

Seven Factors of Awakening - Lecture 7

During the past several weeks we have been discussing a teaching of the Buddha's from the Pali Canon known as the Seven Factors of Awakening. For our study, I have been referencing a commentary on this text by Christina Feldman and Jaya Rudgard.

The Seven Factors of Awakening are: mindfulness, investigation, energy, joy, tranquility, collectedness or unification and equanimity. These are qualities that we can cultivate in our practice that lead us away from suffering and toward our liberation from greed, anger and delusion. While these qualities are presented as a list, our experience of them is not necessarily a progression from one to another. Elements of each element of the path are present in the other qualities.

A second teaching that is often taught alongside the Seven Factors of Awakening, is the teaching of the five hindrances or veiling factors. These are qualities that impede the realization of awakening. The five hindrances are: sense desire, ill will, restlessness or worry, dullness or drowsiness and doubt. The awakening factors can act as antidotes to the veiling factors.

So far in our study together, we have discussed the first five awakening factors: mindfulness, investigation, energy, joy and tranquility. This evening, we will focus on the sixth factor: composure, gatheredness or collectedness. The Pali word for this element of the teaching is "*samadhi*." Based on mindfulness, *samadhi* stabilizes our investigation of mind states. With

continuity of mindfulness, we find the gateway to *samadhi*. The veiling factors can work as a centrifugal force, scattering the mind. While mindfulness of the moment allows us to accept what is offered beyond our likes and dislikes, it is *samadhi* that brings the unification, the gatheredness, that acts as the continuity of mindfulness.

This unification arises with the cultivation of tranquility and joy. We may be inclined to think that tranquility and joy are the products of *samadhi*, but the Buddha suggests that tranquility and joy are qualities that provide a true foundation for collectedness.

Samadhi is often taught as a quality that we are to cultivate specifically during meditation. It is associated with one-pointed focus or concentration. But *samadhi* is a quality that we are to cultivate so that it becomes an element of each moment, on the cushion as well as off. Translated as unification, *samadhi* involves the integration of body, mind, and present moment. These elements are gathered and recognized in any moment in which we are wholeheartedly engaged. As we learn to be attentive to the content of mind, we often find that our mind is in one place, the past or the future, while our body is in another. Our attention is caught someplace between the two, and our intention is completely lost. We experience a divided, roving attentiveness. So *samadhi* brings a collectedness, a unification to our experience so that body and mind are present in the moment. The present awareness, the awakening to what is in the present moment in union with our bodies and minds, is the content of *samadhi*.

Christina Feldman comments:

The image I find myself drawing upon is that of a skilled sheep dog. You see this in so many countries in the world: that a good sheep dog knows how to gather the flock without intimidating, without harming. A good sheep dog moves flocks with care and attentiveness from pastures that are no longer nourishing into pastures that are ripe and nourishing. This is really what we're learning to do with samadhi. We learn to gather our attentiveness from the fields of distractedness, fragmentation, preoccupation, obsession, and to ground or integrate body, mind, and present moment.

Samadhi is a word that we have perhaps already heard in descriptions of meditation practice. One can have the sense that *samadhi* is an extremely advanced meditative state, achieved only by those who have dedicated years of practice to the cushion. And we are not really sure whether we have experienced it or not. But *samadhi* is just this: the gathering of body and mind to the present moment. It is at least easily imagined, and we likely have some experience of it, at least when things are going our way.

I think it likely that we have all had the experience of what is known as “flow.” This occurs when we engage in an activity that we enjoy, of which we have cultivated a certain mastery and confidence. We can find ourselves so completely focused on the task at hand, so that we do not have any idea of time. It is just our minds, our hands and the moment. This is an experience of *samadhi*.

So we probably have some familiarity with this quality. With practice, we can learn to recognize and identify moments of *samadhi*. We can learn to extend our experience of *samadhi* beyond formal meditation

practice into our everyday lives off the cushion. And we can learn to expand our experience of *samadhi* to include times when life is not unfolding according to our likes and dislikes.

The Buddha taught that the person with a mind trained in *samadhi* has a mind that is a friend. When we are caught in rumination, when we get hooked by the proliferation of our self-referential narratives that distort our capacity to see things as they really are, we are not free to meet the moment with creativity, compassion or kindness. Christina Feldman comments: *It doesn't mean surrendering the capacity to think. It doesn't mean surrendering the capacity to reflect and to investigate and to explore. But it does mean a profound freedom from those impulses of endlessly generating narratives and stories rooted in underlying patterns of reactivity. I think it's important to get a felt sense of this landscape, to really feel that your mind is truly a friend, a place of refuge, a place that you can turn to for reflection and for deepening insight.*

The unification of body, mind and moment plays an important role as an antidote to the five veiling factors or hindrances. *Samadhi* allows for the space where our intention and attention can arise together. Dissonance or regret come to an end in what the Buddha refers to as “calm abiding” or “calm collectedness.” We have encountered this term before in our study of the Metta Sutra. Freed from anger, ill-will, deception, greed and dullness, otherwise known as the hindrances, one is instructed to maintain the re-collection, the recollection, of calm abiding in all one’s encounters in the world, whether seated, standing, walking or lying down, boundless, omitting none.

Christina Feldman says:

Learning to work skillfully with thoughts and to understand the thinking process is also an important part in the cultivation of samadhi. We recognize thought as thought, rather than seeing the content of the thought actually as the full reality of the world. We see thinking as an event in the mind that has some connection with the external world, but is not the whole picture of reality. And in all the practice and cultivation that we've been doing, we've been learning to turn our attention to what's happening here and now in this body, heart, and mind rather than taking reality to be our perception of what's going on out there. As we learn to work skillfully with this, we find greater capacity for steadiness and clarity in the present moment.

So samadhi has the effect of blindfolding Mara, which means that these veiling factors cannot put down roots, they cannot establish themselves, they cannot shape the mind anymore. This, of course, is a real taste of freedom. And when Mara is blindfolded, samadhi allows and supports much more penetrating, transformative understanding of the three characteristics, how unsatisfactoriness and distress arise, and how they come to an end. It is a limb of awakening, not, again, an end in itself. Samadhi allows for a penetrating understanding of the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and of nonself. These understandings transform how we see, how we live, how we respond. They actually bring that level of freedom and liberation into lived experience. This is why samadhi is a capacity we all have

that we can develop to differing depths, and is a worthy quality to develop. This is the end of fragmentation, the end of scatteredness.

The Buddha said:

Let not a person revive the past
or on the future build their hopes,
for the past has been left behind
and the future has not been reached.
Instead, with insight let them see each presently arisen stage.
Let them know that and be sure of it
invincibly, unshakably,
and one who dwells thus ardently by day, by night,
is one who has one fortunate attachment."

Samadhi, the one fortunate attachment, is not a quality that can be forced, but we can create an environment conducive to its cultivation. Those of us who have attended the weekend retreats at Ryumonji known as "sesshin," may remember Shoken explaining that the word sesshin means "to collect the mind." The form that sesshin takes, the schedule, the chants, the formal meals, are the container that holds this collection of the mind. The efforts of those participating in the sesshin, the sangha, work together to uphold and support the container of our practice.

Every meditator begins with the cultivation of *samadhi*. We begin by entering the practice space, the zendo, where we can direct our attention to moment with both mind and body present, in order

to experience a sense of unity and collectedness. It is important to realize that as pleasant as our experience of calm abiding may be, it is not an end in itself. This would make it nothing more than a self-help tool. *Samadhi*, the gathering of body, mind and moment, frees us from proliferative, reactive thought, allowing us to more fully realize our interdependent nature. *Samadhi* offers an antidote to the scattered, self-absorbed focus of the veiling factors. And from this place, we can then move into the world, bringing with us a collected mind, a mind that is a friend, that is a refuge. As mindfulness is the gateway to *samadhi*, *samadhi* is the gateway to the awakening of compassion, equanimity and wisdom. It is with *samadhi* that we can live to benefit all sentient beings.

Thank you.

Resources:

The Seven Factors of Awakening, Tricycle Course, Christina Feldman and Jaya Rudgarn, Unit 7.

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marriage. And this development of samadhi is where every meditator begins. It's where we begin to sense what it means to actually be here, to be present, to be awake.

It's not an easy journey. It will be a journey through the veiling factors.

Jaya Rudgard:

In fact, continuity of mindfulness is really the gateway into samadhi. As the other awakening factors ripen, they have this effect of calming and dispelling the veiling factors that pull the mind out, the centrifugal forces in the mind that lead us into scatteredness, into entanglement.

example, if mindfulness is knowing and accepting what's happening in the present moment, we can think of samadhi as the unification, the gatheredness, that results from a continuity of mindfulness.

Learning to work skillfully with thoughts and to understand the thinking process is also an important part in the cultivation of samadhi. We recognize thought as thought, rather than seeing the content of the thought actually as the full reality of the world. We see thinking as an event in the mind that has some connection with the external world, but is not the whole picture of reality. And in all the practice and cultivation that we've been doing, we've been learning to turn our attention to what's happening here and now in this body, heart, and mind rather than taking reality to be our perception of what's going on out there. As we learn to work skillfully with this, we find greater capacity for steadiness and clarity in the present moment.

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experience. This is why samadhi is a capacity we all have that we can develop to differing depths, and is a worthy quality to develop. This is the end of fragmentation, the end of scatteredness.

"Let not a person revive the past or on the future build their hopes, for the past has been left behind and the future has not been reached. Instead, with insight let them see each presently arisen stage. Let them know that and be sure of it invincibly, unshakably, and one who dwells thus ardently by day, by night, is one who has one fortunate attachment."—The Buddha.

Treasuring this capacity we have for collectedness, knowing it as our greatest refuge is one of our greatest allies, and it leads to a mind that we can rest within and have confidence in.

Ways to cultivate samadhi:

Notice when the mind and body are apart

Reconnect mind and body: Christina

Try nonhurrying : A practice that I found very useful for quite a long period of time was to experiment with nonhurrying. I took it upon myself for a year to have the intention to renounce hurry, haste, and busyness. Of course, I quickly discovered that nonhurrying didn't mean I couldn't move quickly but that hurrying was really a state of mind that powerfully impacted the body and how I moved through my life: the haste, rush, and urgency, even.

The Buddha described samadhi as calm abiding.

- Mindfulness of the body is a huge support for samadhi. It also brings our attention out of the domain of mental proliferation or moods.
- Samadhi is not the absence of thought but it does provide the wherewithal to choose how and whether we engage with thoughts. It offers freedom from mental proliferation and obsessive narratives.
- By sustaining both intention and attention samadhi resolves the dissonance between our deepest values and our thoughts, speech, actions.
- Samadhi is not the goal of the path. It supports insight, wisdom, and

equanimity to arise.

When attention is stable and collected, the potential for insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and impersonality increases.