

Mindfulness of Breathing (71) Seven Factors of Awakening

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Four Foundations of Mindfulness, fulfills, Seven Factors of Awakening, Buddha, *ānāpānasati*, simplicity, mindfulness, investigation, Dharma, energy, wholesome, joy, tranquility, equanimity, freedom, awakening, breathing, flows, simple, deeper, awareness, practitioner, trainee, tetrad, *sekha*

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Having covered the sixteen steps of mindfulness of breathing, the Buddha's instructions in this practice continue to first explain how mindfulness of breathing comes along with the fulfillment of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. Fulfillment is a powerful word. As I said yesterday, each of the four tetrads of the sixteen steps is directly connected to one of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

If you do the first tetrad well – connecting to the breathing, feeling the breath body, relaxing the bodily formations – fully and deeply entering into that, this also

fulfills the first foundation of mindfulness, the mindfulness of the body, and so forth.

It is interesting that next, the Buddha says that fulfilling the Four Foundations of Mindfulness brings about or evokes the Seven Factors of Awakening. The way it does this is if you do the first tetrad fully – that fulfills the first foundation of mindfulness. The fulfillment of the first foundation of mindfulness then awakens or brings along with it the Seven Factors of Awakening. The Seven Factors of Awakening then lead to awakening.

The implication here is that each of the tetrads of *ānāpānasati* can be complete in itself. You do not have to go through the sixteen steps one after the other. It is enough that your practice stays with any one of the four tetrads. For many people, I think that means just staying with the first step. So the first four steps are *not* elementary or remedial in order to get to the higher steps. You are supposed to guide yourself through them. Just doing the first four steps can take you all the way to awakening.

After the Buddha died, there were early commentaries. They said, in a similar way, that if you do the first tetrad, this also fulfills the other twelve steps. Somehow, the simplicity of being present for breathing and for the body, relaxing the body, calming the body – doing that

fully – brings about all the other benefits, all the other movements of practice.

To me, this has a lot to do with the simplicity of this practice. The simpler we can be – the less entangled we are in trying, in wanting, just being here in a simple way – this is onward leading. It sets the water free to begin flowing down the mountainside. To stop it, you would have to put up big boulders and blockages. You can do that, but it is a lot of work. If you remove the obstacles, the water will flow.

Ānāpānasati – mindfulness of breathing – is a practice of becoming simpler and simpler in that we step away from all the obstacles. We release the obstacles – and then something unfolds, moves, and deepens.

If we can stay intimate, connected, and trusting of mindfulness of breathing – mindfulness of being in the body, letting the body relax around the breathing, and not getting caught up in things – we do not have to be concerned about the practice deepening. We just go along for the ride – becoming simpler and simpler, just breathing – focused, settled, steady, composed on the breathing. The idea is not to force this. A lot of it has to do with letting go. Just allow yourself to become simpler and simpler.

The Buddha says the fulfillment of the first foundation of mindfulness fulfills the first of the Seven Factors of Awakening (which is mindfulness). When mindfulness is fulfilled, the language – which is interesting – is more like what flows or what arises out of that is natural, as opposed to something we are supposed to do.

This process of simplicity continues where we are just getting out of the way, and the miracle of the Dharma begins to bubble up and unfold. The Buddha says that when mindfulness has become well-developed, investigation follows. One looks more carefully, with wisdom, at what is happening. If mindfulness is clear, investigation is seeing in more detail what is clear, what is happening. There is greater clarity and investigation in discerning what is here.

For the Buddha, the more we discern – the more we see clearly what is here – this gives rise to energy, engagement, and interest: “Oh, this is good.” The more we can investigate – if we are really mindful – the more we see how the trail, the path, opens in front of us into where freedom is – into what is wholesome and beneficial.

We follow choices that go in a wholesome direction because we know what is unwholesome. We know that clinging, grasping, or aversion does not really work. We

choose not to go there. We do not stop having those feelings, but we do not get involved or pick them up. To the degree there is a choice, we choose what is wholesome.

For meditators, wholesome can be as simple as just staying with the breathing. Being mindful of breathing is considered phenomenally wholesome and healthy to do. Then there is energy for that. Enthusiasm arises. You do not have to be enthusiastic or interested. It just flows out of the practice as it deepens.

If we have interest and engagement, then what flows out of that is joy, delight, and happiness. What flows out is that something deeper settles, relaxes, feels reassured, becomes calm and tranquil – a deeper tranquility and serenity. Deeper serenity and tranquility then lead to greater concentration – more settledness, steadiness, and composure. Then from this deeper composure and settled concentration flows equanimity, deep non-reactivity of the mind.

Equanimity is the pinnacle of simplicity. This is where things are so simple that we are just aware, and the awareness is not ruffled by any wanting or not wanting. Until we get to the stage of equanimity, awareness is not completely simple – so don't worry about it. Don't try

to have perfection. The movement is to be as simple as you can be.

We move through these seven beautiful factors. The miracle of practice is that simple awareness – staying in the simplicity of it – can lead to these beautiful qualities of mindfulness; deeper discernment or investigation; energy, engagement or effort; joy; tranquility; concentration; and equanimity.

Part of the value of deep equanimity is that with this radical simplicity we are getting closer and closer to where the mind is not for or against anything. The mind is just here – luminous, clear, present, fully here.

Without wants or aversions. Without building a self or having a self-referential self-help project. Self-concern or conceit falls away because things have gotten so simple and clear.

Equanimity is that way. Because awareness is not doing, wanting, or trying to get anything, at some point, it can discover rest, letting go, and release. Any remnant, any personality or linguistic structure, or any ways in which the mind is involved with and thinking about things just releases, lets go.

There is an experience of freedom. The nature of this freedom is that people say, “Well, now I know what the

practice is about!” “Oh so, this is what it’s about – this level, this possibility of being free from any attachment, any clinging, any agitation, any contraction at all. Wow, this is possible!”

I call it the ultimate fulfillment of simplicity. It is simplicity, which – rather than being boring, or feeling like we are missing out on the wonderful things of life – “*This* is the wonderfulness!” This peace, clarity, happiness of freedom is one of the greatest things in the universe. One then knows: “This is what practice can do. This is what simple, clear awareness is.”

I do not mean to be discouraging (I hope this is encouraging), but it is said in the lore of the ancient world that this is when Dharma practice begins. With the first real taste of freedom, we know what the practice is really about. We have no doubts about it anymore: “Oh, now I can start practicing. This is what the practice is.” And a huge sense of confidence arises.

In the ancient language of the Buddha, a person at this point is called a practitioner. Of course, before this freedom, we are practitioners – wonderful practitioners – with a lot of benefit. The Pali word *sekha* is usually translated in English as “trainee.” This is a person who is now ready to train. This is a person who now knows what the practice is about.

All from this simplicity. You do not have to make it complicated. The commentaries say even the first step of *ānāpānasati* is enough. Just stay there. Be with that. This is enough to go all the way. You will be taken. You will be carried there – if you do it sincerely, fully, and regularly.

The text goes on to one more teaching for tomorrow. This is the teaching of what *ānāpānasati* practice looks like when a person has become a trainee, a practitioner, in the way I am talking about. How do we practice after the first glimpse of awakening?

Thank you very much, and I'm looking forward to being here with you again tomorrow.