

## *Potentials for Energy*

*October 2, 2021*

There's a passage in the Canon where the Buddha talks about how to feed the factors for awakening, and it's a strange passage. In each case, he'll talk about a potential within the body or in the mind—dhammas, he calls them—that can act as a foundation for that particular factor for awakening. In some cases, he's explicit about what those dhammas might be, but in others he's very vague. For instance, with rapture: He says there's a potential for rapture, but he doesn't say what it is. Similarly with calm, equanimity, persistence, and concentration: He simply says that there are potentials within you to be developed without saying what they are.

Now, in some cases, you can trace those potentials down in other passages in the Canon. For instance, with mindfulness, he says in another passage that the potential for mindfulness consists of virtue and views made straight. In other words, you have right view, and you have behavior that doesn't put up walls inside. If you break the precepts, there will be times when you realize you've harmed this person or that person, or you've harmed yourself. You don't want to think about those things, so you put up a wall, which makes it hard to remember what you did. And when you don't remember, it's hard to learn from your actions.

Similarly with persistence: The sutta doesn't say where the potential for persistence lies, but there are other passages in the Canon that do.

It's good to look into those passages, because during a heat wave like this we tend to be depleted. It's good to remember what the Buddha has to say about the potentials within you for energy. That seems to be the main message of that passage—the whole passage: that you have potentials within you. Look into them.

This relates to the teaching on *dhātu*, which we can translate as *element* or *property*. For the most part, these elements or properties don't just sit there. They lie there latent, but if you provoke them, they show themselves, sometimes in very extreme cases. When the water property is provoked, there can be floods. When the fire property is provoked, there are firestorms. From the wind property, of course, there are windstorms. Of the physical properties, the only one that doesn't get provoked is earth. It just sits there, but it's unusual in that way.

There are also mental properties, and this is what you want to look into, because the mind is a generator. It puts out more energy than it takes in. Sometimes we don't feel that way, but they've done studies to show that you expend more calories in a day than you take in through your food. There's

something in there that's creating energy. As the Buddha would say, it's the mind. So when you're feeling tired, when you're feeling depleted, look into your mind. There are potentials there. For advice on where to look, go through the various lists where the Buddha talks about persistence as a member of groups of dhammas, and see what comes before it.

In the case of the bases of success, there's desire. You find it's a lot easier to sit and meditate when you *want* to meditate than when you don't. Well, desire is something that you can generate. You can think of different ways for why you would want to meditate, why you would want to put in the effort. You can think about what happens to people when they don't practice, when they don't train their minds, and you don't want to be in that situation. You go to some old folks' homes and you see people with untrained minds dealing with the ravages of aging, the ravages of approaching death, and it's a really sad sight to see. You have to ask yourself, "Do you want to be there?"

I remember looking after my father when he was sick one time. This was after I'd been looking after Ajaan Fuang, and the difference was striking. Physically, my father was a big strong man. But when illness hit, he was very weak in the face of the illness, whereas Ajaan Fuang had been very strong. I attributed that to Ajaan Fuang's having practiced. So find ways to generate desire as a way of giving yourself energy.

In the five strengths or the five faculties, persistence comes after conviction. This goes hand in hand with desire. You want to find an end to suffering. You want to at least alleviate a lot of your suffering. And if you believe that the Buddha was awakened, and that he proved that human beings can do this, that gives focus to your desire—and a lot of energy right there.

Ven. Ananda would recommend that you augment your conviction with conceit and craving. Conceit, for him, was the thought, "There are beings who have found an end to suffering. They're human beings. I'm a human being. They can do it. Why can't I?" That's a skillful use of conceit. Similarly with craving: You hear that there are those who have put an end to suffering, and it's perfectly okay to want to do that, too. Don't believe the people who tell you that the desire to put an end to suffering, or the desire to gain awakening, is the one thing that keeps you from being awakened. The desire's an important motive. It's part of the path. There's also a role for craving, and a role for conceit as you develop your conviction.

In the factors for awakening themselves, persistence comes after analysis of qualities. In other words, you look into your mind and you try to figure out what in there is skillful and what in there is not. Then you try to develop what's skillful.

Sometimes it may seem to be just a tiny part of the mind as you're assailed on all sides by thoughts of this, that, thoughts of discouragement, thoughts of anger over something, thoughts of frustration with yourself. Well, those are not going to help you, so you don't want to feed them. And how do we feed those thoughts? We pay attention to them. So we've got to find the part of the mind that just doesn't pay attention to thoughts like that.

There is a part of the mind that simply watches what's going on. Find that part inside you. Hold on to that, and anything that comes up that's discouraging, anything else that comes up that's frustrating, don't be surprised by it—and don't get entangled with it. Just ask yourself, "Well what else is new?" Anger comes up. "What else is new?" Lust comes up. "What else is new?" You've seen these things before. They last for a while, then they go. If you give primary attention to simply a state of awareness, there's not much left over to pay attention to those other thoughts, and you let them go.

This is where it's useful to think in Ajaan Lee's terms: There are all kinds of little animals going through your bloodstream. Maybe these thoughts of lust and anger are theirs. They've learned how to dress them up so that you think they're yours, but why believe in the disguise? Just let them go, let them go, let them go—and they *can* go because this quality of awareness is open.

It's like the screen on a window. The breeze can come in through the screen, but the screen doesn't have to catch anything, so it's not disturbed by the breeze. And it doesn't disturb the breeze. That way you can hold on to something skillful inside, which is the determination not to give in to unskillful thinking. And you can augment that with your analysis of qualities of the mind, remembering that qualities of the mind, if you don't pay attention to them, don't last. They may last for a little while, but they're like a stray dog that's come to you for food. If you don't feed it, after a while, it'll lose interest. It'll whine and create trouble for a bit to get your attention. But if you're firm and ignore it, it'll eventually go away. In the meantime, that sense of awareness itself gets stronger and stronger as you hold on to it because you're feeding it, paying attention to it. That becomes your refuge as unskillful qualities keep coming at you.

The important point is to realize that you do have these potentials inside you. When they talk about accepting the present moment, if you really accept the present moment, you accept the fact that there are potentials here: potentials you can work with. After all, this is what the art of meditation is all about. As with any art, you start with some raw materials that look pretty unpromising. As with a painting: You start with a blank canvas. You've got some brushes, and you've got some paints. If you're unskilled, you don't realize what potentials you can get out

of that canvas, the brushes, and the paint. But if you develop skill, you can get some amazing effects.

The potentials are there. It's just a matter of learning how to provoke the right ones and to starve the ones that are not going to be helpful. In that way, you find that you have more energy, more persistence, more stamina.

The same principle applies to all the factors for awakening. They have their potentials within you, and the art of meditation is learning how to take those potentials and make something out of them so that the blank canvas doesn't sit there as a blank canvas. It can become a thing of beauty.