

Satipaṭṭhāna (58) Investigation Factor of Awakening

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distinguish, clear, differentiation, clarity, mind, details, investigation, fog, perception, consequences, relaxed, dharma, light, striving, awareness

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Good morning, everyone. This week, the topic is the Seven Factors of Awakening: mindfulness, investigation, energy, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. These are qualities of our inner life – of the mind – that grow and develop as we do mindfulness practice. These qualities develop as we do the different exercises that are taught in this text.

To some degree, these qualities get awakened. As we become more awake and more present, they become strong. They are ordinary faculties – ordinary states of being. I like to use the analogy of waking up from a very nice afternoon nap, where the sunlight is streaming into the room. We wake up content, happy, and relaxed, and the mind is clear. We might lie still on our backs with our

eyes open. Nothing needs to be done. There is nothing we have to figure out or do. We are contentedly lying there, maybe looking at the ceiling or the light streaming through the windows and the dust particles in the air.

Things are seen clearly not because we are looking intently, but because we are not preoccupied by other things. We are there in a simple ordinary way.

Awareness is present. It is not as if we are trying to be aware. We are in a state of wakefulness after a nap. We are just aware. There is a clarity to the awareness, where we can see the details in the room – the particular texture of the ceiling, or the dust in the air.

There is a delightful energy that is not striving energy – not trying – but we are certainly not about to fall back to sleep. We are just there gazing around the room in this after-nap contentment. It might feel joyful to gaze like this. Maybe joy is too strong a word for a post-nap experience. Maybe it is a sense of well-being. Just being there, content and cozy.

There is a calmness. We feel tranquil. The body feels like it does not have to do anything. It is just there.

Maybe there is some degree of concentration present. We are studying the dancing dust in the sunlight, and we are absorbed in that. That absorption in the dance of the dust is concentration.

There is also equanimity. Right now, all kinds of things

can happen that normally we would be concerned with, but we do not care. The mind knows about them but is not concerned about them. Maybe there is some messiness in the room. Messiness is not something to be concerned about. It is more something to marvel at – to see and be with.

As we settle into this practice, the Seven Factors of Awakening become stronger and stronger. The second factor is usually called in English “investigation.” The Pali (ancient Buddhist) term that is translated as “investigation” means “differentiation of dhammas.” So it involves a differentiation of things – a distinguishing of things. I think of it as becoming more able to distinguish things as there is more and more clarity in the mind. Those of you who have been here from the beginning today can see that the fog is beginning to clear and the sun is coming out. Now there are more details to be seen on the hillside behind me. You can even see the faint outline of the higher mountain behind the first hill.

As the fog clears and the light appears, the eyes – without studying or working too much at it – can notice and distinguish more details. Right now, I can distinguish a row of trees behind me. I can start distinguishing different trees from each other. I do not have to work at it. It is obvious that they are different colors and shapes. But before, when it was so foggy, I had a sense that there were trees, but it was just a row.

I could not differentiate between the trees.

It might not seem important to be able to distinguish things from each other. But this skill is what comes with clarity. The word “dharma” that we are distinguishing can mean different things. I will say what they are in a moment. But I want to emphasize that it is this capacity to distinguish things – to see things in their clarity, in and of themselves, distinct from other things – that begins to free the mind from the fog of attachment and the mist of clinging, wanting, aversion, and our preoccupations.

How many times have you met someone you knew from before and carried with you the ideas of who they were from your past experience of them? In fact, they had changed. They were different today. It took me a while to realize that because I was living in the fog of my memory of them. I was projecting that on them – seeing them through that fog.

We do not have to bring the past with us. We are able to see something clearly for itself in the present. Then we have a chance to distinguish what is unique and what is really happening in this moment with them – as opposed to missing it because we are still living a little in past information.

Part of distinguishing is to distinguish one perception

from another. In the dim early morning light, you can't distinguish very much. You might see rough objects, but you do not see the details of the objects. If you turn on a lamp, then – without any work on the part of the mind – you can see lots of details.

If I take off my glasses and look in certain distances, it is all blurry. But if I put on my glasses, it is all clear without having to work. Now I can see the details.

It is the same way as mindfulness gets clearer and clearer, and we are more settled in present moment awareness. The details stand out. And as the details become clearer, one thing we distinguish is the difference between our ideas of an object that we are perceiving, and the process of the perception – the ways in which things are actually impermanent – arising and passing, and inconstant.

The river of perceptions that flows through us – in this relaxed, open, receptive mind – breaks up the solidity that is always going to be there with clinging. We hold on to things and want them to be a certain way, or push them away because they are a certain way we do not like. We can begin to distinguish or differentiate the process of change that is constantly going on, from the ideations of constancy or fixity – the ideas we overlay on top of things.

The other part of the differentiation of dharmas is that dharma can also mean action – activities. We start seeing that how we practice influences the practice itself. If we are striving and pushing, we feel the tension of that. The more receptive we are in the present moment, the more we become clear that striving and pushing actually hinder clarity. It gets in the way of the practice. We see that there is a better consequence if we do not strive – if we relax and open up.

If we spend a lot of time analyzing or judging, after a while we differentiate – we see clearly: “Oh, when I am not mindful, I confuse thinking with mindfulness. I thought if I spent a lot of time thinking and judging my experience, I was present for it.” But in fact, there is another way of being present, without the judgments, without thinking about things so much in elaborate ways. We are distinguishing how we are practicing. We are starting to discover ways that are more conducive for peace, relaxation, calm, openness, and clarity.

Since dharma also means action, we also begin to be more and more aware of the consequences of our actions in our daily life. For example, we can start seeing that if we live with dishonesty, breaking the precepts, that has a very deleterious effect on us. The consequences are not good. We feel the aftereffect of that behavior. Seeing the aftereffect – the consequences that are not so desirable – helps us to

clean up our life and live a better way. Not so much because it is a moral thing to do, but rather, because we see clearly that it is beneficial.

We distinguish better and better what is beneficial and what is not. As the dharma practice deepens and unfolds, our distinctions get more refined and more subtle, and we get clearer about what is beneficial and what is not. It is not a judgment. It is not a statement about our personal worth. It is just a matter of fact. You take your hand off the hot stove. You do not begin gossiping about someone because you want to take your hand off the hot stove. It does not feel good to gossip or demean someone.

When we translate the differentiation of dharmas as “investigation,” some people think they have to probe, peer deeply, analyze, or figure out what is going on. It is not that way. It is more like we ask the question, “What is this?”, and then we allow it to reveal itself to us. There is a lingering in awareness that gives time for every experience to show itself a little bit better to us. “Oh, that is how it is.” This way, the perceptions can be clearer, and we can take in more fully what is happening.

Investigation is the receptivity of the mind that takes in everything with greater clarity. In the clarity, things become distinguished and differentiated. We are on the path to wisdom when we start seeing with greater

clarity.

You might, as you go about your day today, experiment with this. Find times during the day when you are not rushing on to the next thing and the next thought. But rather, take some time to stay there and take in the experience of the moment, as if you are going to discover something new. Even with something you do every day, take some time to stand or sit there with it and look around in a relaxed way. What can you see that is new? Is there anything new here that you have never noticed before? Stand in your kitchen and look around the kitchen. Let it reveal itself to you. See if you can find something new. The ability to see something new in a relaxed way utilizes the differentiation of the dharma – the second factor of awakening.

As you do that investigation and differentiation, see if you can notice how your mind is. See if you can have a beneficial mind state as you receptively feel, perceive, and look around you to discover something new. As I am talking, I see that the sky is getting more and more clear behind me. There is wonderful fresh air, and the birds are flitting about. The workers came; I do not know if you could hear them begin their morning work on some kind of construction project. That is what is happening now.

Thank you all very much.