

Mindfulness of Breathing (44) Investigation Factor of Awakening

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Let me say a few things about the investigation factor of awakening. It is usually called investigation, which is probably not the best translation. Overall, the word “investigation” is pretty good as an overarching generalization because it involves exploration, discovery, and a deeper discernment of what our experience is. This process of exploration is often called investigation in English.

In *vipassanā* practice, investigation is not a kind of deep probing or searching. Rather, it is a state of openness and receptivity that allows the experience to show itself fully to us. For me, it is represented by the question:

“What? What is happening here? What is it?” But we never look for an answer. Instead, the “what” prompts a clear looking or discovery – silently sensing, feeling, or perceiving what is here.

In doing this, we begin to enact or tap into our capacity for freedom. It’s so easy to be caught and entangled by our experiences, thoughts, and feelings around what is happening in the world. There are many ways we get entangled, attached, or reactive to how things are. When there is reactivity, that is not freedom.

Responding with choice and wisdom can be an enactment of our freedom – but reacting is not. If we are always reacting, and being pulled around and hijacked by our thoughts – or we feel like a victim of our experience – then we haven’t discovered freedom. One way freedom can begin is in acts of mindfulness, to be mindful of what’s here. Acts of mindfulness can grow to be a stronger form of freedom, which is investigation – to see and discover what *is* here.

The core investigation that is part of *vipassanā* practice is *dhamma vicaya*, which Ines talked about yesterday. *Vicaya* comes from the prefix *vi* and the root word *caya*. *Caya* means a “heap,” an “accumulation,” and [here] *vi* means “separate.”

Human beings have an amazing and very important capacity to generalize, lump things together, hold concepts of things together. This is useful, but it can limit our ability to see clearly what is here, to discern, and distinguish the details of our experience.

It is a generalization to say that I had a difficult morning with the technology. But what was the experience specifically like to be here with the technology? Some of it was quite delightful. For example, it was enjoyable and inspiring to see the people on retreat and on YouTube in the chats. It was quite nice to be exploring the Dharma as I spoke. It was nice to sit and meditate when there was some quiet time.

Then there was the issue with the technology. There were so many different devices that I got confused about which battery charger was supposed to be at home and which was supposed to be here. Suddenly my laptop went dark. It wasn't actually an unpleasant experience. It was what it was, and now there was an issue to look into.

Probably the most unpleasant parts were having to ask my wife for help when she was busy at home and wondering how I was going to get back in time to have everything running for the people on Zoom. There was also the awkwardness of realizing that some of you on

YouTube could hear what I was saying. What impact did that have on people meditating?

Those were the particulars. As I distinguished all the different parts, I wouldn't say it was a challenging morning. Some parts had their own unique challenges. But I didn't lump it together as a lousy morning with technology. If I were to write out all the little details or distinctions of what was happening moment to moment, I could see some parts were challenging and others were not. There were pleasant parts and not so pleasant parts.

The ability to begin distinguishing and to not lump. If you know the distinction between lumpers and splitters, Buddhists thrive on being splitters – on really seeing more and more carefully, “What is really happening here? What are the details?” – rather than generalizing.

This clarity of mind – the mind getting clearer and clearer – is cultivated through mindfulness. The particularities – the details – which are experienced as unique little component parts of experience, begin revealing themselves more and more. This becomes especially important when the capacity to distinguish – to see the particularities, the details of what goes on – occurs together with wisdom, the wisdom factor.

Many things are considered wisdom in this practice. One core aspect of wisdom is being able to make the distinction between what is helpful, and what is not – the distinction between what is wholesome and healthy, and what is not. Or the distinction between what has an “Ouch” in it or an, “Ahh, this is good.” Or the distinction between where freedom is, and where freedom is not.

Wisdom is capable of discerning these distinctions. Mindfulness provides clarity so we clearly see things as they are – and wisdom sees what is useful and what is not. This distinction is where we discover the path, and where our choices can be. It is a simple distinction between being entangled in our experience and being free as we investigate it.

With wisdom, we actually see that it is better to be free than entangled. So, the degree to which we have the capacity, we put effort and energy into going in the direction of freedom. We investigate, discern, and see more clearly what the experience is.

It is said that the investigation factor of awakening – the clarity of mind that can see the details of experience, not lumping or generalizing what it may be – inspires the effort factor of awakening. It inspires energy because we see, “Oh, this is the direction to go. This is where freedom, peace, and the lack of stress and

suffering is found.” It is inspiring to make that choice and go in that direction. To go in that direction is a manifestation of our capacity for inner freedom.

As we walk this path, we keep discovering more and more ways that we can manifest or enact our freedom. Then, at some point, freedom becomes a state that we live in, as opposed to something found in the details of how we live and the choices we make.

Mindfulness leads to the capacity to see clearly, which is called discernment, making distinctions, or investigation. Investigation itself is a prompt or catalyst for the effort factor in practice – so that the effort factor of awakening can be born and come to fulfillment.

The effort factor of awakening will be tomorrow’s topic for the retreat and YouTube. I hope the little technology issue today was not too much of an interruption. It worked out well enough for everyone. Thank you very much, and we’ll continue tomorrow.