood to be a fairly deep practice that comes when the concentration is strong. Or to say differently, that comes when the curtains have been pulled. When the agitation of the hindrances have fallen away. And we can just simply step back and watch.

Some experiences are more useful to watch, to observe. Sometimes thinking, we can have all three of these. We can clearly recognize I'm thinking. And that clear recognition can be a little movement or freedom from the thinking. And in that freedom, we come into a little bit more a place of being aware. We can also feel the experience of thinking, unless thinking is very, very subtle. If you're sensitive enough, you can feel the physicality that comes into play when we're thinking. Sometimes micro muscles that tense up sometimes. Sometimes -- I see the mic went out on zoom, I don't know why. But now it's loose, sorry. So micro muscles that can come into play when we're thinking, emotions can come into play. So we can see we can feel. And we can cognize. And we have all these three different realms of things, which are sometimes called mindfulness practice. Some people emphasize more the cognitive, some people emphasize more the sensate, sensory feeling. And some people emphasize more the observing. And what's appropriate for any given individual varies from day to day, from time to time. And learning how to navigate these different ways of being mindful. How to be present is guided by the principle of this too. Can I just be here with this experience, without relaxation, without being for or against.

And then as we practice these different things, observing, feeling, and cognizing, knowing, then mindfulness gets stronger and stronger. And as it gets stronger, the sense of being conscious, being aware becomes stronger. And then we can rest in that, we can abide in it until it's kind of lucid. And this ability to just do abide and rest in awareness, without the ego and self identity issues coming into play, without reactivity, without our desires operating, without aversions operating. Just a profound state of peace allows things more and more for the cobwebs of the mind to unravel. Allows more and more for the ways in which we're contracted or tight or entangled, caught in experience, begin to unravel as well. And more and more, there's freedom to be found. And that freedom in awareness. Awareness which is freedom is really one of the best things. And it's a great foundation for wisdom and for love.

So that's kind of a background for how the Buddha then goes on to teach what right mindfulness is, the four foundations of mindfulness. And I will touch on these next week. And in the meantime, you might over this weekend consider a little bit useful, beneficial ways that you might have experienced these three different aspects of mindfulness practice. Knowing, clear recognition, sensing or feeling through the body what experiences, and observing. And have fun with them. Enjoy the different ways of practicing mindfulness. Thank you very much.