



The Buddha Project

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Non-attention and Seven Awakening
Factors



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Content

Introduction	3
Cūlasuññatasutta	3
Amanasikāra.....	7
Prapañca.....	11
Calm abiding.....	13
The Seven Awakening Factors	14
Mindfulness	14
Investigation of dharmas.....	15
Energy.....	15
Joy.....	16
Tranquility.....	16
Concentration	16
Equanimity.....	17
Round up.....	17
Prayers.....	18
Closing words.....	18

Introduction

There are three things I want to discuss today.

- I will say a bit more about the Cūlasuññatasutta to gradually explore the sutra rather than diving into all its intricacies immediately.
- We will discuss *not-paying* attention (*Amanasikāra*) to something.
- And finally we will look at the Seven Awakening Factors

For those new here, have a look at the document Additional Materials on the IDMT website. There are many interesting topics in this document!

Next week we will discuss the sutra again, as well as the stages of Shamatha by Asanga. Then we will head into the seventh first mind training, we will go to Bodhicitta. So we have two more guided meditations on shamatha, and then we'll use whatever basis we have.

Cūlasuññatasutta

(Please read the sutra at page 50 of the IDMT-reader of year 3)

The sutra is both deep, complex and simple at the same time.

What I appreciate about the Buddha is his capacity to explain very complex insights in very simple ways. Actually, the foundational sutras don't contain much very difficult teachings.

When you first read a sutra, it seems to make a lot of sense, but then you start to unpack it and that takes time and work.

Where this sutra really leads to is something we will get into at the end of this year, in July. Only then you will have all the tools to deeply understand the sutra.

We will go back to the sutra from time to time, to develop an in-depth understanding about non-attention (*Amanasikāra*). Intellectually it is not too difficult to explain, but to really get a sense of what it means, will take time and it is worthwhile to take that time.

About the content of the Cūlasuññatasutta, the sutra has an interesting dynamic. For example, Ananda approaches the Buddha as he heard the Buddha speak about the Buddha abiding in emptiness. Ananda is not really sure what it meant, so he asks the Buddha about it.

The Buddha affirms it is often what he does, it is one of the meditations he uses, something in itself already interesting: when someone is enlightened, why still meditate?

The sutras and the Abhidharma (*the treasury of knowledge*) explains meditation is the most natural state of abiding of an enlightened being. Once one is enlightened, one does no longer practice, it is a state of naturally being. We are practicing to become



natural. In a way, our behavior is very artificial because our perception is incorrect, we perceive the world in an incorrect way and struggle with our behavior. But once enlightened, life becomes very simple: the Buddha abides in emptiness and cares for others. Nothing more, nothing less.

The Buddha affirms it indeed is what he often does, but in the sutra suddenly switches tone: he tells what others should do; probably Ananda is not alone – though the text is not clear on that. However, the Buddha transforms his understanding into an instruction for others. He argues what a bhikkhu or a meditator does, describing how he goes into meditation. He speaks about himself and at the same generalizes what he does into something that is the same for every bhikkhu and/or meditator, brilliantly done.

The first part of the instructions is a main topic for today: we carry more with us than necessary. For example, we sit here, comfortable, I have a fantastic coffee, and still we experience a burden of all the things that we should do, the burden of all the conflicts we have, of all the expectations, the guilt from the past, etc.

This is a vast topic, but even without a deep understanding of why we carry this around, it is already helpful to simply notice the mind is occupied with something that is not present. In the past I joked anger is a mental mind and especially works when the object of our anger is not present. Anger is as silly as taking a photo and then screaming at the photo: it serves no purpose whatsoever, while this is exactly what happens. We all understand this metaphor.

Next time you see this metaphor turning into reality and the mind goes haywire again, realize it is just the mind behaving as stupid as someone screaming at a picture. The picture doesn't care!

As I said before, humor is a very important meditative tool. Humor makes the mind lighthearted and also breaks the delusion of feeling stuck, humor creates perspective. When we feel lost, we also lose other perspectives. Try to laugh about the present, not in a denigrating way but realizing samsara is pretty silly, laughing is very liberating and opens the door to believe freedom is possible. Realizing samsara is that silly, creates the possibility to overcome it.

We also talked about renunciation, something we often frame in terms of what we should do and that does not fit with the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha never argues one should– he invites you to try and do something. Renunciation is when you no longer need to think what is wholesome, it is something the mind wants to do on its own. The mind no longer wants to carry around all this mental baggage, it is just neither acceptable, nor necessary. But, it is not a fault of the mind!

The Buddha argues: notice what is not here.

Consider this stilt longhouse of Migāra's mother. It's empty of elephants, cows, horses, and mares; of gold and silver; and of gatherings of men and women.

This is a very useful tool in daily life because we can do that all day, every day. Keep checking what the mind is preoccupied with. Is it preoccupied with something that is not present, then let it go. In the beginning that is challenging, but it will grow on you;



not by forcing (I should let go!), but by trying to let go and then to *sense how you feel when you let go*. This feedback to the mind is important and as the mind finds it pleasant, the mind wants to go back there more often. When you let go, all the disturbances immediately drop away. Without disturbances the mind switches to another behavior.

The mind seeks to be happy, but is trained to look the wrong way, you have to point out what happiness actually is and where it comes from. Keep practicing letting go and it will become more habitual, very important.

Then the Buddha argues there is still something remaining, it is like a fact check. I like the Buddha also highlights another aspect of our negative bias: we often do not value or appreciate what good conditions we have. For example we could be in a wonderful place with a nice cup of coffee, be it ease, and the mind still feels unhappy. On the one hand we suffer from something that is not present, and at the same time we do not realize what is present. E.g. we all lost good meals and good moments with others because we had this negative bias.

Even in a very worldly sense, this practice is very relevant. So practice twofold: learn to let go and actively practice appreciation. This active engagement with the world is called *investigation of dharmas*, to always have an investigative, exploratory mind. You know I like the word 'wonder' as every moment is new and unique. Now that this moment has arisen, we might as well try to fully get to know it. Even in a worldly sense it is important to practice attention.

Then the Buddha makes the next step.

There is only this that is not emptiness, namely, the oneness dependent on the mendicant Sangha. In the same way, a mendicant—ignoring the perception of the village and the perception of focuses on the oneness dependent on the perception of wilderness. Their mind leaps forth, gains confidence, settles down, and becomes decided in that perception of wilderness. They understand: 'Here there is no stress due to the perception of village or the perception of people.

The Buddha explains one needs a safe place, just as we do by visualizing the Buddha. For the bhikkhus, it is a piece of forest with their community, that is a safe space. That might also be a room in your house with a meditation cushion, it is important to create such a safe place.

The Buddha not only highlights the forest, he also highlights the ethical community with spiritual and reliable friends. The Buddha highlights we both need a place conducive to spiritual growth, but we also need a community conducive to our growth. Both give a sense of safety, an important basic tone to our practice in order to be able to let go. When we don't feel safe, we cannot let go – without safety the mind is always alert, switched on, an habituated pattern.

Do not expect you can immediately feel safe and let go, it will become a habit that grows on you, do not put the burden on yourself you should do that. Figure out why it is worthwhile to you and then accept things take time, you cannot make your practice go any faster. We live with complexity and in a way complexity is a disturbance of the mind. Not in a negative way, but in order to understand the situation I am in at any



given moment the mind needs to interpret: Who are you? How are you responding to what I say? Is the translator keeping up? Is the microphone working? Life always involves interpretive activities.

Shamatha calms these interpretive activities. Another aspect is we interpret the world in unfortunate disturbed ways. This disturbance comes with anger, desire, competitiveness, and so on. Shamatha calms the disturbances and the mind needs something simpler.

The Buddha continues to move your attention to the earth element; something that can be explained in different ways, here the Buddha uses what is called a [kasina](#): a meditation object.

You mostly start with a direct sensation and transform it into a mental object. Shamata is always mental-mind, one cannot develop concentration through the sensory consciousnesses, impossible as the sensory consciousnesses are too coarse and the object of sensory awareness is always changing, it fluctuates and one cannot stabilize the mind on something fluctuating.

One can experience the earth element by simply feel the ground that you sit on. Thich Nath Hahn often uses the earth element time as a moment of gratitude or celebration of Mother Earth that is truly holding us. We also have a precious human rebirth thanks to this livable environment on earth.

So we start with a direct sense and spread it in a very visual way. In the end an abstract understanding of the earth element arises, a knowing of what earth-element is: something obstructive; you cannot move through it, it is solid. This abstract understanding has a boundless aspect Through this meditational object you can achieve the four higher concentrations or Jhanas. You train until the mind becomes pliant and you let go of the coarse aspect, entering the first Jhana.

The first Jhana is characterized by analysis and investigation. The second Jhana is especially characterized by joy. The third Jhana is especially characterized by happiness. The fourth Jhana is mainly characterized by equanimity. This of course is very simply stated!

The four Jhanas are the limit of meditations on kasina, here the earth element – and that is quite far.

All these stages I explained do the same: letting go. In the beginning, you let go of analysis as this is an activity. Then you let go of joy because it's effervescent, bubbly. Then you let go of happiness because there is still an intentional aspect to it.

And finally there is equanimity – this is where you really want to be, that is the thing: the mind is completely at ease, becomes sublimely stable, transparent and knowing.

The fourth concentration is the most acute mind you can have in samsara.

Then the Buddha shows there are even more calm-minds beyond the fourth Jhana.

- Then you let go of the form aspect, because you understand there is something unpeaceful about form, something still solid in a way. When you let go of that, you



release the mind into space, as it were. You get a sense of enormous release, and the mind becomes even deeper and more still.

- But space is still saying something about, it is still an object. And then he lets go of the object.
- Then one becomes aware that consciousness is infinite because you have already given the concept of my consciousness.
- Then, following the sutra, you get to the higher stages of nothingness, where you even let go of the subject.
- And even deeper than you find *neither perception nor non-perception*.

But we leave it there for now, these are exquisite subtle states of awareness.

The final analysis is that, whatever these states are, they are conditioned, impermanent and non-self.

We even have to let go this to get to nirvana, the unconditioned.

Then the Buddha argues about a complex topic in the Mahayana tradition: he highlights that, as long as he is in that final life, there is still physical aggregates – still something to let go of.

This explanation gives you a basic overview of the sutra. I will come back to the sutra regularly until we understand what the Buddha means by letting go.

Amanasikāra

Next year, we will look deeper at the word *Amanasikāra*, for now I give you only one explanation: non-attention. By adding an 'a' to *Manasikara* the word becomes a negation.

Manasikāra (attention) is one of the omnipresent mental factors and one of the aspects creating a basic perception or experience, one could say.

The main mind has necessarily five functions attributed to it:

- Contact
Knowing is always the knowing of something (simply stated)
- Feeling
There's a felt sense, experience is basically a felt experience before it is a known experience
- Perception
One recognizes objects and their functions
- Intention
The constant moving of the mind. Every moment of mind is always moving towards or away from something (either wholesome or unwholesome)

- Attention

When you move your gaze, when for some reason you are propelled to look at something.

You always see your awareness firstly moving in a general way a broader context, that is what intention does. And then in that context the mind pays attention to something. For example, I look around in the broader space before in front of me, and I do not see all things equally. The mind is e.g. limited by the eyes, but the mind also censors. It is a very practical aspect of the development of children. Young children do not see the world for two distinct reasons:

- 1) The brain has to learn that everything is upside down and the left is right as the optical nerve crosses and the focal field in the middle of the eye also causes for everything to invert. The mind of children needs to figure out how to reorder this.
- 2) More importantly, the mind has to learn not to pay attention, it needs to discriminate. That is why Buddhists use the word discriminate: what you do not look at.

In daily life, even in a moment of visual consciousness, there is way too much information to process, so you must select and young children cannot select yet. We also know this from restoring a specific eye-disease where people are born with the retina on the bottom of their eyeball. The retina is a piece of light-sensitive skin that was once stuck on the outside, where somewhere in evolution this developed into the eye. I think in the 1960s or '70s, they found a way to re-attach the retina to the back of the eye, scientists thought that people would be able to see. To their surprise, they discovered they couldn't because the patients were unable to discriminate, we learn to do so as a child. As far as I remember, the first person who got this surgery killed himself because for the rest of his life, he was stuck with this bombardment of raw data.

Anyway, the point I want to make is that a very important aspect of our lived experience is being able to pay attention to one thing (*Manasikara*) and not to pay attention (*Amanasikara*) to something else.

Especially when you become a monastic, the attention you pay to things is not as volitional as you wish it were. I don't need to explain that as a monastic, I have rules that prohibit me from paying attention to certain things. And in the beginning we find this is very, very hard to do – we are in constant need to correct the eyes. The eyes go to places where everyone knows you look at, and you are not supposed to look at. This highlights that we believe we have the freedom to choose, but when you try to inhibit it you discover you are not free at regarding to what you pay attention to. In fact, many of our opinions are nothing but explanations afterwards why we paid attention to some things and not to other things. We take our preferences very personal, but they are only interpretations afterwards: we make up a story why we looked at certain things more than other things.



This is why monastics have rules, because the rules make storytelling visible. Without rules, we would be lost in these stories. Monastics have a deep need to be free in what we want to look at and not. And it is very difficult to develop the choice as we constantly experience the opposite. Then you become a monk and you are supposed not to be doing so and you find you are doing so far too often.

There are two answers to the question why the mind pays attention to certain things, there is an ultimate answer and is a contemporary answer.

- The ultimate answer

Is where we get to at the end of this year. For now it suffices to know things do not exist in the way they appear; our attention is attracted by their appearance.

In reality, they are mere appearances, where things appear to us as not being mere appearances; that is the paradox.

Things appear as not being dependent on parts, not being dependent on causes and conditions, and not being dependent on imputation by mind (PU). The things that appear to us seem to exist from their side, as though they are showing *themselves* to us. We think we recognize what is out there.

Last year in Yogacara, we already saw half of that story does not work. This year we will see that the rest of the story doesn't work either: nothing exists independently from its own side.

To deeply understand this will take time. Even if you understand that intellectually, it is very difficult to apply in daily life. For example, when you are in a restaurant having pizza and you look at it, then to tell to your pizza you know the pizza does not inherently exist is not immediately impactful, unless you really evaturated the mind.

However it takes quite a bit of time for the pizza to appear as it really exists once you are able to see the pizza as it really exists, the pizza will even taste better!

We need practical tools to deeply understand why the mind acts like it does: things that immediately help to not to have to pay attention to things sometimes.

- The contemporary answer

We already encountered one tool: understanding why the mind has great difficulty distinguishing between what we directly see and what we think about what we see.

The mind treats mental objects, concepts, exactly the same way as the real thing.

This is why books and movies work. When you watch a movie, you look at a bunch of dots in three colors – that is the reality. However what we imagine on top of reality makes the movie interesting.

Another example comes from my memory, of climbing the Sears Tower. Getting to the top I realized skyscrapers move – a lot! Buildings move with the wind to prevent them to break, they swing back and forth. Standing on the 150th floor and see and experience the building moves two meters to the front and two meters back, is not an experience that makes me happy. It is fascinating, but it is not nice! But now, my body responds as though I'm still standing there.

For the same reason horror movies work: there is nothing there, and yet you get

afraid.

The mind has great difficulty separating between what we really, directly see and what our mind mentally conjures up, keep that in mind!

When we face conflicts or worries or other distraction, and so on, this brings an additional burden.

As the mind has difficulty discerning things do not exist, the mind thinks all these thoughts and things are real. The mind then reacts from habitual patterns and the mind has the conviction actually doing something good about what it misinterprets. It feels useful, as though the mind is in control by engaging the object of distraction, where in reality you are not engaging at all, as the object is not really there. And strangely enough the reaction feels empowering, but is not.

When I have a conflict with someone that I will see tomorrow, the mind has an inclination to keep thinking about this meeting because the mind creates the illusion I have a controlling relationship with this problem. The way the mind reacts gives satisfaction: it produces endorphins. However in reality, my reaction leads to the opposite: my situation becomes worse because it aggravates the mind and anger becomes worse, worry becomes worse, and we are sucked into a state of forgetfulness where we are not in power.

So it does not contribute to the situation, it gets worse, where the mind feels it contributes in a positive way. When you think angrily, the mind feels like you contribute to the solution of the problem and that is why the mind insists in its behavior.

When you have a job-interview tomorrow and you worry about it, you keep going over scenarios in your head because it creates an illusion, as if you have grasp on the situation, where the opposite is true.

Therefore it is very important to know and to keep telling the mind what it does and what the results are. At one point this will have effect: you will find better solutions. When you have a job interview, of course you prepare. You write down the things you think are important to mention, to keep them in mind. And then the best way to prepare is not to think about it anymore. You will be at ease, you will rest well, and at the moment of the interview, you are ready. All the tools you need are present, that is a better approach.

The same goes for all the challenges in the world. You gain so much when you give up these repetitive thoughts in the mind. But you cannot just tell the mind to act like this, you must show the mind it doesn't work and the other strategy works much better.

When you consistently do so, life becomes much lighter, and you also create an environment where you can meditatively develop well. Once you keep the mind alert it will be much calmer to begin with, it will be spacious during the day and when you sit down in that space and seek your meditation object is very easy. You keep the disturbances always at bay.



However, there is an extra challenge and it is wonderful to see how deep and empowering the Buddha's exploration is. This challenge has two intersecting processes or aspects, two branches, two intersecting processes.

1) Improper attention

So we come back to attention.

The mind attends to thing, but – as the texts say – in a perverted way.

2) Conceptual proliferation (Sanskrit: *Prapañca* – Pali: *papañca*).

Prapañca

We believe to see things as they exist, no matter if we directly see objects or if imagine them. In reality, the mind always represents things in an unbalanced way – as if these things exist inherently. The mind does so with regard to others / objects, but also with regard to ourselves.

The mind shows us things according to our preferences: when I had a pleasant experiences in the past with an object / person, the mind will overemphasize the characteristics I remember (or stored in my memory), like predictive programming. In the same way, when I had an unpleasant experience with an object / person, next time I see or think about it / them, the mind conjures up a negative attitude. For example, let us look at anger (anger is quite extreme, without much nuance). I had a negative experience earlier today, and an unpleasant feeling arose: immediately a wrong interpretation. At the very moment the negative feeling arose, this feeling was attributed to the other, where the mental factor of feeling is from our side, but the mind depicts feeling to be relational: the mind completely misunderstands the feeling to start with.

At the moment feeling arose, I did not understand the feeling came from my side and the mind over-interpreted feeling as not being contextual, but being an unchangeable characteristic of the other. So all kinds of things really go wrong.

After this encounter I go home and by my initial response I created the cause for the same feeling to come back; it has been brewing in the back of your head. You might have been distracted by other activities, but when you go to bed, or put down your book, the anger comes back. The mind has set you up for a problem: the (misinterpreted) situation comes back. And the mind looks as though this re-created image is the real thing; where it is nothing but an interpretation of what happened. Then the mind doubles down, starts to explore what went wrong. And with every step the image of the person becomes ever more perverted by my interpretation: this person gradually starts to look more and more evil to my mental eye. And I still believe that what I'm looking at is real, where it drifts further and further away from what is real. The more unreal it becomes, the more angry I become, my anger re-emphasizes some characteristics even deeper, which makes that person look even more horrible, which gives me more reasons for anger. That is why it is so difficult to stop; the longer it lasts, the more powerful this circle of anger. Sometimes you put so much energy into it, you



even need to get up and do something completely different to distract yourself, you cannot stop anymore. Many things go wrong in that moment, for example:

- You look at a person who is not here. The person is a re-creation by the mind.
- The mind creates a highly distorted interpretation.
- The mind believes it is actually finding a solution to the situation, which it is not.
- The mind misunderstands where unpleasant feeling comes from.

It is important to understand this process is *not your fault*, it does not make you a bad person. It is the price *samsara* takes.

Maybe even more important is to understand the mind can restore the pattern. Now you know and you can start to train the mind to respond in a wholesome way. Next time you have a conflict, to not pay attention to some things, to come up with a better interpretation of the situation. Intervening at the beginning of this process is much better as this train of thoughts has not been perverted that much yet. The longer you leave it, the more problematic it gets.

That is one aspect of renunciation: the moment anger arises, you know hell is coming your way, anger is entirely self-produced. The mind immediately bounces off: '*No, I don't want to go there, I have sufficient experience to recognize what will come from this.*'

You can extrapolate the inner process of these unskillful emotions because they all have the same quality of being obsessive. Depression, anxiety, jealousy, desire, they all have the same mechanism. Once you understand one, you know them all. It is immensely liberating to be free from *prapañca*.

If you want Shamata to develop in a wholesome way, you need to practice this. And when you want to live happily in the present without further aims, you still really need to practice this.

There is one more thing to highlight, related to *prapañca*.

Remember, conceptuality is always a theory about reality and theories generalize. The problem related to ignorance comes from generalizing.

We generalize in the three times (past – present – future) and we generalize in context (Gendun in Amsterdam, Gendun in Helsinki, Gendun with a friend, Gendun with his parents, Gendun with monks, etc.). Conceptuality allows me to think about 'me' independent of this context, which is a complete illusion.

This is where the sense of '*my own*' and '*unchanging existence*' comes from.

When we look into the world, we don't see the world, but we recognize the world as we interpreted it. The mental fact of discrimination recognizes objects based on their characteristics. The world is organized based on the concepts we have.

Some time ago we meditated on the fact that what you see is always something known, you cannot see what we do not know – what you see is already interpreted by discrimination. Any image is a product of discrimination.

You don't see (an object / a person) the way it was before discrimination, that is not possible.

Every person is an always changing phenomenon. I joked that the face you looked at on your screen last week is now in the vacuum cleaner: you think you see the same face



but it is not, it is always different. Everything changes from moment to moment. The mental factor of discrimination tries to recognize; it picks out certain characteristics allowing me to think there is a continuity and to predict how I relate to the person. This process creates an illusion, my conceptuality is then rubbed off onto reality. Then the illusion appears to me in a preoccupied way: when I interpreted someone in a negative way, he/ she appears to me as my enemy. When I had a very pleasant experience with somebody, this person starts to look increasingly pleasant; the same for objects.

Prapañca is like a feedback loop based on concepts and vision: what we see is created by concepts, and at the same time reinforces these concepts. This is another reason why our minds go circling, like when you empty a bathtub, you are sucked into a whirlpool.

Keep this in mind, but do not worry we will come back to it, especially when we talk about the separation between the way things appear and the way things exist.

Two hints or tools to moderate *Prapañca*:

- Work with appreciative joy; tell yourself positive things about relational things in the world
- Contemplate impermanence. Be aware moment after moment is different.

That's a good start and Nagarjuna will remind us about this.

Calm abiding

An important aspect of Calm abiding is the capacity to pay attention to one thing. Finally this will be the infinite consciousness, for now it can be (e.g.) the breath or the earth element without paying attention to anything else.

Focusing on the object of meditation, as the Buddha highlights, liberates you from disturbances.

Do not look at *infinite consciousness* or the *breath* in a random way. Look at the object with an appreciative sense, as long as I look at the breath I am free of disturbing emotions (everything that is not the object of meditation). Stay focused and all the disturbances are gone, the breath is fantastic! Focusing on infinite consciousness makes you understand what it means to be alive, you look at life itself.

At the same time you realize everything else that appears in meditation is a disturbance and you know where disturbances will lead to, let go.

This is the basic practice of Shamatha, let go.

You let go and realize that, before you practiced Shamata, life was unpeaceful and you want to move towards a peaceful life.

The Seven Awakening Factors

The Seven Awakening Factors is a very deep topic that I could talk about forever. For now I want to give you something motivating.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness, one could say, is extended attention. The mental factor of attention normally pays attention to something relatively short; enough to recognize it and to interpret it as it were. When attention becomes more long term, it becomes mindfulness.

There is one caveat: you cannot be mindful to non-virtuous things, one of the beautiful aspects of mindfulness: none of the object-ascertaining mental factors can be accompanied by non-virtuous mental factors.

To be mindful is already to be protected.

Mindfulness is to pay attention to one thing and not to pay attention to another thing: to pay attention to something either neutral or virtuous and to deliberately not pay attention to anything not virtuous.

QUESTION

Can you elaborate on the training of mindfulness in the military?

ANSWER

Those of you who studied mind- and mental factors: this is not mindfulness, this is about forgetfulness; forgetfulness is paying attention to something under the influence of unwholesome emotions: I shall kill. That is why mindfulness should always be taught in an ethical context and not in the army. You cannot be mindful and want to kill, that is not possible. Forgetfulness and mindfulness are the same thing. The difference between the two is the other mental factors. Anger is really persisting in holding on to the object.

So mindfulness is an extended attending to something, manasikāra, but by definition virtuous; and it is accompanied by the other tools I provided you with to come to a deep understanding of what you see. That is what mindful always does.

Mindfulness is a protective mental factor. It holds the mind to something you interpret in a skillful way – mindfulness is very important in all lived circumstances.

For a Buddha or an Arahant, mindfulness is an omnipresent mental factor, it never leaves them. That is why Arahants, Pratyeka Buddhas and Buddhas are safe. Their mind cannot trick them into anything else. Their minds are always virtuous or neutral, their minds cannot be non-virtuous. The capacity to be non-virtuous is gone, there are no conditions for non-virtuous minds anymore and that is why nirvana is refuge: the mind cannot misbehave.



Imagine you are in bed and you want to become angry and the mind tells you ‘no, compassion!’ 😊

When you keep practicing, you will get closer to that. You will find the mind jumping away from things. Then, when desire arises, you see your mind jumping away from it. You know things look like fulfilling but you know the consequences. In a moment of conflict your mind thinks it will reason its way out, but anger is not wholesome. I will not go there, the price is too high.

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Mindfulness grows due to its characteristics of familiarity. Unfortunately the same is true with the other half: forgetfulness.

When we are mindful of virtuous objects, we become more familiar with the virtuous aspect of it: the object appears clearer and clearer. We recognize more of its distinguishing characteristics. Mindfulness also creates the possibility to be at ease while practicing, mindfulness grows through practicing, you cannot force mindfulness to be more familiar, it takes time. Mindfulness allows you to meditate in a non-competitive, non-forceful way. The term *joyful-effort* in Buddhism does not relate to force, to know this is necessary.

Investigation of dharmas

When we can hold an object longer in meditation and we see more detail, *investigation of dharmas* unfolds. This allows and invites us to look deeper. The object becomes fascinating.

And already the next stage of meditation starts to arise.

Mindfulness and investigation mutually reinforce.

While practicing Shamata or Vipassana, don't blankly stare at the object, that is not helpful.

The beauty of practicing the Awakening Factors is each factor paves the way for the next. From investigation of dharmas energy arises.

Energy

Engage actively with the object, your practice is not to lose the object, this is especially in the beginning very important. We need an active approach.

While practicing Shamata, energetically investigate if there are hindrances like excitement or torpor. But also investigate when the hindrance are absent. Figure out how they came to be absent and why they re-appear. Develop a constant '*appreciative vigilance*'. When the hindrances are not there, you deeply know, that is what the Buddha highlights in the sutra. You know there are no disturbances and it feels cool. We need to know when the hindrances are absent in order to get to the next awakening factor.



Joy

Sometimes referred to as *joyous effort*.

To explore the mind by means of the Awakening Factors is very encouraging. The more you learn about the mind, the more the mind becomes inviting. We become empowered, in contrast to the normal lived experience where we feel out of control, we worry, are angry because we fear the future. For example, you worry to fail the job interview tomorrow.

The underlying fear comes from a lack of trust and this lack of trust comes from a lack of understanding (*not knowing*). Through your investigation you start to understand how things work. You know how hindrances arise, you know their effects and you know how you are protected and nourished when they are absent. This inclines you want to put more energy in the process.

There's a lot to say about *joyous effort* and we will come back to it regularly. Joyous effort is very important as it provides you with a constancy in your practice. This constancy leads to an increasing sense of empowerment and produces joy, where empowerment creates states not only free of disturbances, but the mind becomes your own contentment; and contentment is an aspect of the mind. The mind is less disturbed.

The mind starts to recognize the resources you were looking for within yourself, stimulating to look for more resources, and so on.

The first four Awakening Factors are mutually helpful.

Tranquility

The more you practice, the more tranquil the mind becomes, or pliant – both are good. The mind is now self-sustaining: a sense of well-being has arisen that is not dependent on anything outside, a major life changer! The mind is empowered by itself and becomes more pliant.

Compliancy refers to a mind that more and more is, by itself, inclined to virtue or to skillful habits. When this really reaches its summit, the mind becomes concentrated.

Concentration

Concentration here means all other consciousnesses dissolve. The mind can stay with the object for at least two and a half hours without any movement whatsoever. The mind is sufficient unto itself. When we continue to train sufficiency, it leads to the next stage.



Equanimity

I explained the Seven Awakening Factors in a sort of fluid way. These Factors are often explained in different stages – which is true – but each stage already kind of includes the next stage. When you look deeply, all the stages are already there.

When the mind is deeply contented and self-sufficient, it will seek something even more deep and that: equanimity

Equanimity is where even joy is experienced as a bit too much, not necessary. The mind finds the sweet spot where it is unmovable, infinite. The mind is as clear as a cold early morning after a night of snow, exquisite without any disturbance.

That state of mind is something to look forward to. At the same time it is something to look for, sometimes we already experience equanimity; remember what equanimity feels like and it will be easier to recognize it when it arises.

So that was a short reminder, just to combine it with this practice of *amanasikāra*. In the reader (*Additional materials*) you will find more information about the Seven Awakening Factors.

Also remember this is a practice-oriented training, practice what we discuss and find out what it means to you. I try to take you beyond definitions and utilize the capacities you have.

We all seek freedom. That is the theme of my life. Unfortunately we look for freedom in the wrong place, where this is one of the major paths to freedom.

You have a choice to attend to some things and not attend to other things. You can choose to attend to wholesome things. You can attend to things with anger, you can also attend to things with appreciation.

This is very important in our next topic, why Bodhicitta works. We will argue why the wish to become Buddha for the wellbeing of others actually meets your own needs. When we choose to aspire that, it will create an exquisite form of paying attention, something like nothing else.

Round up

It is important to keep in mind what the far-sighted goal, that is why we dedicate. There still are Buddhas and Aras around; it can be done. Practice recognizing these Buddhas, sometimes they are right in front of you without noticing them.

At the same time, it is better to think about your path to enlightenment in terms of ‘*doing*’ than in terms of ‘*achieving*’: we try to do Buddha. And by *doing Buddha*, we will gradually become better at it, until at one point we will always do Buddha.

Let us dedicate from that perspective, whatever understanding and virtue we brought together today is a mass of *doing Buddha*. Through your practice the wish to *do Buddha* will grow throughout your days until *the mind wants to do nothing but doing Buddha* ☺.



Living beings always needed protection and care, but we poison our planet so strongly (and not only in an environmental sense). There is also a lack of empathy and resentment etc., leaving us no place to practice anymore. This is a very practical approach to think about the world.

When we want to keep the Dharma alive, we need to nourish the world, it is something every one of us can do in daily life. We can make our home, our presence, our words, the way we attend to someone into moments where people can find some freedom, a bit of absence of disturbance. their moments of touching home where they experience *'wow, happiness was always inside'*.

Prayers

Closing words

So thank you for your presence, both live here in New York and online.

I rejoice in your practice, in our togetherness.

May we fulfill the wishes of our gurus and join them.

As of my teachers said: *'the Dharmakaya is as one, but when needed individuality is available.'*

Let's get there.

