

# *Satipaṭṭhāna* (59) Effort and Joy Factors of Awakening

April 20, 2022

## **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

awareness, fork, delight, present, practice, skillful, meditation, choice, unskillful, flow, juncture, pleasure, contraction, reactivity, loss, preoccupation, clarity, freedom, surfing, gladness, appreciation, rapture, continuous, ecstasy, gratitude, goodness

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Good morning. Today, I am going to discuss two of the Seven Factors of Awakening. The third factor is effort, and the fourth one is joy. Joy follows effort, because rather than effort being a drag – stern, serious, or hard work – effort is delightful. We feel: “Of course, this is a good thing to do.”

In every moment, we are at a fork in the road. If computer buffering happens here, or if we freeze or even disappear, we are at a fork. [There is a technology problem going on.] Our question is always: which fork do we take? Do we take a fork that is disappointed,

upset, angry, or grieving, where we get tight and constricted and try to make our computer work? Or do we take a more beneficial fork, and try to figure out what is going on, but without feeling any tension around it? We feel relaxed and open: “Okay, so this is happening now.”

This effort is not a “should.” The effort we are making at this point in practice is a byproduct of mindfulness developing to such a degree that there is a naturally heightened sensitivity to and awareness of the choices our system makes, which may not be conscious.

For example, maybe we start thinking about breakfast, fantasizing about the most wonderful breakfast we could have. We start thinking about how we can get it and make it. If we are very sensitive and watch that process from the very beginning, we can feel that there is a loss. There is a contraction and narrowing – a preoccupation. The delightful sense of presence and vitality in the natural awareness that is there has been shut down and lost. If we are present with that, we might feel: “This is not interesting. I would rather stay present, peaceful, and free, rather than think about breakfast one more time. I get preoccupied with breakfast every morning, and I have wasted so many years of my life thinking about food and breakfast.”

There is nothing wrong with doing that, but we can feel that it is not skillful. It is not helpful if there is a loss of something even better that we have learned through this practice. We have learned to value the practice of being present. So rather than continuing down the track of the mind's reactivity, because the practice has gotten strong and we know we are at the fork, we just come back to awareness.

In fact, it seems more interesting to me to watch and track what my awareness is doing – how my awareness is present for the next thing that arises, how it receives it, how awareness can move from one object to another. Now it is this; now it's that. Now it is the birds; now it is the workers doing the work here.

We are seeing, in a very natural way, the distinction between what is healthy and not healthy. The classic Buddhist language for this is “skillful and unskillful”. We are choosing the skillful. This does not have to mean that we are choosing to make a lot of effort to do something new. It means that we are choosing to be present. We are choosing the practice. We are choosing to be awake for what is going on.

As it becomes clear that this is really for our betterment – it is a nice thing to do, and the best game in town – then a kind of joy begins to arise. A delight, a gladness,

and an appreciation. We start feeling: “I am so lucky to have discovered this. I am so lucky to have the ability to stay in this flow of skillfulness, healthiness, and clarity. This is where freedom is found.”

So joy begins to arise. This joy has different qualities: delight, gladness, and a sense of gratitude – the feeling that this is a great choice – a great place to be. It is great to be tracking and following the healthy choice. We begin getting more into the flow of these healthy choices, especially in meditation. We choose to stay present in the flow of present moment awareness, staying with the breath and kind of surfing on the breath, or letting the breath surf on our awareness. We stay present more and more, surfing in the present moment continuously, feeling, “this is good.” This tends to give rise to a joy that can be thrilling – a joy that some people call “rapture,” There is so much pleasure and delight as we start getting filled with the goodness of this path.

As we feel the gladness, joy, delight, and goodness of practicing and choosing the healthy fork, we are choosing a path of pleasure. It is pleasant, and that pleasure tends to grow into a kind of ecstasy and delight – real joy.

This joy can be part of meditation practice. Not automatically – not coming to meditation from a busy life with lots of different challenging things going on. But rather, joy comes from having developed and cultivated the practice over some time, so we really begin to feel the benefits of it.

Rather than seeing the juncture between skillful and unskillful as another reason to be judgmental towards oneself, and feeling like it's a drag, a lot of work, and a lot of choices, when the mind is really clear and settled, then there is just delight in doing this. We are following the path of pleasure. There is no need to be critical or judgmental towards oneself about how it is going because that itself is choosing the stressful, unskillful fork. Always choose the skillful one. At a minimum, that means to come back to awareness – the clarity of awareness that sees and knows.

Tomorrow, do not feel like you have to do much more than really seeing that fork, and then see what happens. See the forks, and see them again. Really see: “Oh, now I am at this fork” – with that kind of clarity. See what happens then and what you decide to do. Maybe seeing the fork clearly and choosing the right thing will bring you a sense of joy. Thank you.