CULTIVATING THE SEVEN AWAKENING FACTORS

In the Fourth Foundation of Mindfulness various self-state organizations are described as to their proximate causes and their functions. In the first set, the Five Hindrances, the goal is to identify how the hindrances are triggered, how to recognize them, how they disintegrate, and how to support the conditions that prevent their recurrence.

Regarding the next set, the Five Aggregates of Clinging, the goal is to identify how each of the five is organized and how each contributes to the formation of the sense of self as a dynamic process. The third set, the Six Sense Bases, the self-state organization process is subdivided into the function of each sense base, such as the eye and seeing, etc. and including the sense of the mind and cognizing. The goal of that area of practice is to see the impersonality of the sense bases more directly as phenomena without the clinging associated with the Five Hindrances.

The set that is currently being investigated is termed in Pali *Satta Sambojjhanga*. Here is how Wikipedia describes this term:

* satta - seven;
* [bodh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodhi) - an [abstract noun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abstract_noun) formed from the verbal root *\*budh-* (to awake, become aware, notice, know or understand) corresponding to the verbs *bujjhati* (Pāli) and *bodhati* or *budhyate* (Sanskrit);
* anga - a part of a whole; factor, cause.

Tonight’s talk will focus on the broader aspects of the seven factors, with an emphasis on the first and foremost of them, *mindfulness*. Here is the list of the factors:

1. Mindfulness (*sati*)
2. Investigation of Mental Phenomena (*dhamma vicaya*)
3. Energy/Effort (*viriya*)
4. Joy (*piti)*
5. Tranquility (*passadhi*)
6. Concentration (*samadhi*)
7. Equanimity (*upekkha*)

Here is the appropriate quote from the Satipatthana Sutta regarding the seven factors. Note that they are called the enlightenment factors:

“Again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects in terms of the seven enlightenment factors. And how does a bhikkhu abided contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects in terms of the seven enlightenment factors? Here there being the mindfulness enlightenment factor in him, a bhikkhu understands: ‘There is the mindfulness enlightenment factor in me’; or there being no mindfulness enlightenment factor in him, he understands: ‘There is no mindfulness enlightenment factor in me’; and he also understands how there comes to be the arising of the unarisen mindfulness enlightenment factor, and how the arisen mindfulness enlightenment factor comes to fulfillment by development.

“There being the investigation-of-states enlightenment factor in him…There being the energy enlightenment factor in him…there being the rapture enlightenment factor in him… there being the tranquility enlightenment factor in him…there being the concentration enlightenment factor in him…There being the equanimity enlightenment factor in him, a bhikkhu understands: ‘There is the equanimity enlightenment factor in me’; and he also understands how there comes to be the arising of the unarisen equanimity enlightenment in him, he understands: ‘There is no equanimity enlightenment factor in me’; and he also understands how there comes to be the arising of the unarisen equanimity enlightenment factor, and how the arisen equanimity enlightenment factor comes to fulfillment by development.

“In this way, he abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects internally, externally, and both internally and externally…And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects in terms of the seven enlightenment factors.

With this set, the goal is to identify what promotes the arising of an awakening factor, how to be aware of the presence or absence of it and how to foster the development of the factor to its highest potential for Awakening.

MINDFULNESS is arguably the most important quality of awareness involved in the process of Awakening. The Pali word is sati, which has a specifically applied function. According to Rupert Gethin, quoted in the article about mindfulness in Wikipedia:

“[*sati*] should be understood as what allows awareness of the full range and extent of *dhammas*; *sati* is an awareness of things in relation to things, and hence an awareness of their relative value. Applied to the *satipațțhanas*, presumably what this means is that *sati* is what causes the practitioner of yoga to "remember" that any feeling he may experience exists in relation to a whole variety or world of feelings that may be skillful or unskillful, with faults or faultless, relatively inferior or refined, dark or pure."

Mindfulness appears in multiple combinations of mental qualities: The *Four Foundations of Mindfulness (satipatthana)*, the *Seven Awakening Factors*, the *Five Powers*, the *Five Faculties* and the *Noble Eightfold Path*. The description of Sati in the Noble Eightfold Path is in reference to satipatthana.

Vipassana and sati are quite similar in function but can be distinguished in this way: Sati is present moment awareness, cultivated in an ongoing way so that vipassana can function as clear awareness of the arising and passing of mental self-state organizations in order to determine whether they are wholesome or unwholesome. If they are unwholesome, to starve them of attention and if they are wholesome to foster their development to fulfillment.

Mindfulness has been compared to the chief minister of a king, whose function is to monitor the operations important to effective functioning. The king in this case is vipassana.

Once again, mindfulness of breathing meditation cultivates the requisite internal awareness for the development of the awakening factors to fulfillment. The key practice is to be diligent in applying and reapplying mindful, present moment attention to the changing nature of breath sensations. It is also crucial to cultivate “acquiring the breath”, that is, the ability to persistently notice the process of breathing during normal everyday activities. The ability to notice clearly what is emerging into conscious awareness is developed in order to check what is occurring in the mind and make appropriate alterations in focus to stay on task.

Initially, the task is to cultivate a flow of mindful attention and action in order to interrupt what neuroscientists call “default mode network” operations, more commonly known as daydreaming. Ultimately, however, the goal is to discern the impersonal and transient nature of cognition, to overcome the misconception of an enduring and autonomous self.