**THE SEVEN FACTORS FOR AWAKENING REVIEW**

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, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness teachings, and the Anapanasati Sutta, the teaching on mindfulness of breathing. The word *bojjhanga* combines two words: *Bodhi,* the awakened process regarding life, and *anga,* a causative factor. Therefore, we can understand the word to mean the factors that cause awakening.

The basic formula is described in the Satipatthana Sutta, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness Discourse and is the primary focus for practice in the First Foundation of Mindfulness in the practice of Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation. As sati is developed through breath awareness, this quality of attention is brought to all the foundations of mindfulness and is described in this way in the Satipatthana Sutta, the Fourth Foundation:

"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:

"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 Right Understanding--samma ditthi (sahm-mah dee-tee) and Benevolent Intention--samma sankappa (sahm-mah sahn-kah-pah), which are found in the Wisdom aggregate of the Eightfold Path. The Awakening Factors of Mindfulness, Investigation of Mental Phenomena, Energy/Persistence/Right 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 first three generate the conditions that support Joy/Enthusiastic Engagement and Tranquility. The remaining two, Concentration/Unification and Equanimity/Balance, create the integration of the other factors to maximum benefit.

**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. It can 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 means “*Present-moment noting of 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

Mindfulness supports the operation of *Dhamma Vicaya* (dah-mah vee-chah-yah), Investigation of Mental Phenomena, the second of the seven Awakening factors, and the manifestation of these cooperating functions makes those mental formations which are operating implicitly explicit, that is, reflected in conscious awareness.

The function of Mindfulness in the Awakening factors is as a monitor for the coordination of the other 6 factors. In the Pali Canon, the simile for this is function of the 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 (sampajanna)* contained in the first foundation, mindfulness of the body.
2. Avoid voluntary association with people who aren’t interested in being actively engaged in mindfulness. One of the remarkable insights that develop 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.
3. Intentionally associate with mindful people. Mindfulness isn’t the sole property of Buddhist practice, 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 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 fairly often, I regard it as *a vacation for the mind!*

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

The word *dhamma* 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* 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 the mature manifestation of *vitakka/vicara* (vee-tah-kah/vee-chah-rah), *bringing attention to a mental object fully*, that 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 contents of a moment of subjective consciousness, rather than the “how”, related to the process through which self-organization manifests. The function of investigation is to observe the emerging process as soon as possible, so that mindful awareness with benevolent intention can either sustain wholesomeness or interrupt unwholesomeness, working cooperatively with the next Awakening factor, Energy, Persistence/Right Effort. In this way, dhamma vicaya is an essential component of vipassana practice.

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

**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, 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 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 combined with Mindfulness, Right Effort, and Concentration/Unification, 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 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*. The value of cultivating Concentration/Unification and Tranquility 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 translated 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”.* We are energy transformative beings using food and oxygen as fuel, and a significant focus of vipassana practice involves the skillful channeling of this energy through the neural pathways of the brain.

My understanding of this factor of awakening is that Mindfulness and Investigation of Mental Phenomena channel the Energy we call attention to a particular focal point through the function of Concentration/Unification. When this channeling is skillfully organized through wisdom (Right Understanding and Benevolent Intention), we call the resulting process vipassana, insight into how to liberate the mind from dukkha--distress and confusion.

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 the way 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 I*nvestigation 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 stage production 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. 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* regarding 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).
* **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 the scholarly monk Buddhagosa. 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 buoyancy about 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 achieved rather than a resource we already have abundant access to. 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.
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 (sah-mah-dee), Concentration/Unification, the next Awakening factor 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 tranquilizing 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-passadhi. 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, including avoiding overly rich foods containing fats, sugars and lots of 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* 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 organized 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

Right View is Right Understanding and Right Resolve is Benevolent Intention. The function of Samadhi is to integrate the other Awakening factors, combined with Passadhi and the next factor, Equanimity/Balance. Once the mind is freed from the interference of energy flows through avoiding the effects of the five hindrances, the process of vipassana can operate at higher levels of subtlety and clarity, cultivating the conditions suitable for total liberation from dukkha.

**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 because the characteristics of a consumer culture promote persistent demands for attention!
2. Balancing optimally between energy and tranquility, with steady focus on a simple object like the breath or whole-body awareness 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 structure of the event is intended to provide optimal opportunities to dedicate every waking moment to cultivating concentration, as well as the other Awakening factors.

**EQUANIMITY-*UPEKKHA* OR *TATRAMAJJHATTATA BOJJHANGA***

The final factor of the seven factors of awakening is *upekkha* (ooh-peh-kah)*,* which is translated as *equanimity,* or *non-preference.* Equanimity promotes 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-mah-jah-tah-tah)*.*  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 equanimity 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. As the result of skillful application of Mindfulness, Investigation of Mental Phenomena and Right Effort the they bring balance to the 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**

Skillful means for cultivating Equanimity/Balance:

1. Practice intentionally accepting physical discomforts or obstacles to progress while meditating or throughout the day. This provides opportunities for mindful investigation and letting go of impulsive reactivity.
2. Recognize the limits of your capabilities and resources acceptingly. I call this “Turning humiliation into humility”.
3. Practice doing kind and generous things for unappreciating or critical people with the intention of practicing setting aside “The eight worldly winds”.