**SATTA SAMBOJJHANGA-THE SEVEN FACTORS FOR AWAKENING**

**Part One**

The seven factors for awakening are wholesome mind conditions that, when cultivated and brought to full potential, lead to *nibbana* (nih-bah-nah), *nirvana* in Sanskrit. These factors are found many times in different contexts throughout the Pali Canon, perhaps most significantly in the Satipatthana Sutta (sah-tee-pah-tah-nah soo-tah), the Four Foundations of Mindfulness Discourse, and the Anapanasati Sutta (ah-nah-pah-nah-sah-tee soo-tah), the Mindfulness of Breathing Discourse. The word *satta* (sah-tah) is translated as *seven*, while *bojjhanga* (bow-jahn-gah) combines two words: *Bodhi* (boh-dee)*,* the *awakened process regarding life*, and *anga* (ahn-gah*), a causative factor*. I have been unable to find a translation for the prefix sam (sahm). Therefore, we can understand these terms to mean *the seven factors that cause awakening.* They represent the level of consciousness that functions when the hindrances are disabled. They are not “inventions” created by the Buddha, but qualities inherent in the functions of the human mind. The ability to be immediately aware of each as a function, cooperating with the other Awakening Factors, is a primary goal of vipassana (vih-pah-sah-nah) practice, which is direct subjective insight into how the “selfing” process operates.

The basic formula for cultivating the Awakening Factors is described in the Satipatthana Sutta and is the primary focus for practice in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, basically through the development of Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation. As sati (sah-tee), that is, mindfulness, is developed through breath awareness, this quality of attention is brought to all the foundations of mindfulness and involves the ability to: 1) Note the present-moment awareness of mindfulness, 2) Note the present-moment absence of mindfulness, 3) Note the present-moment emergence of mindfulness into awareness, 4) Note a sustained full experience of mindfulness in the present moment of experiential flow. The same formal analysis is brought to the remaining factors: investigation of mental phenomena, energy/effort, joy, tranquility, concentration and equanimity. Here is how this process is described in the Fourth Foundation of Mindfulness:

"Furthermore, the monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the *seven factors for Awakening.* And how does he remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the seven factors for Awakening? There is the case where, there being mindfulness as a factor for Awakening present within, he discerns that 'Mindfulness as a factor for Awakening is present within me.' Or, there being no mindfulness as a factor for Awakening present within, he discerns that 'Mindfulness as a factor for Awakening is not present within me.' He discerns how there is the arising of unarisen mindfulness as a factor for Awakening. And he discerns how there is the culmination of the development of mindfulness as a factor for Awakening once it has arisen. (The same formula is repeated for the remaining factors for Awakening: analysis of qualities, persistence, rapture, serenity, concentration, & equanimity.) translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

This is how the process is described in the Anapanasati Sutta:

**The Seven Factors for Awakening**

"And how are the four frames of reference developed & pursued so as to bring the seven factors for awakening to their culmination?

"**[1]** On whatever occasion the monk remains focused on the *body* in & of itself — ardent, alert, & mindful — putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world, on that occasion his mindfulness is steady & without lapse. When his mindfulness is steady & without lapse, then *mindfulness* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"**[2]** Remaining mindful in this way, he examines, analyzes, & comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment. When he remains mindful in this way, examining, analyzing, & coming to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, then *analysis of qualities* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"**[3]** In one who examines, analyzes, & comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, persistence is aroused unflaggingly. When persistence is aroused unflaggingly in one who examines, analyzes, & comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, then *persistence* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"**[4]** 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.

"**[5]** For one enraptured at heart, the body grows calm and the mind grows calm. When the body & mind of a monk enraptured at heart grow calm, then *serenity* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"**[6]** For one who is at ease — his body calmed — the mind becomes concentrated. When the mind of one who is at ease — his body calmed — becomes concentrated, then *concentration* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"**[7]** He carefully watches the mind thus concentrated with equanimity. When he carefully watches the mind thus concentrated with equanimity, *equanimity* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

*(Similarly with the other three frames of reference: feelings, mind, & mental qualities.) Anapanasati Sutta, Thanissaro*

My intention here is to focus on each of these factors in ways that might increase understanding of the functions of each and how they interact to cultivate clear awareness (samma ditthi) and benevolent intention (samma sankappa), that is, the Wisdom aspect of the Eightfold Path. The factors of mindfulness, investigation of mental phenomena, energy/effort and concentration are some of the component elements of vipassana, insight into the characteristics of impermanence, non-self, and the inevitable suffering that arises as the result of craving and clinging.

The seven factors can be subdivided into three categories to clarify their functions: Mindfulness, Investigation of Mental Phenomena and Effort/Energy bring attention to what is in awareness in an ongoing way. Joy and Tranquility represent different levels of energy, with joy representing engaged interest and tranquility representing a smooth flow of attention. Concentration and Equanimity represent the unified activity of consciousness, balanced in such a way as to support the effective interactions of the other six factors. The following are more specific reviews of each of the factors:

**MINDFULNESS-*SATI BOJJHANGA***

Mindfulness is one of the most familiar concepts of Buddhist practice. The Pali word *sati* (sah-tee), smrti (sm-er-tee) in Sanskrit, was traditionally understood to mean *non-forgetfulness,* that is, the ability to keep a thought or plan of action in mind. It can be understood as “present-moment awareness”. The Buddha was quite adept at modifying the intended meaning of words and concepts to his purpose. In this case, it 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”. These functions operate outside of consciousness, and, in that way, their effect 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 counter already conditioned beliefs that are implicitly understood; the plague of systemic racism in our culture is an example of an implicit confirmation bias.

Mindfulness, integrated with dhamma vicaya, supports the operational 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 emerge into conscious awareness through metacognition. This is described in the Satipatthana Sutta, in the *mindfulness of the bod*y section of the First Foundation:

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 reference to metacognition, however.

The function of mindfulness in the awakening factors is as a monitor for the 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.

**SKILLFUL MEANS FOR CULTIVATING MINDFULNESS:**

1. 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,* pronounced *sah-tee-sahm-pah-jahn-yah),* contained in the first foundation, mindfulness of the body (See the above quote).
2. Avoid voluntary association with people who aren’t interested in being actively utilizing mindfulness, formally or informally, which is observable in the behaviors of others, whether they are Buddhists or not. 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 one’s behavior.
3. 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).
4. Regular practice of mindfulness of breathing meditation. It is very helpful to commit to occasional residential retreats, preferably lasting a week. This may seem daunting, but the immersive experience has a transformative effect that is beneficial for living a more balanced and less stressful life. When I go on retreats, which is fairly often, I regard it as *a vacation for the mind!*

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

The word *Dhamma* (dah-mah, known as Dharma in Sanskrit)has many different meanings in Buddhism. When it is capitalized, it represents the concepts found in Buddhism; when not capitalized, it refers to any phenomenon that is involved in the formation of consciousness. 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). In this case, it refers to *a momentarily existing formation of constituent elements, a cognitive phenomenon. Vicaya* is translated as “investigation” or “discernment”. The following quote describes how dhamma vicaya functions:

“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 represents the maturation of *vitakka/vicara* (vih-tah-kah/vih-chah-rah), *bringing attention to a mental object fully and sustaining that attention*. This discernment 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”, creating a duality—an observer and that which is observed—a process that must be seen as a fabrication. As a result of craving and clinging, 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 contents of subjective experience, rather than the “how”, which investigates the process through which self-organization manifests. The function of dhamma vicaya is to mindfully observe the emerging process as soon as possible, seeing it as a process that involves the shaping of benevolent intention—the determination to liberate the mind from craving and clinging. In this way, dhamma vicaya is an essential component of vipassana practice.

Mindfulness monitors investigation to prevent it’s functioning from degrading into the hindrance of skeptical doubt. Mindful investigation also functions to prevent the awakening factor of concentration from becoming too rigid or doctrinaire when their function is integrated with the next Awakening Factor, Energy/Effort in the form of Right Effort.

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 others 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, regretting unethical behaviors, 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 meditating regularly or diligently applying Buddhist principles and practices is “I don’t have time!”, “I’m too busy!”, or “I’m 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 absolutely 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 investigation of mental phenomena combining mindfulness, investigation, Right Effort, and concentration 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. This is another description of the benevolent effect of metacognition.
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 actually 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’s to be done about it to liberate the mind*. The value of cultivating two more of the Awakening Factors, concentration and tranquility, is that they create a “buffer zone” against impulsive reactivity, allowing the inborn capacity for reflective analysis to operate more effectively that buffer zone is the operation of equanimity, another of the Awakening Factors.

**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”.*  This regulatory process can be described through the functions of one aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Effort, which functions to “channel” the flow of energy away from distress and confusion, instead nurturing qualities of attention that promote liberation from craving and clinging.

My understanding of this factor of awakening is that *mindfulness* and *investigation of phenomena* channel the *energy* of attention to a particular focal point integrated and unified by the function of *concentration*. When this channeling is skillfully organized through wisdom (clear awareness and benevolent intention), we call the process *vipassana,* that is, insight.

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 also in the way the technician is making the “Right Effort” 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 monitor the procedures to 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 that is activated (see the neurological bit above regarding the function of the prefrontal cortex, for example). The cultivation of vipassana cultivates wholesome 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. When the five hindrances are set aside and the seven Awakening Factors are operating in a unified way, persistence becomes more of a conditioned habit, an “effortless effort” (Thank you, Joseph Goldstein!)

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

1. Reflect on the negative effect of a slothful lifestyle. Laziness reinforces laziness. Get some regular 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. There is a prevalence of lifestyles which are organized around being a “couch potato”, which is physiologically harmful.
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 resilience in stressful situations along with 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. Associate 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.

These first three of the seven Awakening Factors are fundamental training modalities, the products of which are the remaining four factors: Joy, Tranquility, Concentration/Unification and Equanimity/Balance. They will be reviewed next in the series.