

## *Factors for Awakening*

*January 27, 2017*

Take a couple of good, long, deep in-and-out breaths. Then notice where you feel the breathing process most prominently: where it's clearest, where it's easiest to focus on. Let your attention settle there. Then you can allow the breath to find a rhythm that feels comfortable. If long breathing feels good, keep it up. If not, you can change. Short in, short out; or short in, long out; or long in, short out. Heavy, light, fast, slow. Coarse or refined. Deep or shallow. Get a sense of what the body needs right now. If you're not sure, just pose that question in the mind, "What kind of breathing would feel good right now?" with each breath, and then see how the body responds.

To settle in here, you have to have a sense of ease, a sense of well being. If you're feeling tired, breathe in a way that feels more energizing. If you're feeling tense, breathe in a way that feels relaxed. Try to find the right balance. When you've found what seems to be the right balance, see if you can maintain it. If, after a while, it doesn't feel so good anymore, you can change again. You can keep this up throughout the hour. It may not seem like much, but you want to get the mind to feel at home here in the present moment. That requires getting more sensitive to what it needs right here: what the body needs, what the mind needs. That right there includes three of what the Buddha calls the factors for awakening.

The first is mindfulness, which means keeping something in mind. It doesn't mean bare awareness; it doesn't mean non-reactive attention or anything like that. It means remembering what you're here for. You're here because you see that the mind needs to be trained. Part of the training is to get the mind to settle down, so you want to remember that. Don't forget. If you forget, the mind will wander off and then it'll take a long time to come back. So keep reminding yourself: "right here, right here."

The second quality, analysis of qualities, is the discernment factor in the factors of awakening, the one that says, "Let's figure out what's needed right here. What's the point of balance? What coming into the mind is skillful, and what's unskillful?" If you see that something is skillful, as when there are a few moments of concentration, those are to be developed. In other words, you keep doing them. If you're distracted, you recognize that as an unskillful state and then drop it. Come back to the breath. Each time you come back to the breath, try to reward yourself with an especially satisfying breath.

As you keep at this, it turns into the third factor, which is persistence. Just keep at it, again and again and again. This is effort, but it's effort in a sense of ease. The ease that the Buddha talks about has two facets. One is a sense of fullness. When you breathe in right now, what would feel full in the different parts of the body? Not full in the sense of a full stomach, but just that the energy feels full, the blood flow feels unrestricted, everything can flow smoothly throughout the whole body, the energy flows smoothly throughout the whole body.

One thing you might like to try is to notice your hands. Try to relax your hands as much as you can. If you notice any slight little bit of tension in the hand, allow it to relax, relax, relax. Then, when there's a sense of ease in the hands, see if you can maintain that ease as you breathe in, as you breathe out. Don't let the hands tense up with the in-breath, or at the end of a breath. Just keep that sense of being open and ease, full right there.

Once there's that sense of fullness, allow it to spread up the arms into the chest. When there's that sense of fullness, there's a sense of calm. As the mind grows calm, then you can get concentrated. In other words, you don't have to think so much about adjusting the breath. Just be with that sense of fullness and ease, centered wherever in the body it feels right to be centered. The longer you stay here, and you have a sense that the ease is enough, you can let it go, which means you don't try to hold it anymore.

The mind will settle down in a state of equanimity. See if you can maintain that.

Those are the seven factors for awakening: mindfulness, analysis of qualities, persistence, rapture, calm, concentration, equanimity. That's one of the ways the Buddha describes them. He sets them up in a line, saying that you start with number one and you go through the list up through number seven. That's a way of showing how mindfulness and discernment working together can bring the mind to concentration.

The Buddha actually has lots of different ways of describing the order in which these things happen. Mindfulness always precedes concentration, but sometimes discernment comes first, then mindfulness, then concentration; sometimes mindfulness, then concentration, then discernment, depending on whether he's talking in terms of the factors for awakening, the five strengths, or the noble eightfold path. It really depends on what kind of mind you have and what kind of mind state you have right now. Because your needs will change: Sometimes you sit down and the mind just centers. At other times, you have to think your way to being calm.

So this is an explanation of how to think about it a little bit: directing your thoughts to the breath, asking questions about it, using your discernment to get the mind in the mood to settle down and feel at home here.

There's another way, though, in which the Buddha explains the factors for awakening, and that's for you to use whichever way your mind is tending in a particular time when you're going to sit down. He says you start out with mindfulness. Then you notice: Is the mind sluggish or is it overactive? If it's overactive, he said to go straight for the concentration. Don't analyze things, don't even worry about the rapture, just go straight for the calm. Just do what you can to make sure the mind is not interested in anything but the breath right now.

Other times, if you notice that you're getting sluggish—you're sitting here calm and you're beginning to doze off, or going into what Ajaan Lee calls delusion concentration, where the breath feels nice, everything is very still, but your focus gets very blurry, so blurry that when you come out, if you ask, where were you right now, you're not really all that sure: That's a sign that your concentration needs more energy. That's when you go for the more active factors for awakening. Start with analysis of qualities, thinking: What's wrong here? Is the breath too weak? Is the mind just simply getting lazy?

One thing that can happen is that you get with the breath, there's a sense of ease, and you drop the breath and go for the ease. That's like earning money at a job, then quitting the job and going out and spending all your money. The money will last for a while, but then it's going to run out. Then you go back to the old boss. If he's good-hearted, he'll take you on again, but you're never going to get a raise that way. In other words, if, when the sense of ease comes, you abandon the breath for the ease, the meditation is not going to develop very far. So to counteract that, you ask yourself: How do I stay more focused on the breath? This may involve breathing more heavily, or taking a quick survey of the body each time you breathe, going through the different parts of the body.

One thing I've found is when that you're getting drowsy, it's helpful to move the spot of your concentration every three breaths: the middle of the head, the middle of the chest, the stomach, in your hands, in your feet. Keep moving around. Stir up the juices of the mind. Stir up the blood with whatever you find wakes you up, whatever you find energizes you. That way, you've got the energizing qualities, which are analysis of qualities, persistence, and rapture. When they've done their work, then the mind will settle down.

So in this second way of using the factors of awakening, you can make it apply to times when the mind has to start with concentration, then moves to discernment. At other times, it starts with discernment and moves to

concentration. You can then use this pattern to analyze your concentration in either of these two ways. This gives you a handle on what you're doing, because you want to be able to read what's happening in the mind, and get a sense of what's just right.

If your thinking is too active, the mind is not going to really feel at home here. It won't be able to settle into the present moment with enough solidity to really see things clearly. If everything is too peaceful, too calm, you get very lazy. All you can think about is hanging out with a sense of ease. Neither extreme is going to be good for the practice. You have to learn how to bring things into balance. And as with any balance, it's going to swing back and forth, but after swinging back and forth for a while, it should be able to find a point of just right, which is what you want. After all, the mind needs both insight and tranquility to do the work that needs to be done.

Without the tranquility, the mind's going to be hungry for other pleasures, and it'll keep thinking of ways to slip away from the meditation and to find pleasure someplace else. Without insight, it's not going to see where its ignorance is, where it doesn't understand what's going on inside. So we work on these two qualities together: insight and tranquility, or concentration and discernment. Then we can bring the mind into a state of right concentration—not only right, but just right.

In Thailand they use the image of a hunter. When you're hunting, you go to the spot where you know the animals are going to be, and you have to sit there very quietly. If you make any noise at all, you're going to scare them away. But if you're too quiet, you start dozing off, and you're not going to notice them. So you have to be alert and still at the same time. They say that when anthropologists go to study hunting cultures and try to learn the very skills of the people in the culture, hunting is the hardest because it requires such balanced concentration. But that's what we're doing here: We're hunting down the defilements of the mind, the things that obscure its ability to see itself clearly. To do that, you have to be very still, but very alert.

So do your best to bring these two qualities into balance, then use the Buddha's teachings on the factors for awakening as a convenient checklist, so that when something's not quite right, you can ask yourself: What's missing? Then you can make up the lack and bring things into line.