

Ayya Anandabodhi
Week 4, *Opening the Mind of Awakening*
November 24, 2014
“Honoring Contentment”
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Hello, again. Last week Ayya Santacitta was speaking about the first four factors of awakening, of enlightenment. These are energizing factors. Mindfulness is always focusing and collecting; it's developing an investigation of what's going on with interest and curiosity. Once we put energy behind that and combine those factors, there is a joy that arises; thus, these are energizing factors of enlightenment. If we find our practice is getting a bit dull, or we're drifting and not really knowing what to do—or our practice is always a little bit too spacious or sleepy—then we can implement those factors. If you're finding that you're very agitated, or if you have a lot of energy and you don't know what to do with yourself, then employing those factors will bring you more energy. So, you might find yourself getting into a bit of a knot. Know, however, that mindfulness is always the right thing to apply. Mindfulness is always the right quality to apply to our experience at any given moment.

I would like to speak a little bit about the last three factors of enlightenment, of awakening. They are always together with mindfulness—not separate from it. These are particularly helpful if there is a lot of energy. If there's too much energy, then use mindfulness to go straight to these three factors. These three factors are tranquility, or *passaddhi* in Pāli, concentration (*samādhi*), and equanimity (*upekkha*).

Now that I'm living in America, I reflect on these qualities and see how, culturally, there's a lot of emphasis on things like energy, effort, joy, gain, success, getting more and being better. This emphasis doesn't really allow for a resting place. It doesn't allow for contentment. Where does contentment come into the picture? It doesn't, really, because as soon as you get one thing, then you've got to move on to the next. You've got to get better and more and faster and newer and so on. We can apply this same paradigm to our practice. If we're not careful, our practice becomes a process of getting more, getting better and having higher results. Then we judge our practice and ask, “Did I have a good meditation, a good sit, or a not-good sit? Where am I on the path? Is that person further on than me, or not as far?” We can get into this sidetrack of applying that same drive to our meditation practice or our spiritual practice.

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These three qualities are, in some ways, counter to American culture. Maybe a lot of you didn't even switch on tranquility today. We may say, “Tranquility, what's the point? I mean, who wants to be tranquil? I want to be excited! I want interest, I want stimulation!” However, as I was mentioning in the first week, when we're constantly following the desires and the drives of our hearts and minds, we get temporary satisfaction. We get a little gratification, but we never reach that place of peace. This is something that I have noticed here in this culture, in America—and not just in America, but also in the larger Western world. There's a lot of anxiety because there's never a point at which one can say, “Hmm. That was really good. I got here, it's enough and that's good for now.” It's not allowed to think in that way and, as a result, we never get to really rest into the fruits of our work or our efforts. There's always something better on the horizon. There's always something more that we should do. We should always be better than we are. This leads to anxiety and more and more stress. The Buddhist path is a path that leads to the ending of stress, not to increasing stress. So it's very important to look at these last three factors.

The first one we'll discuss is tranquility, or *passaddhi*. What is that? It leads directly from joy, or *pīti*, or rapture. That's an interesting shift, isn't it? You can experience the joy and really take in the experience of the whole body and mind filled with joy. Then there's this sense of, “I like this. I want it to keep going. I want it to last forever. I want more of it.” This is where we lose touch with the path and we're back in greed again. We're back in desire again and the path is leading us deeper. We experience the joy and we experience perhaps a lot of rapture. We experience the joy of seeing clearly, of knowing, of being fully present. We can enjoy that for a while and even dwell in it. Let it fill us. This is wholesome. It's good, it's beautiful. However, we don't want to stay there forever. After a while, it will start to get agitating. Also, if we just stay at the joy level, we don't really learn anything. It's just another nice experience, another hit of pleasure. It's like a vacation in our minds and in our experiences.

The movement from joy to tranquility, or peacefulness, is a deepening of experience. We experience the joy, and while the joy is wholesome, beautiful and present, we know that it can't last forever. So, instead of holding onto that until it falls apart when somebody disturbs us, we consciously start to pacify or calm the body. With the breath we can breathe through the body, breathe through the torso, through the limbs, all the way down the legs and out the toes. In turn, what was a

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high energy starts to become deeper energy, an energy that's a more deeply integrated awareness in the body. As we do that, we may feel a sense of relief, or maybe a surprise, like, “Oh, I thought I really want to stay with that joy, but actually this is even more pleasant. This is a deeper pleasure.” As we calm the body with the breath, the mind also starts to calm more deeply and we experience that pure ease. It can be like delight or like a mind that is not agitated. It's not wanting. It's not fearful. It's a sense of calm within this moment and with this experience.

As we move from joy into the deeper calming experience, there needs to be a certain conscious intention. I want to also emphasize again—if you're feeling dull and sleepy, you shouldn't try to go toward tranquility. You'll just fall asleep. Instead, you need to energize your system. However, if there's a lot going on, or if you feel like your energy is a little bit too high and you need a bit more calming, then you can consciously calm the bodily formation and calm the mental formation.

Let's just sit for a moment and experience that. What is it like to take a breath and feel all the way through the body? We're not just lost in a thinking mind, but we can feel the head all the way down the neck. We can breathe through the limbs, through the arms. Of course, we're not physically breathing through the arms, but we can let the breath body go through our arms, through our shoulders and down through our arms, through our fingers. Just having that intention combs out all the tangles in our body. Then we can breathe through the other shoulder and down through the arm, all the way down through the fingers. We comb through the energy of the shoulder and the arm and go through the torso. Here we feel the strength of the torso, or perhaps the warmth just by breathing. As you breathe in and breathe out, breathe all the way down through the torso, and then through your hips and down through the legs. Feel any tension or agitation being combed out, being teased out, being smoothed out and released. First one leg, then the other leg, or you can do both together if that's helpful. Move all the way down to the feet. Any extra energy that is tangled up in the system can be smoothed out and released back into the great universe where it will be recycled. It'll be used and never wasted. This is how we bring tranquility to the body and mind. Also, if the mind is excited or nervous or agitated, then we can use a mantra like “May I be well. May I be free from all suffering. May all beings be well. May all beings be free from all suffering.” This is how we replace the agitated thoughts with

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thoughts of well being, or thoughts of good or kindly intention. As we center, calm and collect, the mind starts to naturally collect. So *samādhi*, or collectedness of mind, or concentration, starts to naturally happen as we practice this calming and steadying of the body and mind.

This word *samādhi* is often used in the Buddhist world and sometimes we can have a very fixed view of what it means. One aspect of *samādhi* is giving a very narrow focus at the exclusion of all other experiences. If we do that, perhaps we can develop very strong concentrated states. Sometimes we can and sometimes we can't. Sometimes we may go on long retreats trying to get to those states and then find ourselves frustrated. That's where the energy is. Perhaps there's a lot of energy going in, but there's no discernment, wisdom to know what to do or wonder if what we're doing is the right thing. Sometimes we need to keep our attention broader so we're still collected and not distracted, so our attention does not get pulled here and there. When we're collected, the mind's collected—but it's collected in a bigger space. Maybe the whole body is in the mind, in our awareness. We develop that collectedness of mind by being aware of what is going on right now, not by following the stories or our past, dreams about the future or worries about what might happen.

By being with this experience and breathing calm breaths, the body and mind start to collect. If you have a natural aptitude for strong concentration, then you can develop the absorptions—the four or eight absorptions. If you don't have that natural aptitude, I would encourage you to just allow the mind to be collected instead of trying again and again at something that makes you feel frustrated. Experience that. Be with it. It's a powerful state. As the mind is collected, then we know what arises moment by moment. We know what is happening, what is here. In that, there's a sense of ease and well being. The well being that we spend so much time looking for in the world is actually right here; we just never stayed still long enough to really notice it, to find it. It's right here, all the time, accessible to us at every moment. Strong concentrative states or absorptions may not be available to us at every moment, but collectedness of mind is available if we remember to hold our attention in the right way.

As we develop this collectedness of mind and we allow the mind to be broad and present, then we see the arising and ceasing of things. We see how feelings arise

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in the body. They're there for a while. They have a sense of urgency and then they pass. We may see moods arise in the mind as well; they're also there for a while. They're really believable and then they pass. When we have that collectedness of mind, we can see the whole of our experience playing out—what we call “me” and “mine.” We see these different qualities arising, being there for a while, and then passing. To be able to know that directly is a great teaching. If we just hold onto a painful state that arises, then we feel stuck. We push it away or try to get rid of it. We feel scared. We can recognize that and say, “Ah, this is a painful feeling. I've had this before, but I don't have it constantly. So there must be a point at which it stops.” Then we can trust that and say, “Okay, this is a painful feeling. I don't like it. It's not nice. I don't want it, but it's here, so let's pay attention to it. Here it is.” Then we're with it for a while in that collected state, in that clarity. Then naturally, at some point, it changes. When we know the arising and ceasing of things, then we have a refuge. It's like a refuge in dharma—in Buddha and in dharma, in that which knows and in the truth of the changing nature of things. When our mind is collected and we see this—we see this natural phenomena arising—we let it be there for a while, and then it passes away. This is the nature of things. As we know that more and more deeply, as we pay attention to that, then equanimity naturally arises.

Equanimity is an interesting word in English. You only ever hear about it in Buddhist circles. In Pāli, it's the word *upekkha*. One of the ways of understanding *upekkha* is thinking about it like the big view, or the big picture. You can see the whole story, not just one little moment of it. When we reflect on something very intense in this moment, we can then move from that and reflect on the whole of our lives. In the context of the whole of my life, how difficult is this moment? How important is this in this moment? Do I need to do something about this, or is it just one of those things that arises and passes away? Sometimes I find it helpful to also bring in the sense of being a little human being on planet Earth, which at one time it was a great planet—a vast planet. In some ways, it is getting smaller and smaller. It's not getting physically smaller, but conceptually smaller in the galaxy or in this universe. The Hubble space satellite has possibly discovered billions, if not trillions, of galaxies. We used to wonder if we just have this one galaxy. Now they discovered that there are countless numbers of galaxies out there. Wow. Here we are, little me. Here I am, little me with my story and my life in a tiny moment of time in this vast unfolding, this miraculous and extraordinary

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unfolding. This can give you a sense of *upekkha*, a sense of the me-and-mine story that gets so important. It’s like, “Is it really?” It’s just this.

I think the word equanimity can very easily be mistaken for indifference. They say the near enemy of equanimity, or *upekkha*, is indifference. Indifference says, “Everything changes and nothing matters anyway,” or “I’m just this little human being in this vast universe. So what? It doesn’t matter.” Actually, when we really have that *upekkha*—that equanimity—there’s a real appreciation and resonance with the arising that is happening right now, with the kind of miracle of it and the knowing that it’s just this. It’s just this. It’s just this moment and it’s both incredibly precious and in some ways completely empty. It’s changing and not solid. With *upekkha*, we can experience one of the highest forms of love. It’s like the love that can accept birth, aging, death, any difficulty, beauty, hostility, and compassion. It can accept all of it because it understands that this is the nature of the unenlightened mind in the world. It couldn’t be any other way. That’s not, as I said, indifference. It’s not saying, “Well, it doesn’t matter. Of course people are going to kill each other. They’re going to have wars and exploit the planet for fossil fuels and, oh, it doesn’t matter.” It’s not that. It’s understanding. It’s saying, “Well, this is going to happen because people are still fueled by ignorance, greed, confusion and fear. As long as that’s happening, as long as we’re still confused and obscured by those states, then we’re going to do a whole lot of crazy things.” We are doing them, and *upekkha* is that which understands that. You could say it’s like a mother that knows her kids are going to have to make mistakes. Her teenagers are going to do wild things, things they have to do in order to learn for themselves. She remembers that she did the same. It’s not saying, “Yeah, this is a really good thing to do. Go and do more.” Instead, it’s understanding that we have to learn by our mistakes. We have to find out for ourselves. Also, at the same time, we can develop our own hearts and minds. We can help guide others and be an example to others. We don’t all have to be victims of the madness of unenlightened minds that are rife everywhere. We can guide that in the right direction and help each other to wake up.

Ayya Santacitta mentioned that the outer supportive condition is being with good friends or spiritual friends. If we’re really lucky, we might find someone who’s very, very realized. There are a few in the world. Or we might know of somebody who has a pure heart and great intentions. We can remember them and that can be an encouragement when we’re getting lost in the confusion of our own minds. Or

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we might just have friends who are more or less the same as we are, but they keep encouraging us in the right direction. These friends are anywhere in between. They're very precious. To be such a friend in the world—or to have such a friend—is a great blessing. It helps us remind ourselves of the true potential that we have in this human life.

I want to mention that I knew about the enlightenment factors—the seven factors of enlightenment—for a long time, but somehow I could not get my mind to retain them. I would be like, “Oh, yeah, those seven. Now what are they again?” There's only seven, you know. It's not like that's a lot to remember. Then I realized that I had this idea that in order to practice these enlightenment factors, you have to be almost enlightened already. Or I thought that maybe if I did that, then—voom! —it's going to lead to enlightenment and maybe I'm not quite ready yet. These enlightenment factors are a gradual path. They're a gradual awakening. Even if you can connect with them a little bit, do that. That is great. As you keep putting your attention on these qualities of heart and mind, they deepen and start to grow. Just like anything we take care of—it starts to grow. It gets stronger and healthier.

We also start recognizing how easy it is to feed our attention into what is wrong, into the hindrances. I think that's something many of us do unconsciously. It's similar to nourishing the weeds in the garden and helping them to grow strong because we keep seeing them. We keep giving them more and more and more. Meanwhile, those beautiful flowers, fruit bushes and plants in the garden of our hearts and minds get choked up. They don't get to see the light. So we have to recognize when those hindrances arise or are present. When we recognize them, we cannot start berating ourselves for having been greedy or angry or sleepy or whatever it might be. Rather, we can say, “Look at that! A moment of mindfulness. I clearly see the anger in my heart and now I can do something with that.” Or we might say, “I see clearly the sleepiness and dullness with which I'm living my life and I can start to sharpen up.” The factors of awakening gradually and steadily lead us back to our true nature, back to what is beautiful, powerful and true. They help us return to what is light within our own being. We need a lot of patience, steadiness and persistence in this practice so that we don't just get swamped again with all the weeds of our mind. So, I'd like to offer that. I hope there's something useful there for you.

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Ayya Anandabodhi, Ayya Santacitta together recite the Bojjhanga Paritta:

Bojjhango sati sankhāto

Dhammānam vicayo tathā

Viriyaṃ pīti passaddhi

Bhojjhangā ca tathapare

Samā dhupekkhā bojjhangā

Satte te sabba dassinā

Muninā samma dakkhātā

Bhāvitā bahulīkatā

Samvattanti abhiññāya

Nibbānāya ca bodhiyā

Etena sacca vajjena

Sotthi te hotu sabbadā

Ekasmim samaye nātho

Monggallā nañca Kassapam

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Gilāne dukkhite disvā

Bojjange satta desayi

Te ca tam abhinanditvā

Rogā muñcimsu tamkhane

Etena sacca vajjena

Sotthi te hotu sabbadā

Ekadā dhamma rājāpi

Gelaññenā’bhi pīlito

Cundattherena tam yeva

Bhanā petvāna sādaram

Sammo ditvā ca ābādhā

Tamhā vutthāsi thānaso

Etena sacca vajjena

Sotthi te hotu sabbadā

Pahīnā te ca ābādhā

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Tinnā nampi mahesinam

Maggā hata kilesāva [sic]

Pattānuppatti dhammatam

Etena sacca vajjena

Sotthi te hotu sabbadā.


