

Ayya Santacitta
Week 2, *Awakening the Mind*
November 10, 2014
“Cultivating the Seven Factors of Enlightenment”
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Hello everybody. I'm following up from the talk Ayya Anandabodhi gave last week about the five hindrances. Today, I'm going to speak about the seven factors of enlightenment, or *bojjhanga* in the Pali language. The seven factors of enlightenment are sometimes also called the anti-hindrances, so I'd like to start with a quote from the Anguttara Nikaya about the relationship between the five hindrances and the seven factors of enlightenment: "Whosoever is emancipated from the world does so by removing the five hindrances, firmly establishing their mind in the four foundations of mindfulness and cultivating the seven factors of enlightenment or seven factors of awakening."

We are establishing mindfulness in the four foundations—the foundations of the body, feelings, mind and phenomenon. When we establish mindfulness in this way, we transform the five hindrances into the seven factors of enlightenment. The seven factors of enlightenment comprise the path that leads to enlightenment. At the same time, they also constitute enlightenment.

Sometimes the seven factors of enlightenment are compared to a river flowing towards the ocean, as all rivers flow toward the ocean. Similarly, the seven factors of enlightenment lead us towards enlightenment. Practicing in this way is very simple in theory, but putting it into full application is considered very challenging at times.

When we're confronted with one of the hindrances, turning towards our experience can be difficult. We are used to distracting ourselves from the immediacy of direct experience by getting lost in different stories. Turning away from past habits is not easy. We have to learn to stop and open ourselves to what's happening in the present moment.

The first of the seven factors of enlightenment is *sati*, also described as mindfulness or awareness. Here we just come into the present moment to let go of the hindrances of desire, aversion and all of the other hindrances we spoke about last week. We let go of those ways of relating to experience and come fully into direct contact. That's the first factor.

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When we stay with the experience in that way and relate it to the framework of the teachings, we arrive at the second factor of enlightenment. This is *dhamma vicaya*, or investigation of *dhammas*.

Then, if we can recognize the teachings in our own experiences, a sense of energy arises, along with a sense of recognition and a sense of urgency. We want to apply the teachings in this way because we can see this as a path that leads toward insight. If we practice in that way, energy arises and then turns into joy. It turns into the joy of being fully connected with our experience rather than thinking about it. This is a way of being fully alive and being fully with what is. This joy can be nourishment on the path to being fully with it.

After fully being with the experience, it starts to settle down and turn into tranquility. The Pali word for tranquility is *passaddh*. In the Pali language, energy is *viriya* and joy is *piti*. To review, there's *sati* (mindfulness), *dhamma vicaya* (investigation of *dhammas*), *viriya* (energy) and *passaddh* (tranquility). If we can stay with that sequence it naturally turns into collectiveness of mind or concentration. In the Pali language, this is called *samadhi*.

If we stay fully with experience, insight increasingly occurs. The mind is able to let go of old ways of relating to experience and meets life with equanimity, or *upekkha* in the Pali language. This is a natural progression, or a natural sequence that arises if we set up mindfulness and are fully in the present moment. It's not something we have to force the mind to come up with. This is a natural blossoming if we start with awareness, if we are fully here with our experience.

According to the Buddha's teachings, there is an internal supportive effect that comes from practicing the seven factors of the enlightenment. Attention—or the quality of simply being in the present moment and attending to your experience—makes up the framework of the teachings of the Buddha. In short, this is how we describe this internal supportive condition.

Another way to describe the internal supportive factor is wise attention. This means that we are with our experience and, at the same time, we're relating it to the framework of the teachings. We can see our experience in a better context and

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not just see our experience in relationship to me and myself, or me and my life, or and me and my world. With wise attention, we see it in a much bigger context. By seeing it in a bigger context, there is an ability to relax with it so we don't take everything so personally. So that's the internal supportive factor.

The external supportive condition is to have wise friends and spirited friendships. Friends can really help us stay centered and remember the teachings by giving us feedback and supporting us if the going gets tough. This essentially means that we have contact with people who are on the same path as we are, or at least people who have respect for the path. These people understand that a spirit of practice can really only go into the depths if it rests on a foundation of *sila*, or ethics. This is what's called the five precepts in the Buddhist framework. These are considered the minimum for ethical contact.

The central purpose of the seven factors of enlightenment is letting go. It's developing the capacity to step out of the five hindrances, step into the middle of our lives and open to what we are meeting. Here, we can use whatever happens in our lives as a means to grow in wisdom and compassion. That can be only done if we are fully with our experiences, if we collect the raw data from the experiences that our lives bring us. We don't have to go out and look for anything because it's always coming to us every moment; we just need to pay attention to it.

The central purpose of letting go is the essence of all three schools of Buddhism. This is about letting go of past ways of looking at experience, being there and fully allowing ourselves to be informed, and increasingly sensitizing ourselves to experiencing. By sensitizing ourselves, we are able to go deeper and look into the way things are, how life and the world are opening up. We become more and more able to relate in a way that is aligned with the laws of nature, a way that is more aligned with the way things truly are. This is a way that is not purely informed by our preferences.

If we relate to experience in this way, there's a lot of friction and suffering there. It's precisely that suffering—that dissonance—that can motivate us to take on a path. We're only aware of that if we are stepping into our lives, if we lean towards them. Only then can we be aware of what's really happening. If we turn away

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because we can't hold an unpleasant feeling, or if we turn to distraction, know there are many different ways for how that can be done.

Over the centuries, the array of available means that we can use to distract ourselves has become more complex, sophisticated and varied. When there are so many things available to give us a momentary sense of fulfillment, we can lose ourselves in that flat land of consumerism. We have gone so far in distracting ourselves from unpleasant feelings that our whole planet is reflecting our way of going about life in order to distract ourselves. It leads to our destruction, really. It leads to destruction of our environment and to destruction of ourselves. We take many other species with us.

These distractions are fundamentally unwholesome and counterproductive. In the first moment, it seems to be in service of getting what we want. However, in the long run, we can see that it's not doing us a service at all. It's actually leading to increased difficulties for ourselves and the whole planet. This practice of the seven factors of enlightenment has a great implication for our lives as individuals as well as on a bigger scale. If we can live accordingly, we can inspire others to make these more central in their lives as well.

So these seven factors of enlightenment are very important supports for living a life that is in accordance with *dhamma*, and for living a life that is compassionate, wise, and benefits ourselves and others. Next week, I'm going to speak in more detail about those first factors of enlightenment.

I hope you have benefited from this little talk. See you again next week. Thank you.