**Cultivating The Factors For Awakening**

The culmination of skills for the process of Awakening is found in the coordinated function of the *Satta Sambojjhanga* (sah-tah sahm-bow-jahn-gah), translated as *The* *Seven Awakening Factors*: *mindfulness, investigation of mental phenomena, energy/effort, joy/enthusiastic interest, tranquility, concentration/stability of attention*, and *equipoise/dynamic balance of factors*. The purpose of these notes is to support a review of these factors and the levels of insight into the process of self-formation that can be realized during the process of Awakening.

The Awakening Factors are qualities of attention that can be noted and perfected with diligent mindfulness of breathing meditation, effectively integrated into ongoing awareness. The levels of insight, traditionally called the “Progressions of Insight” have been part of the Theravadin commentary for many hundreds of years and provide noticeable “landmarks” that confirm the deconstruction of craving and clinging and lead eventually to the direct experience of Nirvana.

First, a review of the Seven Awakening Factors. The seven factors function at their peak effectiveness in balancing each other, as described by Analayo in “Satipatthana—A Practice Guide”, on pages 181-82:

The actual performance in the cultivation of the awakening factors is a matter of harmonious balancing. The basic tone that accompanies the entire piece is set by mindfulness. Mindfulness is always required. The remaining six awakening factors fall into ensembles with three members each. Investigation-of-dharmas, energy and joy make up the members of the first ensemble, which serves to energize the practice. Tranquility, concentration, and equipoise make up the members of the second ensemble, which serves to bring calmness to the practice. In actual practice, the concert pitch of these two ensembles could be summarized under the headings of “Joyfully sustained interest” and “calmly composed balance”…the element of *inquisitiveness* naturally builds on the keen interest we bring to whatever we encounter through establishing receptive mindfulness, as if we had to remember it later. This element of inquisitiveness or sincere interest needs sustaining, it needs to be propped up with *energy* in the form of persistence. If this takes place without going overboard so as to result in tenseness, the *joy* of being in the present moment will saturate the resultant experience. In this way the three energizing awakening factors…make their contribution in the form of a “joyfully sustained interest” … Alongside such joyfully sustained interest, well-established mindfulness has a natural dimension of *calming* body and mind. A mind with mindfulness established also tends towards *composure* rather than being scattered, and through *satipatthana* practice the theme of balance and *equipoise* is very much in the foreground throughout. In this way the three calming awakening factors of tranquility, concentration and equipoise offer their contribution by way of a “calmly composed balance”.

**MINDFULNESS-*SATI BOJJHANGA***

Mindfulness is one of the most familiar concepts of Buddhist practice. The Pali word *sati* (smrti in Sanskrit), was commonly understood to mean *non-forgetfulness,* that is, the ability to keep a thought or plan of action in mind; the Brahman priests cultivated sati so they could remember and re-enact the rites and rituals contained in the Vedas, holy teachings; skillfully activated, these performances assured favorable karmic consequences. The Buddha “repurposed” the term to be understood as “present awareness”. The Buddha was quite adept at modifying the intended meaning of words and concepts to his purpose. In this case, it specifically means “Be diligent in noting the nature of impermanence, non-self and the dissatisfaction that arises through craving and clinging”.

A term that is synonymous with sati is *apammada* (ah-pah-mah-dah), translated as *heedfulness*:

"Just as the rafters in a peak-roofed house all go to the roof-peak, incline to the roof-peak, converge at the roof-peak, and the roof-peak is reckoned the foremost among them; in the same way, all skillful qualities are rooted in heedfulness, converge in heedfulness, and heedfulness is reckoned the foremost among them.” AN 10.15, translated by Thanissaro

A modern psychological concept that can be understood as synonymous with sati is *metacognition.* Wikipedia offers these definitions of metacognition:

**Metacognition** is defined as "[cognition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognition) about cognition", or "knowing about knowing". It comes from the root word "**meta",** meaning beyond. It can take many forms; it includes knowledge about when and how to use particular strategies for learning or for problem solving. There are generally two components of metacognition: knowledge about cognition, and regulation of cognition….

…[Metamemory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metamemory), defined as knowing about memory and [mnemonic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mnemonic) strategies, is an especially important form of metacognition...

…Metacognition variously refers to the study of memory-monitoring and self-regulation, meta-reasoning, [consciousness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consciousness)/[awareness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Awareness) and auto-consciousness/[self-awareness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-awareness). In practice these capacities are used to regulate one's own cognition, to maximize one's potential to think, [learn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning) and to the evaluation of proper [ethical](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethics)/[moral rules](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morality)…

…In the domain of [cognitive neuroscience](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_neuroscience), metacognitive monitoring and control has been viewed as a function of the [prefrontal cortex](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prefrontal_cortex), which receives (monitors) sensory signals from other cortical regions and through feedback loops implements control…

…Metacognition includes at least three different types of metacognitive awareness when considering metacognitive knowledge:

1. **Declarative Knowledge**: refers to knowledge about oneself as a learner and about what factors can influence one's performance. Declarative knowledge can also be referred to as "world knowledge".
2. **Procedural Knowledge**: refers to knowledge about doing things. This type of knowledge is displayed as heuristics and strategies. A high degree of procedural knowledge can allow individuals to perform tasks more automatically. This is achieved through a large variety of strategies that can be accessed more efficiently.
3. **Conditional knowledge**: refers to knowing when and why to use declarative and procedural knowledge. It allows students to allocate their resources when using strategies. This in turn allows the strategies to become more effective…

Similar to metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive regulation or "regulation of cognition" contains three skills that are essential.

1. **Planning**: refers to the appropriate selection of strategies and the correct allocation of resources that affect task performance.
2. **Monitoring**: refers to one's awareness of comprehension and task performance
3. **Evaluating**: refers to appraising the final product of a task and the efficiency at which the task was performed. This can include re-evaluating strategies that were used…

…Similarly, maintaining motivation to see a task to completion is also a metacognitive skill. The ability to become aware of distracting stimuli – both internal and external – and sustain effort over time also involves metacognitive or [executive functions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_functions)… <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metacognition> will provide the entire article.

Much of what informs our selfing process comes from what is termed “autobiographical memory” or “implicit memory”, which operates outside of consciousness, and in that way biases the process of recognition and action regarding various situations that arise in daily life. In other talks I have referred to “confirmation bias”, which is the tendency to disregard or devalue perceptions that are implicitly understood; the plague of racism in our culture is an example of an implicit confirmation bias.

Mindfulness supports the operation of dhamma vicaya, investigation of mental phenomena, the second of the seven awakening factors, and the manifestation of these cooperating functions makes that which is operating implicitly to become explicit, that is, reflected in conscious awareness through metacognition.

This quality of metacognition can be found in the Satipatthana Sutta, in the *mindfulness of the bod*y section:

1. The Four Postures

“Again, bhikkhus, when walking a bhikkhu understands: ‘I am walking’; when standing, he understands: ‘I am standing’; when sitting, he understands: ‘I am sitting’; when lying down, he understands: ‘I am lying down’; or he understands accordingly however his body is disposed.

“In this way he abides contemplating the body as a body internally, externally, and both internally and externally…And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That too is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body.

1. Full Awareness

“Again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu is one who acts in full awareness when going forward and returning; who acts in full awareness when looking ahead and looking away; who acts in full awareness when flexing and extending his limbs; who acts in full awareness when wearing his robes and carrying his outer robe and bowl; who acts in full awareness when eating, drinking, consuming food, and tasting; who acts in full awareness when defecating and urinating; who acts in full awareness when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent.

“In this way he abides contemplating the body as a body internally, externally, and both internally and externally…And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That too is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body.

I find it quite interesting that there is no mention of sati in the article as ancient historical sources are quoted. There is reference to Greek philosophical writing as an ancient form of metacognition, however.

The function of mindfulness in the awakening factors is as a monitor for the monitoring and coordination of the other 6 factors. In the Pali Canon, a metaphor used is that of a chief minister of a king, whose task it is to monitor the functions of other departments of the kingdom to maximize their effectiveness and report what is discovered to the king.

**SKILLFUL MEANS FOR CULTIVATING MINDFULNESS:**

1. Regular practice of mindfulness of breathing meditation. It is very helpful to commit to a residential retreat, preferably lasting a week. This may seem daunting, but it has a transformative effect that is beneficial for living a more balanced and less stressful life. When I go on retreats, which is often, I regard it as *a vacation for the mind!*
2. Practice cultivating clear awareness of posture, gestures, or any sensing/moving awareness. It is useful to review the cultivation of the *four clear comprehensions (satisampajanna)* (sah-tee-sahm-bow-jahn-gah)contained in the first foundation, mindfulness of the body (See the above quote).
3. Avoid voluntary association with people who aren’t interested in being actively engaged in mindfulness. One of the remarkable insights that develops over time with the practice of mindfulness is an increasing awareness of how often people are “on autopilot”, unaware of the consequences of their attitudes and actions. This avoidance shouldn’t be cult-like or arrogant; it is more about thoughtfulness regarding how to spend time socially.
4. Intentionally associate with mindful people. Mindfulness isn’t the sole property of Buddhist practice (see the section above on “metacognition”), it’s just that Buddhism puts a strong emphasis on cultivating that quality of attention. Being mindful is an important aspect of what is popularly called “emotional intelligence” (Daniel Goleman, who wrote the book “Emotional Intelligence” and several of the other books of that sort, has been a practicing Buddhist for many years).

**INVESTIGATION OF MENTAL PHENOMENA-*DHAMMA VICAYA BOJJHANGA***

The word *dhamma* (dharma in Sanskrit)has many different meanings in Buddhism. In this case, dhamma refers to a momentarily existing formation of constituent elements, a phenomenon. A dhamma can be a physical phenomenon (the constituent elements would be molecules, atoms, etc.) or a mental phenomenon (conditioning factors in the mind that shape a moment of self-experience). *Vicaya* (vee-chah-yah)is translated as “*investigation*” or “*discernment*”.

“Any time one examines, investigates, & scrutinizes internal qualities with discernment, that is analysis of qualities as a factor for Awakening. And any time one examines, investigates, & scrutinizes external qualities with discernment, that too is analysis of qualities as a factor for Awakening. Thus this forms the definition of 'analysis of qualities as a factor for Awakening,'” SN 46.52 translated by Thanissaro

It seems to me that dhamma vicaya is a more highly developed form of vitakka/vicara (vwee-tah-kah/vwee-chah-rah), which involves bringing attention to a mental object fully and is informed by wisdom, that is, alert for the perception that moments of awareness are transitory constructs, with the intention to avoid clinging to a moment of awareness as if it is “I, me or mine”.

The nature of untrained awareness is superficial when it is lacking in mindfulness—the mind identifies whatever emerges into consciousness as “myself”. As a result, the mind becomes preoccupied with the fabricated meaning that is elaborated from memory and imposed upon the ongoing “data flow” of new stimulation. This preoccupation is a form of enchantment, partly attuned to new stimulation, but increasingly biased by the emerging “selfing story”.

We frequently focus on the “why”, related to the content, rather than the “how”, that is, *how* self-organization manifests. The function of investigation is to observe the emerging process as soon as possible, the intention being cultivating and combining mindful awareness with benevolent intention. In this way, dhamma vicaya is an essential component of vipassana practice.

Mindfulness monitors investigation to prevent it from degrading into skeptical doubt. Investigation also functions to prevent the awakening factor of concentration from becoming too rigid or doctrinaire.

Referring back to the references on metacognition mentioned above, dhamma vicaya would relate to *planning, monitoring and evaluating in the regulation of cognition*.

**SKILLFUL MEANS FOR CULTIVATING INVESTIGATION OF MENTAL PHENOMENA**

1. Become familiar with the concepts described in the Satipatthana Sutta and other teachings that emphasize the craft of self-awareness, that is vitakka (aiming attention at an arising phenomenon), and vicara (maintaining conscious awareness of the arisen phenomenon to discern whether it is wholesome or unwholesome).
2. Cultivate an orderly life and ethical values. The less complicated one’s lifestyle is, the easier is it to not get caught up in mentally rehearsing your day at work, to-do lists, and so on. In my experience as a practitioner and teacher of mindfulness meditation, it’s clear to me that the most frequent reason for not applying Buddhist principles and practices is “I don’t have time!”, “I’m too busy!”, or “I’m just too tired—I just fall asleep when I try to meditate!” These reasons are all familiar and reasonable, but as mindful investigation becomes more effective with practice, it’s easier to notice how many things that seem necessary really aren’t! Being committed to Right Speech, Action and Livelihood creates a clear conscience, and that is a very effective stress buster.
3. The practice of combining mindfulness, investigation, Right Effort, and concentration with investigation of mental phenomena develops vipassana, which is insight into the three characteristics at the core of Buddhist teachings: impermanence, non-self, and the inevitability of suffering as the result of craving and clinging.
4. Avoid people who have little or no interest in thinking critically about what they are exposed to or their habitual behaviors. Thinking critically is not “negative criticism”; rather it is the ability to investigate how beliefs and behaviors come to be and being able to discern whether those beliefs or behaviors are generated by craving and clinging or by more wholesome means.
5. Associate with people who are more insightful, conscientious, and well-informed about spiritual practices. The Buddha said repeatedly that the degree to which a person is ethically inclined, with self-awareness and self-discipline to live a more ethical life is growing towards freedom from suffering.
6. Integrate the concepts and practices that promote wholesomeness and mental clarity into daily life routines. We’re trained to think critically in our jobs and while driving; investigating our motives and behaviors regarding relationships, lifestyle, and so forth promotes spiritual growth.
7. When practicing investigation of mental phenomena, *don’t get bogged down in the content of what is arising in awareness--instead, focus on investigating* *the process through which thoughts and behaviors emerge.* This doesn’t mean that the contents are meaningless. Rather, the emphasis is on *understanding how the mind jumps to conclusions regarding what’s happening and what beneficial adjustments can be made to improve the situation*. The value of cultivating concentration and tranquility, also among the awakening factors, is that they create a “buffer zone” against impulsive reactivity, allowing the inborn capacity for reflective analysis to operate more effectively.

**ENERGY/EFFORT/PERSISTENCE-*VIRIYA BOJJHANGA***

The Pali word *viriya* (veer-yah)is defined as *energy* or *strength* and is often associated with *persistence*. Daniel Siegel, in his “Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Biology-An Integrative Handbook of the Mind” has an interesting description of the mind on page XXVI:  *“A core aspect of the mind can be defined as an embodied and relational process that regulates the flow of energy and information”.*

My understanding of this factor of awakening is that mindfulness and investigation of phenomena channel the energy we call attention to a particular focal point through the function of concentration. When this channeling is skillfully organized through wisdom (clear awareness and benevolent intention), we call the effect *vipassana* (vih-pah-suh-nah)*,* that is, insight into how selfing operates.

Here’s an analogy that might be useful: Assume that *wisdom* is the “lighting script” for a stage production, and that the lighting technician is operating a spotlight in the back of the darkened auditorium. *Energy* is being used in two ways: as the beam of light energy organized by the spotlight, and as the technician is making the “Right Effort” (from the Noble Eightfold Path) to move the beam of light in the ways appropriate to illuminate the performer on the stage and according to the lighting script. The technician uses *mindfulness* and *investigation of mental phenomena* to successfully accomplish her task. What is the stage production that is being illuminated? The practice of Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood! Of course, the theater of everyday life is improvisational, with no script.

The assumption that I rely on is that energy, that is, glucose and oxygen, is being channeled through the body via the blood stream. When patterned neural firing is activated, those neurons need energy to function properly, so more fuel-laden blood goes to that part of the brain (see the neurological bit above regarding the function of the prefrontal cortex, for example) that is activated. The cultivation of vipassana enhances this channeling, assuring that the neural networks that are being reinforced are associate with Right Speech, Action and Livelihood.

Every time a particular neural pathway is fed, the neural connections become “stronger”, with more synaptic connections and a stronger signal that is more easily activated (that is, it becomes “habitual”). This describes how vipassana cultivates awakening through “the four right exertions”:

There are these four right exertions. Which four? There is the case where a monk generates desire, endeavors, arouses persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen... for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen... for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen... (and) for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. These are the four right exertions.

Just as the River Ganges flows to the east, slopes to the east, inclines to the east, in the same way when a monk develops & pursues the four right exertions, he flows to Unbinding, slopes to Unbinding, inclines to Unbinding. SN 49.1 translated by Thanissaro

Buddhism also describes different levels of effort: *instigating, sustaining* and *determined*. The first can be associated with bringing attention to the breath, the second to sustaining attention without wavering, and the third to persistence in repeating the first and second.

**SKILLFUL MEANS FOR CULTIVATING ENERGY/EFFORT/PERSISTENCE**

1. Reflect on the negative effect of a slothful lifestyle. Laziness reinforces laziness. Get some physical exercise and reasonable periods of restful sleep. It’s well documented that many in our culture are sleep deprived, due to late night television or computer gaming, or other distractions that waste energy with no benefit other than immediately available ongoing distraction.
2. Reflect on the benefits of energy. I recall times when I really didn’t feel like exercising, and then, after exercise, enjoying the burst of energy and buoyant mood that arises. Deliberately recall the times when energy was up and how good it felt. I know that when I have a regular meditation practice I generally am more alert and enjoy the simple pleasures of life more easily.
3. Check on the research that supports the practice of vipassana over 25 centuries. Modern neuroscientific studies affirm that regular meditation practice enhances mood and mental alertness. It literally changes the structure of the brain, particularly the areas that process internal body and emotional awareness, as well as the areas associated with self-regulation.
4. Practice being generous with others-it’s quite interesting to note how much delight can come from providing a service or some support to others who would benefit in wholesome ways from your efforts.
5. Reflect on the benefits of regular practice. Buddhism describes different levels of confidence: the confidence that comes from reading something that seems sensible, the confidence that comes from observing the life and actions of someone who has been diligent in practicing mindfulness, and then the confidence that arises with direct awareness, what I call an “Aha! moment”.
6. Associating with people whose energy is “up”, but not in a hyperactive way.
7. Here’s something to reflect upon: it is clear to me that I have more energy when my mind is less burdened with the five hindrances. I call the hindrances “energy dumps”, because the free energy of the nervous system is bogged down by the entrapment/enchantment of the hindrances. A lot of energy is wasted with pleasurable fantasies and pursuits, rage and resentment, dullness, restlessness, worry and skeptical doubt. Should you gift yourself with a one-week meditation retreat, you will notice that, after the third day or so, there’s a surge of delightful energy--colors are more vivid, flavors richer, and life is somehow more vital.
8. I find it useful to read Buddhist books that inspire me to practice. it seems to build motivational energy and confidence.

**JOY-*PITI BOJJHANGA***

The accumulating beneficial effect of vipassana practice is that the energy in the system is not being wastefully and stressfully channeled into the hindrances. This freed-up energy is experienced as *piti* (pee-tee)*,* translated as *joy, rapture*, or, as I prefer, *enthusiastic, buoyant interest* in the mind and body phenomena.

“In one whose persistence is aroused, a rapture not-of-the-flesh arises. When a rapture not-of-the-flesh arises in one whose persistence is aroused, then rapture as a factor for Awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.” MN 118, translated by Thanissaro

Here’s what Wikipedia has to say about different levels of piti:

As the meditator experiences tranquility ([*samatha*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samatha)), one of five kinds of joy (*piti*) will arise. These are:

* **Weak rapture** only causes [piloerection](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goose_bumps) (the hair on the back of the neck stands up).
* **Short rapture** evocates some thunder "from time to time".
* **Going down rapture** explodes inside the body, like waves.
* **Exalting rapture** "makes the body jump to the sky".
* **Fulfilling rapture** seems to be a huge flood of a mountain stream.

Note only the last two are considered specifically piti. The first four are just a preparation for the last one, which is the jhanic factor.

These levels of piti are as described in the 5th century C.E. Visuddhimagga, a treatise by Buddhagosa, which emphasizes the development of *jhana* (jah-nah), *an extraordinarily highly developed level of concentrated attention, exclusive to any external stimuli*. I have experienced these states, except for the body jumping part, when I was able to produce the different levels of jhana. “Piloerection” is what happens when your hair stands on end, usually accompanied by chills. “Thunder” alludes to areas of the body that seem to rapidly transform into ecstatically charged pleasant feeling, and these areas can be developed wherever in the body the levels of mindfulness, investigation, effort and concentration are sufficiently strong and enduring. The “waves” of piti are just like that, passing over the body like chills up and down the spine. The “exalting rapture” might mean a feeling of lightness and buoyant resilience to unpleasant feelings. “Fulfilling rapture” sweeps through the entire body, pervading the mind with extremely pleasant flows of energy.

There is no mention of the levels of piti in the Pali Canon, although piti is mentioned as one of the characteristics of the first and second jhanas. The transition from the second to the third jhana is marked by noting the “harshness” of piti and using investigative concentration to penetrate past piti to the sense of profound satisfaction that characterizes the third jhana, called “a pleasant abiding”.

These days, my understanding of piti is related more to enthusiasm and a sense of resilient, curious, and buoyant interest regarding whatever comes to mind, and I find this very supportive of vipassana practice. Conscious awareness is not burdened by sloth and torpor, as this level of practice is the ability to note the potential arising of sloth and torpor and deny the dominance of it (see Right Effort above). Attention can be compared to riding a powerful, well-trained horse: there’s a quivering eagerness that isn’t agitated or unregulated, and the mind can quickly and clearly discern where the energy is flowing (see investigation of mental phenomena above).

**SKILLFUL MEANS FOR CULTIVATING JOY**

In our culture, joy and happiness seem to come from outside ourselves. As a consumer culture, we are bombarded with ads suggesting that using some product or service will make us happy. We are told that happiness is a goal to be acquired rather than a resource we already have access to with sufficient meditative training. From a spiritual perspective, the opportunity to experience joy is always with us. Here are some recommendations for the releasing of joy:

1. Reflect on the examples of those you know or have read about who manifest joy as an inspiration. Have you ever gotten chills in your body when being around or reading about someone who seems to have really mastered life? Those chills are manifestations of joy.
2. Recall times when you were truly inspired by your own virtuous qualities--generosity, kindness, and so on. Let that inspire you in your practice.
3. Cultivate concentration and tranquility to the level of access concentration, which is the flow of energy in awareness unburdened by the hindrances. This level of joy is subtle and is more likely experienced as a buoyant enthusiasm or exuberance about what is flowing in awareness, regardless as to whether the feeling tone is pleasant or unpleasant.
4. Orient your social encounters toward more exposure to people who seem optimistic, upbeat and jovial about life. This is not to be confused with people who indulge in frivolous activities that produce excitement, however.

**TRANQUILITY-*PASSADHI BOJJHANGA***

The Pali word *passadhi* (pah-sah-dee) describes a state of *non-turbulent energy flow, serene, tranquil, stable* and *calm*. It is so congruent with samadhi (concentration) that I routinely combine the two: samadhi/passadhi. In the function of the seven awakening factors, passadhi is the antidote for the hindrance of restlessness and worry. In this way, passadhi cooperates with piti. The result is a “just-right” balance between the activation of the sympathetic nervous system (piti) and the tranquility that occurs under the influence of the parasympathetic nervous system (passadhi)

Achaan Chah, the famous Thai master, used as an analogy a river. He asked his students: “Have you ever seen a still river? Yes? Have you ever seen a flowing river? Yes? Have you ever seen a still, flowing river?” With this series of images, he conveyed the nature of samadhi-passadhi.

One of my teachers on a retreat told us a story of being at a monastery perched high above the Irrawaddy river in Myanmar. Looking down on the river, it seemed to be quite still, with no rapids, not a ripple. Then she noticed boats moving downriver with the current very swiftly, again without a ripple. This seems to me to be a useful way to relate to the practice of vipassana. Samadhi-passadhi is the dynamic and non-turbulent flow of the river, while mental phenomena drift in and out of awareness without a ripple of craving and clinging. However, if one of those boats was anchored or moving upstream, there would be noticeable waves, disturbances of samadhi. Realizing that the ripples are on the surface, and that the smooth but energetic flow of energy is far more predominant than the ripples is comparable to the way vipassana can reveal that receptive, non-reactive awareness is far more present when a mental phenomenon arises than the immediate effect of the phenomenon, *provided that craving and clinging hasn’t created a false sense of personhood around the rippling effect of the thought!* Passadhi manifests a minimum degree of craving, and therefore makes it much easier to not take the ripples personally.

**SKILLFUL MEANS FOR CULTIVATING TRANQUILITY**

1. Cultivate a simple, healthful lifestyle, avoiding overly rich foods containing fats, sugars, caffeine, and refined carbohydrates.
2. Be clear about what levels of stress exposure are unavoidable and which can be eliminated or minimized in your lifestyle.
3. Meditate on a regular basis. Concentration practice automatically brings tranquility with it, provided that the practice includes investigation of mental phenomena and mindfulness. Tranquility that is out of balance and unregulated produces the hindrance of sloth and torpor. Using Right Effort, combined with active investigation of each breath cycle, cultivates a wholesome balance of energy and tranquility in awareness.
4. Minimizing exposure to restless and impatient people. We live in a hyperactive, “instant results” culture that fosters excitement and agitation. Take a break from this sort of reinforcement. Take a vacation from the news, which emphasizes issues to worry about or be angry about in order to keep us tuned in.
5. Develop a routine of sweeping attention through the body periodically to notice and release/relax any muscle tension.

**CONCENTRATION-*SAMADHI BOJJHANGA***

The Pali word *samadhi* (sah-mah-dee)is usually translated as concentration, but the more fundamental meaning is “unification of mental formations”. In this regard, it is ethically neutral, that is, the mind can unify around unwholesome factors or wholesome factors. As applied to the factors of awakening (and the eightfold path), the mental conditioning factors (sankhara) are unified through wholesome intentions.

Now what, monks, is noble right concentration with its supports & requisite conditions? Any singleness of mind equipped with these seven factors—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, & right mindfulness—is called noble right concentration with its supports & requisite conditions—MN 117

There are two sorts of concentration: fixed concentration (*appana samadhi*), and momentary concentration (*khanika samadhi*); for the latter term I prefer “moving concentration”, unwavering attention as moments of self-awareness come and go. Both applications involve a stable, intentional focus, and both can either be very precise and one-pointed, or more broadly focused without “wobbling”. I often use a simile based on how a how a theatrical spotlight operator functions: With fixed concentration, the lighting tech is directed by the stage manager to keep the spot clearly focused on one player, wherever she or he moves around the stage; with momentary concentration, the tech moves the spot from one player to another smoothly, without wobbling, with the intention to illuminate the plot of the scene. In this example, the script followed is organized around the Wisdom aggregate of the Eightfold Path. The stage manager is mindfulness and investigation of mental phenomena, while energy is the light of the beam and effort is the intentional activity of the tech. The resulting illumination is vipassana, whether involved with fixed or momentary concentration. The awakening factor of joy is the ongoing enthusiastic satisfaction of a job well done. Tranquility is the smoothness and lack of “jitter” in the movement of the spot. Equipoise is the result of the balanced coordination of the routine, regardless of whatever emotion is revealed through the plot.

**SKILLFUL MEANS FOR CULTIVATING CONCENTRATION**

1. As with tranquility, organizing a relatively stress-free, uncomplicated lifestyle is quite beneficial. The Buddha said that the supporting factors for cultivating concentration included living in a place that is quiet, protected from the elements, with a moderate temperature and few interruptions. It’s ironic that we live in well-insulated dwellings (quiet, with moderate temperatures), with plenty of conveniently arranged food, water, light and sewage facilities, and yet we can’t find the time to meditate!
2. Balancing optimally between energy and tranquility, with steady focus on a simple object like the breath to avoid distracting thoughts.
3. This may seem counter to the task, but the more urgently one tries to force the mind to stay on task, the more the associated agitation creates intrusive thoughts and expectations. The most productive practice is to *rest attention* (vitakka-aiming) on the touch sensation at the rim of the nostrils *persistently* (vicara-sustained attention), the more likely it is that concentration will build. It is an “effortless effort” (thank you Joseph Goldstein!)
4. Associating with people who value simplicity and non-distraction is quite helpful. This is why it is so beneficial for dedicated meditation students to sit in each other’s presence on a regular basis.
5. Of course, one of the best ways to cultivate concentration is during an intensive residential meditation retreat. The focus of the event is to provide the optimal opportunity to dedicate every waking moment to cultivating concentration, as well as the other awakening factors.

**EQUIPOISE-*UPEKKHA* OR *TATRAMAJJHATTATA BOJJHANGA***

The final factor of the seven factors of awakening is *upekkha* (oo-peh-kah)*,* which is translated as equipoise, non-preference or patience.

“The Pāli term *Upekkhā* is composed of *upa,* which means

justly, impartially or rightly *(yuttito)* and *ikkha,* to see, discern

or view. The etymological meaning of the term is discerning

rightly, viewing justly, or looking impartially, that is, without attachment or aversion, without favour or disfavor.” From “The Buddha And His Teachings”, pp. 606-607, Narada Maha Thera

It is a mental factor, that is, it only refers to how the mind processes physical experience and shouldn’t be confused with a physically neutral feeling.

*“Equanimity has the characteristic of evolving the mode of neutrality as*

*regards beings; its function is seeing equality in beings; its manifestation is*

*quieting both aversion and attachment; its proximate cause is seeing the*

*heritage of the occurring kamma as ‘beings are the property of their*

*kamma’. By its influence they will attain to pleasure, or be free from pain, or*

*not fall from the prosperity already acquired. Its consummation is the*

*quieting of aversion and of attachment; its failure is the production of an*

*unintelligent indifference which is based on the home life.”*

*From “The Perfections Leading to Enlightenment” by Sujin Boriharnwanaket,*

*Page 174, Translated by Nina van Gorkom 2007 First Edition*

There’s another term that is synonymous with upekkha: *tatramajjhattata* (tah-trah-muh-jah-tahtah)*.*  Here’s  how Gil Fronsdal describes it:

“The second word often translated as equanimity is *tatramajjhattata*, a compound made of simple Pali words. Tatra, meaning “there,” sometimes refers to “all these things.” Majjha means “middle,” and tata means “to stand or to pose.” Put together, the word becomes “to stand in the middle of all this.” As a form of equanimity, “being in the middle” refers to balance, to remaining centered in the middle of whatever is happening. This balance comes from inner strength or stability. The strong presence of inner calm, well-being, confidence, vitality, or integrity can keep us upright, like a ballast keeps a ship upright in strong winds. As inner strength develops, equanimity follows.” From an article downloaded from the Insight Meditation Center on October 7, 2014. The URL is: <http://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/books-articles/articles/equanimity/>

From the same article, here are Gil’s comments on what are called “The eight worldly winds” that equipoise is the antidote for:

“Equanimity is a protection from the “eight worldly winds”: praise and blame, success and failure, pleasure and pain, fame and disrepute. Becoming attached to or excessively elated with success, praise, fame or pleasure can be a set-up for suffering when the winds of life change direction. For example, success can be wonderful, but if it leads to arrogance, we have more to lose in future challenges. Becoming personally invested in praise can tend toward conceit. Identifying with failure, we may feel incompetent or inadequate. Reacting to pain, we may become discouraged. If we understand or feel that our sense of inner well-being is independent of the eight winds, we are more likely to remain on an even keel in their midst.” From an article downloaded from the Insight Meditation Center on October 7, 2014. The URL is: <http://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/books-articles/articles/equanimity/>

The function of tatramajjhattata can be illustrated in the graphic illustration below. It uses mindfulness, investigation and Right Effort to balance two “vectors” of the selfing process. The horizontal line represents the function of perception and identification, and the vertical line represents the balancing dynamic between the sympathetic (arousing) and parasympathetic (sedating) systems:

**ENERGY**

**(SYMPATHETIC SYSTEM)**

**Too much generates agitation**

**MINDFULNESS**

**+ JOY/INTEREST**

**CONTINUALLY MONITORS**

**THE FOUR FACTORS**

**BENEVOLENT INTENTION**

**CONTINUALLY MOTIVATES THOUGHTS & ACTIONS**

**CONFIDENCE**

**Too much generates attachment to views**

**INVESTIGATION**

**Too much generates skeptical doubt**

***TATRAMAJJHATTATA***

***IS THE OPTIMAL, DYNAMICALLY VARIABLE BALANCE OF ENERGY/TRANQUILITY & CONFIDENCE/INVESTIGATION***

**TRANQUILITY**

**(PARASYMPATHETIC SYSTEM)**

**Too much generates sluggishness**

This graphic shows the dynamic balancing act to be managed regarding the interaction between two different processes in our experience. It also reflects what is called *panca bala* (pahn-chah bah-lah)*,* the *five powers* of Buddhist psychology. Classically, the five powers are:

1. **Faith** ([saddha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saddha)) and **Unification** (samadhi) - controls doubt
2. **Energy/Effort/Persistence** ([viriya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viriya)) – controls laziness
3. **Mindfulness** ([sati](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mindfulness_%28Buddhism%29)); - controls heedlessness
4. **Concentration** ([samādhi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samadhi_%28Buddhism%29" \o "Samadhi (Buddhism))) - controls distraction
5. **Wisdom/Discernment** ([pañña,](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prajna" \o "Prajna) ) – controls ignorance (copied from Wikipedia)

I have substituted confidence for faith, and investigation of phenomena for wisdom/discernment. I understand this in the context of the seven awakening factors in this way:

**Mindfulness** is the quality of self-awareness, alert for either too much energy (restlessness and worry plus the reactivity of sense desire and aversion/ill will) or too little energy (sloth and torpor or the absence of commitment, which is skeptical doubt).

**Faith** is a degree of confidence, contradicting doubt, avoiding attachment to views.

**Energy/Effort/Persistence** is the skillful management of the flow of experiential energy so that the manifestation of it isn’t “jittery” or overpoweringly impulsive.

**Concentration** is the ability to maintain steady attention to a focal point without becoming attached to a view and thereby inattentive to new information arriving through the senses.

**Wisdom/discernment** is the capacity to investigate how the mind makes meaning out of the new information that comes through the senses. When discernment isn’t monitored by mindfulness, it can become incoherent and too skeptical.

**SKILLFUL MEANS FOR CULTIVATING EQUIPOISE:**

1. Make it a regular practice to not take yours or other’s beliefs and behaviors personally. The classical suggestion for this is to realize that that there is no person to take things personally! The Dalai Lama, who fled with many of his people from his homeland, has said “If something happens and you can do something about it, don’t worry! If something happens and you can’t do anything about it, don’t worry!” This doesn’t mean to not think things through and take effective action when possible—it means to realize that all plans and expectations are provisional, and to invest our self-worth and self-identity on the outcome is an example of craving and clinging.
2. Our culture is very involved in attitudes and behaviors that foster self-absorption. Practice noticing how this plays out mindfully, without judgment; how often people crave things that aren’t really necessary, or take offense to setbacks or others’ thoughtless behaviors that aren’t all that important (such as when someone interrupts or cuts you off in traffic).
3. Practice sitting meditation for extended periods of time with the intention to cultivate ongoing tolerance of physical discomfort or emotional urgency, investigating the mental resistance to the discomfort while releasing muscle tension. Keep relaxing into the next breath, the next moment.
4. Practice intentionally performing an act of compassion, generosity or patience in a situation that you would ordinarily avoid, using the same strategies as in #3 to learn how to reduce reactivity in adverse situations. Provide a service to someone whether they show gratitude or not. Willingly clean up a messy situation that you find repulsive or boring to explore and release mental and physical resistance.

It is said that cultivating concentration is like going into a yard and chopping all the weeds off at ground level (the weeds are the five hindrances); soon they will regrow. Cultivating the seven factors of awakening can be compared to starving the roots to the extent that they don’t regrow (Starving involves removing the basic attachments to the false view of an enduring, separate self).

One of the benefits of developing the awakening factors is the manifestation of the “six beautiful pairs” of cetasikas, wholesome mind conditioners. The pairing represents the maximal cooperation between the receptivity of the mind and the functionality of the constituent conditioning factors reflected on the mind:

**TRANQUILITY OF MENTAL FACTORS, TRANQUILITY OF MIND**

**LIGHTNESS OF MENTAL FACTORS, LIGHTNESS OF MIND**

**PLIANCY OF MENTAL FACTORS, PLIANCY OF MIND**

**WIELDINESS OF MENTAL FACTORS, WIELDINESS OF MIND**

**PROFICIENCY OF MENTAL FACTORS, PROFICIENCY OF MIND**

**UPRIGHTNESS OF MENTAL FACTORS, UPRIGHTNESS OF MIND**

These function to optimize mental alertness and cognitive “competency” in discerning the elements within emerging self-state organizations. Subjectively, consciousness is calm, buoyant, flexible, workable, effective and realistic.

**THE PROGRESSIONS OF INSIGHT**

*The Progressions of Insight* involve several stages that recognize characteristic qualities of experience that increasingly reveal the process of self-fabrication. the progression is rationalized—that is, it seems to be a rational, step-by-step development of insightful skills—this understanding doesn’t account for the increasingly sophisticated and unrelenting qualities of attention that must be acquired and perfected in order to realize the fulfillment that is possible. Effective practice requires the qualities of non-reactive discernment and discipline that are the manifestation of high development of the Seven Awakening Factors. Any progress of insight that is acquired is part of Awakening. The earliest stages involve cultivating a more ethical value system that is well-integrated into one’s lifestyle, an increasingly capable quality of introspection and the ability to reliably discern the difference between what the body senses and the mind creates. These fundamental stages of personality integration are advisable for anyone to have a well-balanced personality and effective resilience to the stressfulness of contemporary life. This personality sets the conditions for the liberation of the mind from dukkha, distress/confusion and leading to ultimate realization of Nirvana.

The following notes were developed for presentations provided for the participants in a one-week residential retreat in 2018. The progressive listing is reviewed below:

**THE PROCESS OF AWAKENING**

The list below describes what are recognized by Theravadin Buddhists as reliable “landmarks” realizable on the path of awakening. The system was developed in the 5th century C.E. by a Sri Lankan monk, Buddhaghosa, is found in what is called the *Visuddhimagga* (The Path Of Purification), and is a quite elaborate commentary on the understanding of Buddhist teachings of that era.

The graphic below and the following comments describe my understanding of how the progression evolves. I have some direct experience of some of the stages, and the rest is derived from my studies over the years. A useful introductory book for understanding these stages is “A Meditator’s Atlas”, by Matt Flickstein, one of my teachers. A much more advanced book is “Wisdom Wide And Deep” by Shaila Catherine, another of my teachers.

**STAGES OF AWAKENING**

**Purification of Knowledge and Vision of Path Progress** has several sub-stages:

**Purification of Knowledge and Vision** takes "as object the unconditioned, the standstill of existence, the absence of becoming, cessation, **NIBBANA**"

**Knowledge of Equanimity and Adaptation of Truth** is the opening to one of the characteristics, then:

**Knowledge in Reflecting Contemplation**, an increasingly clear awareness of the three characteristics.

**Knowledge of Desire for Deliverance** is the emerging desire to be rid of the torment. This leads to:

**Contemplation of the Fearful**, a pervasive, reflexive reaction to what appears to be annihilation of self.

**Contemplation of Dissolution** is awareness that self-states collapse immediately, leading to:

**Contemplation of Rise and Fall** increasingly knows the rapid emergence and dissolution of self-states.

**Purification of Knowledge and Vision of What is the Path and Not-Path** is increasing awareness of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self. At this stage, jhana-like rapture, clarity and energy may emerge, called *the corruptions of insight*. Mindful investigation of conditioned arising and passing away prevents getting stuck. Awareness of arising and passing away becomes reliable and easily done.

**Purification of Overcoming Doubt** is the process of observing cause and effect. An intention always precedes a thought, mood or action, with an extremely rapidly evolving development. This insight establishes an awareness that consciousness arises to reflect the mental object, then fades momentarily until the next object arises. By inference, it becomes clear that it always has been and always will be this way.

**Purification of View** is the increasingly frequent realization that what the sense doors receive is only provisionally interpreted by the mind. The interpretation is distorted by greed, hatred and delusion. This insight begins the process of deconstructing the false view of an enduring, reliable self.

**Purification of the Mind:** samadhi, with jhana, or at least access concentration. Hindrances are subdued & the 7 awakening factors are activated.

**Purification of Virtue:** cultivating the precepts and generosity, patience, renunciation, wisdom, effort, truthfulness, lovingkindness, equanimity, etc.

**Purification of Virtue:** This represents the virtue aggregate of the eightfold path, Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood. It also aligns with the transition from self-state conflict (the absence of virtue) through self-state integration (the ability to generally practice a virtuous lifestyle). This ethical base provides the platform for self-liberation.

**Purification of the Mind:** This represents the training aggregate of the eightfold path, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. It provides the self-awareness and self-discipline necessary to evolve from self-state conflict to self-state integration. The systemic energy of a person’s life is not bogged down in the hindrances, and the Seven Awakening Factors are increasingly accessible and effective. This sets the stage for the true purpose of vipassana, to directly know the reality of impermanence, that suffering inevitably emerges from craving and clinging, and that there is no isolated, autonomous, enduring self.

**Purification of View:** This is frequently called *knowledge of nama-rupa*. *Nama* is *the process through which the mind creates meaning*, and *rupa* is *the realm of sensational stimulation that provides the basis for nama*. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and physical sensation in the body are rupa. Mindfulness of breathing is nama-rupa. At this stage, there’s the capacity to know that the way the mind interprets sensation is not entirely reliable. Here’s an example from my experience: On a retreat, I might notice another person; this is visual perception--rupa, with the mental label “person” added on, which is nama. My mind elaborates a story about that person, perhaps judging her “performance” as a meditation practitioner; the story could be that she’s very competent, or that she’s doing it all wrong! All that is known is that light hit the eye and initiated a perception that a part of the light stimulation is a female person, and the resulting internal commentary is pure imagination on my part. Being able to see this phenomenon as it is occurring is an important way to notice the delusional process produced by craving and clinging.

**Purification of Overcoming Doubt:** This stage is sometimes termed *knowledge of cause-and effect*. Following on the insight regarding nama-rupa, because the emergence of the “selfing story” is known as provisional, not certain, the awakening factor of investigation of mental phenomena can begin to notice the initial transformation of the raw sense data into some mental concoction. The ability to apply meaning to sensational input is a valuable part of being human, but, as we all know, it can get out of hand! During this stage of practice, we can practice tracing how the mind intends toward a particular meaning. The Pali word *cetana* (cheh-tah-nah) is often interpreted as *intention* or *volition*. It is the function of the mind that sorts through various possible meanings at a very rapid pace, multiple potential renderings per second, and coordinates their function. If a person isn’t alert to this process, the resulting story can be quite mistaken in understanding and subsequent behavior. When the awakening factors are operating effectively, the ability to be aware of the emerging potential meanings of an event in the process of becoming, combined with the ability to apply Right Effort quickly, changes the flow of energy towards seeing the three characteristics, impermanence, the danger of craving and clinging, and non-self. This stage is called overcoming doubt, because the more proficient one becomes during this stage, the more confidence emerges regarding the value of the Buddhist teachings.

**Purification of Knowledge and Vision of What is the Path and Not-Path:** The emergence of confidence has great benefits, but also some significant possible obstacles to awakening. Because the awakening factors of energy, joy, tranquility and equipoise reach a new level of insight, the mind is very alert and eager regarding the practice. The ability to track the arising and subsiding of self-states becomes easier and more fulfilling. These factors can become quite dramatic in operation, producing imbalances of energy, manifesting as blissful feelings, deep tranquility, overconfidence (leading to a diminishing commitment to mindfulness and investigation), and enthusiastic flights of imagination, including “past life regressions”. There also may be strong urges to convince others to emulate one’s practices, beyond what is polite. Apparently, these self-states can become a significant distraction away from deepening practice. These experiences are called *corruptions of insight*. The antidote for these mental phenomena is a determined commitment to continue vipassana practice, that is, careful and persistent application of the awakening factors. The result of this further examination is called *realizing what is path and not path*. It also is very helpful to have the active support of someone who has already navigated these sorts of adventures and can encourage further practice.

The next stage of the purification process is often subdivided, as illustrated in the graph above. As the previous stage matures past the attractive self-states, the ability to notice arising and passing away becomes much more frequent and effortless, and thoughts are momentary, arising and passing away with extreme rapidity. It’s possible at this stage to lose the ability to convincingly “know” what the contents of the thoughts are, because they arise and pass away so rapidly. It is reported that once this stage becomes quite familiar, the practice takes on a very different tone, analogous to what the Christian mystics might call “the dark night of the soul”. Some commentators state that the “real” practice of vipassana matures, that is, clear, immediate awareness of impermanence, dissatisfaction and non-self is known with increasing frequency and confidence—however, this can become frightening without some previous understanding of how the process of awakening operates.

**Contemplation of Rise and Fall:** As the ability to notice impermanence becomes more routine, it also may seem to occur whether one intends that insight to occur or not. This stage may persist for extended periods of time in one’s life, maybe even years, or it may be fairly quickly transited through. Currently, I’ve become more frequently aware of arising and passing away in this manner. My experience is the thoughts are fleeting, “transparent” and incomplete; they seem to “shred” or dissolve very quickly. This doesn’t happen with the high level of frequency or as automatically as what I’ve read.

**Contemplation of Dissolution:** As the previous stage matures, the ability to track impermanence becomes so capable that the process of “selfing” seems to collapse, sometimes without intending for that to happen. I was on a retreat many years ago and had the experience of thoughts collapsing before I could really grasp them. It seemed as if my mind was trying to get “traction” regarding meaning making, but the “ground” was too slippery, and each moment of selfing was just falling apart. This awareness lasted only a few seconds, but my mind recoiled away from that reflexively, and I realized, by inference as well as having previously read about it, that this is a fundamental phenomenon of cognition. It startled and shocked me. I sat and wept for quite a while, realizing that this characteristic had always been operating in my life in the past, and would be for the rest of my life! This is the onset of “the dark night of the soul” phase of practice. Obviously, it can be quite daunting. Fortunately, I was well-informed enough and had enough confidence in the eightfold path that I didn’t hesitate in continuing my practice; however, I haven’t had that sort of experience since then.

**Contemplation of the Fearful:**  Continuing the practice at this point is quite important, but, obviously, it can seem like the whole sense of self is a fiction, which is true. The fictional quality doesn’t deny the reality of life, however. What it does accomplish is a direct knowing of this phenomenon as impermanent and not conforming to our previous understanding of what constitutes a self. Once again, it is very important to have conceptual and personal support while coming to terms with this experience. By the way, even though I only had that experience one time, by inference, it validated, then and now, the truth of the teachings. I would be OK with experiencing it again in the future, but, according to the teachings, being able to confront that flickering sort of knowing awareness again may not be necessary.

**Knowledge of Desire for Deliverance:** As the knowing of the dissolution of self-states is assured and there’s enough equipoise to investigate the experience clearly and non-reactively, the opportunity is there to know the characteristics of impermanence, dissatisfaction and non-self at the most valuable and liberating level. The *fear* *of losing the assurance of an enduring self is the problem, not the awareness of impermanence*! This will become clearer through knowing the next stage.

**Knowledge in Reflecting Contemplation:** With the full development of the Seven Awakening Factors, that is, mindfulness, investigation of mental phenomena, energy, joy, tranquility, concentration and equipoise, there’s a direct knowledge of the process of craving and clinging. Reflecting upon how craving and clinging seem to require an enduring self for lived experience to be “real”, seeing through that misperception by directly knowing the dissolution of self-states, creates conditions sufficient to ultimately understand what the Buddha taught in the most deeply personal way.

**Knowledge of Equanimity and Adaptation of Truth:** Upon reflection that the real problem is attachment to the misperception of reality which causes dissatisfaction, it becomes possible to surrender craving and clinging. This may seem odd, but, upon reflection, the misery of trying to sustain the “hard-edged” belief in a self is so evident that the stage is set for deliverance.

**Purification of Knowledge and Vision:** This represents a “revisiting” of the eightfold path; some commentaries describe what occurs as realization of a “tenfold path”, with the maturing of the Wisdom Aggregate: Right Understanding matures into Right Knowledge, and Right Intention matures into Right Liberation. Direct knowledge of the essential insecurity and dissatisfaction inherent through the ignorance of craving and clinging eradicates misperceptions regarding that which is truly impermanent as permanent. This insight, along with a realization that there is no separate, autonomous self can bring direct experience of the unconditioned, Nirvana. This realization doesn’t deprive someone of the richness of life but frees up the mind to be more appropriately adaptive to the realities of life, unburdened by ego defense and ego gratification.

When I first started studying and practicing Buddhism seriously in the early 1980’s, I believed that experiencing the unconditioned was extraordinarily rare, with only a few examples in the history of mankind. These days I read reports of many people experiencing nibbana, and realize that, with enough information, support and commitment, the possibility for awakening is here for many, perhaps tens of thousands in each generation. I hope that this article is helpful for you in the quest for freedom from suffering.