

Ayya Santacitta
Week 3, *Opening the Mind of Awakening*
November 17, 2014
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Hello again. Today I'd like to speak about four of the seven factors of enlightenment. The first one is *sati*, which is mindfulness or awareness. The second one is *dhamma vicaya*, or investigation of *dhammas*. The third one is energy or *virya* and the fourth one is *piti* or joy. This is also sometimes called rapture.

When we work with the seven factors of enlightenment, we don't have to use any particular method of meditation. You can use any meditation method that works for you. Within that meditation, you can reflect on the presence or absence of the factors of enlightenment. First, what we notice is whether or not a certain factor of enlightenment is present or not present. If a factor of enlightenment is not present, we can see what the conditions are for this factor not to be present. Then, if a certain factor of enlightenment is present, we can investigate how we can strengthen the conditions for that factor of enlightenment to be more established. That's how we practice with them.

As we work with these, we are not saying we are just caught up in fear or anxiety, or in a very strong feeling or emotion. We are actually noticing and waking up to the fact that we are caught up in this emotion. That happens as soon as mindfulness or awareness is there. We realize that we have just been thinking in a fearful way for five minutes or even five seconds. Whenever we wake up to it, that's the moment when we step out of the emotion and into awareness, into mindfulness. We receive that package of feelings and thoughts and whatever is going on in our bodies and our minds. At that point, we are fully with the experience instead of shutting down by becoming small and contracted. We remain with the experience instead of becoming the emotion or the feeling, spinning the story, becoming increasingly caught up and identified, or becoming the fearful or anxious one and spinning with that. If we're there, we then project it onto our world and relate to people in that way. If we relate to everything in that way, then we are making our greatest fears happen as a result of how we are relating to what's happening right now.

If we are mindful and aware, then we are still with our experience, but we are not acting out of the experience. We are not becoming it. We are feeling the

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unpleasant feelings of anxiety and fear as they are established in the body and the mind at that moment. Instead of collapsing into it and becoming it, we can open into it and let what it is in the body and in the mind just be there. We allow that experience to open us up rather than hijack us into identification. That is a subtle shift in the way that we are meeting life. It's not that much has to change in terms of how we are. It's just opening up and allowing it to move through. After doing that for some time, we gain more confidence that this is something that we can do.

This is *dhamma vicaya* or investigations of *dhammas*. By just being with the experience fully as it is and allowing ourselves to be informed by our experience, we collect raw data—like a scientist—and then extract information out of this raw data. We extract the information and then use the raw data and to investigate everything within a framework of science. The Buddha has left us with the science of the body and the science of the mind. We can be in full contact with the experience and then collect insights, which means we're starting to go into the depths of our experience. We're no longer caught in the surface and we start to discern patterns, or certain laws of nature, that become apparent through attending to experience in that way of *dhamma vicaya*.

Once we get that, we start to see the connections between our experiences and the teachings then there's an ah-ha moment. There is a moment when we think, “oh yes, I can do that too. I can see how my own experience is reflected in the teachings of the Buddha.” Then we feel the energy coming forth because we feel confident that this is a path we can follow. This is something we can practice. There's a way for us to relate to our experiences in a different way. We also feel a sense of being more stable in the practice and feeling confident that this something we can do. We then have the courage and the willingness to open ourselves to something that we did not dare to do before because we thought it was not possible. We can hold steady with this. This ability to hold steady with our experiences becomes bigger because we actually have more energy with which we can hold steady.

Once we are able to this, joy arises also because we have the sense of confidence. We can meet life in a way that helps us to grow in wisdom and compassion which, in turn, helps us to grow in understanding about the way things are. That

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gives us joy and a feeling of personal empowerment. Once we know that we can meet life as it is, we don't have to manipulate life. We don't have to pick and choose. We can just be fully available and learn from whatever is happening.

This is this ability not to collapse and not to give into identification. It's learning how not to relate in the same ways as we have done over and over again in the past. By creating that space and giving the opportunity for something new to come forth, we find a way of connecting with our experience where we don't repeat the same thing again and again. This is also the essence of wisdom. It's meeting an experience with openness before we project the past onto it. In order to do that, we need to increase our capacity for being with feelings however they are, rather than trying to control them by turning toward distraction, drinking something, eating something, or reading something. There are so many different ways to do this. Some of them are quite innocent and are highly praised in our culture. However, in terms of insight and being with the way things are, some of those are actually a waste of time. We need to wake up to that fact we need to attend to experience. This element of *piti* or joy is also sometimes translated as rapture.

This is a very important factor for the path and that was one of the crucial insights that Buddha himself had when he started to have a more effective practice. With this insight, he woke up to the fact that starving the body and suppressing the mind is not a way to liberation. It is not a way to wisdom and compassion. He was remembering one day when he was a little boy. He was sitting under a tree and waiting for his father, who was out doing some business. He naturally started to go into concentration and he had this feeling of being very connected and fully with his experience. He felt the sense of rapture—the sense of *piti*—arise and he remembered that. Then he thought we would practice again in this way since he had very good results from it. A mind that is saturated with joy and has a feeling and experience of satisfaction, of connection with life, is prone to tranquility and settling itself. That's one of the insights that Buddha shared with us. He had a different approach than the other teachers of his time, who were very much speaking about sadism and dependencies. That was a very forceful way of doing this and the Buddha found a different way—the middle way.

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The Seven Factors of Enlightenment are a path that establishes us in this middle way, which is finding the balance between suppressing, getting lost and acting out. It's that way that encourages us to be aware and fully with our experience. It also lets us exercise a choice to determine what we want to enact and what we do not want to enact. The etiquette precepts, or the five precepts, are our way, how we can make a decision, what can we enact safely and wholesome, what is wholesome and what is un-wholesome. Those five precepts are considered the minimum foundation for a successful practice.

If we want to really practice those Seven Factors of Enlightenment we need to also understand what *sila*, or ethics, is all about. If we reflect on our lives and see that our own lives are in accordance with *sila*, that awareness can be a wellspring of joy. That can give us a feeling of personal empowerment. At that point, the mind is much more easily inclined towards tranquility and concentration.

Having insight into the way things are is also another way of expressing what disenchantment is all about. It's like waking up from a dream. In our culture, disenchantment is sometimes considered to be a pessimistic way of looking at experience. In the framework of the teachings, however, it's considered a wholesome thing to be disenchanted with surface experiences and the surface appearances of the world. It gives us the ability to go into to the depths of experience and see what's really going on. I very much like that little saying of Bhante Gunaratana's about escaping into reality rather than from it. It's really where the Seven Factors of Enlightenment are leading—they're leading us deeper and deeper into reality. That's the only escape route, really.

By seeing the way things truly are, we can free ourselves from dependency on things that hold promise for us—the things that hold promise for us as long as we only look at them on the surface. It all starts with establishing mindfulness and being fully in touch with our experience, and then relating what we are seeing through this way of being. We can relate it back to the framework of the teachings and then feel a sense of connection with life. We can feel a sense of energy and joy coming through. Our capacity to have deeper wisdom and compassion come forth simply by being with whatever life is presents to us.

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We don't have to go out and look for anything special; it's just all here and now. We just need to fully attend to it and then allow that process of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment to reveal itself. It's a natural progression that we don't have to make happen.

Ayya Anandabodh will speak about the factors next week. So I hope you benefited from this little presentation and hope you can integrate it into your practice. Thank you.

