

# Mindfulness of Breathing (46) Joy Factor of Awakening

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## **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

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We are continuing with this series on the Seven Factors of Awakening. The factor for today is joy. The particular joy that is a factor of awakening is a product of doing the practice of mindfulness. It is not joy that comes from reflecting on the wonderful things happening to us in the world. It is really the joy that arises out of the practice, doing the practice, and engaging in the practice in a sincere, wholehearted way.

I like to think of this joy as an expression, enactment, or manifestation of our freedom that grows as we practice mindfulness. The Seven Factors of Awakening can all be seen as enactments of freedom. Rather than waiting for freedom to occur, as in a big bang of enlightenment

down the road if you just huff and puff and get concentrated enough. That eventually, maybe by magic, there will be a big transformational moment. Boom! Now you'll live happily free for the rest of your life. You have it made. Enlightened retirement.

It is much more valuable to appreciate that we are planting a seed of potential freedom inside of us and germinating it. Caring for it in our greenhouse. Tending to it carefully and transplanting it out into the world. Letting it grow, develop, and mature into freedom – full freedom. We are beginning to be more responsible for our own freedom, rather than thinking that something else will do it for us.

So, recognize the little movements of freedom that we have all day long. I would guess that throughout the day, most of us have more moments of freedom than non-freedom. But the reason we don't feel free is that we let our attention focus on the ways we're unhappy – what we want, what we don't want. We get swept up into the world of thinking. More often than not, there is not much freedom in thinking. We get hijacked by our thoughts, concerns, fears, or desires. It might seem that, in important psychological ways, we are not free – but there are plenty of ways we are free.

If you sit down in a chair, you have a fair amount of freedom in how you adjust yourself in that chair. You probably don't give much thought to how you sit in the chair or how you adjust yourself to be comfortable. But that movement of sitting down and choosing how you sit in the chair is a manifestation of some freedom.

Reaching to open your front door is an expression of freedom. There are people who cannot do that for all kinds of reasons. There are a lot of little moments when you choose to do something, and there is freedom in doing that. Through mindfulness practice, we can begin to recognize how mindfulness itself can be an enactment of freedom.

This is hard to do if mindfulness is burdened by shoulds and shouldn'ts: "I've got to do better." Or, "I'm supposed to get somewhere." Or, "Am I there yet?" Or, "I'm not a good meditator. Someone else is a better meditator. I'm going to really push and strain."

All this extra stuff can come along with mindfulness. But a moment of mindfulness is phenomenally simple – just to know in the moment what is happening. You have many moments throughout the day where you know something without the burden of anything more complicated than knowing it.

When you open a door, something inside of you knows it is a door handle. It's not anything more complicated than that. You are not comparing your door handle to your neighbor's door handle: "Who has the better door handle? I should have a better door handle." It's just a door handle.

The practice of mindfulness is also the practice of appreciating the simplicity of awareness in the moment. There is freedom in that knowing before all the extra stuff is added on top of it.

There is also the freedom to choose to investigate. As soon as you choose to investigate – to look more carefully and recognize what is here – you are not being swept up in your thoughts, agendas, desires, or wishes. "I'm choosing to take a second look at what's happening." That is an enactment of freedom.

Effort has to do with making choices – choosing the endeavor that is more healthy for us. As soon as we make a choice toward health, skillfulness, and wholesomeness, we are enacting our freedom.

We don't always recognize this freedom because many of us carry a huge backpack full of shoulds, desires, agendas, self-concepts, self-criticism, and aversion everywhere we go. Because of that heavy backpack, we

don't recognize the ease, simplicity, and freedom found in the choice to move in a healthy direction. Part of the practice is to begin recognizing something that has probably been there to some degree all along: the enactment of freedom, the expression of it.

This brings us to joy. The word for joy is *pīṭī*. *Pīṭī* is usually translated as “joy.” Sometimes it is translated as “ecstasy” or “rapture,” which has a Theravādan or meditation slant. It can also mean pleasure, delight, enjoyment. *Priti*, the Sanskrit word for joy, can mean friendliness, pleasure, and affection, which shows it has an emotional quality.

We're tapping into an emotional connection to the practice – being free with what is present – that comes from emotional contentment. “I'm doing a practice. I'm practicing a path of freedom. This is worthwhile. This is a healthy thing to be doing.”

We are enacting freedom. It feels so good to not be entangled, trapped, or caught in things because the mind has become free in the enactment of these freedoms.

The continuity of this free act of mindfulness – of concentration – tends to give birth to a variety of different kinds of contentment, joy, and happiness.

Some of it is like sliding down a long slide. There is the joy of freedom, of just letting go. It's a delight.

If you have a continuity of these moments of freedom – a continuity of choosing, engaging, and being mindful and aware – you start to get more of a taste for freedom. The continuity gives birth to joy and delight. “Boy, am I lucky! This is a great thing.” It is not so much that we evaluate that, but there is delight, joy, and gladness in the freshness.

There used to be in the United States an experience of joy from driving on an empty, open highway. This joy – this open, free highway of meditation, of practice. The amazing thing about this is that it doesn't matter so much whether what's happening to us is pleasant or unpleasant because we discover how to be free – to be mindful, aware, investigate, and make healthy choices. Inner freedom is discovered even when things are unpleasant, or things in the world around us are not so good.

What an amazing thing to have discovered that – because we know how to be mindful, to investigate, make choices, and appreciate why we're doing this – there can be joy and delight at times even when the world expects (or wants) us to be miserable. “I'm miserable, so you're supposed to be miserable. We're

supposed to commiserate in our misery. Isn't it terrible? Things are awful."

You may decide to get off this path of the factors of awakening because when you get far enough along, you won't be inclined to complain anymore. You have something much better and more wonderful to do: the enactment of your freedom through mindfulness, investigation, effort, endeavoring, and the wonderful joy of freedom.

May you find that "complain free" zone of freedom and delight in it. Thank you.