**The Seven Awakening Factors—Part 2**

During Part 1 of the review of Satta Sambojjhanga, the Seven Awakening Factors, the first three of the factors were reviewed: Mindfulness, Investigation of Mental Phenomena and Energy/Effort/Persistence. These three identify, organize and channel the energy of attention without being distorted and disabled by the Five Hindrances: Sense Desire, Aversion/Ill-Will, Sloth/Torpor, Restlessness/Worry, and Skeptical Doubt. The result of their wholesome integration the next two factors, Joy and Tranquility, bring more balance to the flow of energy. The final two factors, Concentration/Unification and Equanimity/Balance, represent the optimal unification and coordination of the first five factors. The practice of vipassana (vih-pah-sah-nah), which is direct knowledge of the transitory and impersonal nature of subjective experience is fully realized through the balanced integration of the Seven Awakening Factors.

**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 how the mind and body phenomena operate*.

“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

The persistence described in the above quote is the mindful application of Right Effort, part of the Noble Eightfold Path. Rapture not-of-the-flesh means that the joy is not a manifestation of the hindrance of Sensual Desire. Its presence is primarily noted as a state of mind that comes about as the result of training. There may be physically evident pleasurable sensations, particularly in the experience of the first three levels of jhana (jah-nah), highly concentrated levels of consciousness. Basically, if you desire piti, it won’t happen, because the characteristics of piti are the result of mental discipline, not desire. The levels of piti traditionally characterized in the 5th century C.E. Visuddhimagga (vih-soo-dee-mah-gah), a treatise by the scholarly monk Buddhagosa. The cultivation of piti is not emphasized in the varieties of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism found in the Tibetan, Chan and Zen schools.

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.

I have experienced these states, except for the body jumping part, when I was able to realize 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 these 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 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). It is a wholesome channeling of the energy of attention, a manifestation of the sympathetic nervous system that is not overactivated or anxious. Attention at this level of development 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).

Our experience of joy involves the sympathetic nervous system, experienced as a heightened level of systemic arousal, which is activated by adrenaline, a hormone that courses through the body and is fundamentally associated with the fight or flight phenomenon that is common for the animal kingdom. When adrenaline is found in the brain, it is called either noradrenaline or norepinephrine. Here is the description of this organic chemical found in Wikipedia:

The general function of norepinephrine is to mobilize the brain and body for action. Norepinephrine release is lowest during sleep, rises during wakefulness, and reaches much higher levels during situations of stress or danger, in the so-called [fight-or-flight response](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fight-or-flight_response). In the brain, norepinephrine increases arousal and alertness, promotes vigilance, enhances formation and retrieval of memory, and focuses attention; it also increases restlessness and anxiety. In the rest of the body, norepinephrine increases [heart rate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heart_rate) and [blood pressure](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blood_pressure), triggers the release of [glucose](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glucose) from energy stores, increases [blood flow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blood_flow) to [skeletal muscle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skeletal_muscle), reduces blood flow to the gastrointestinal system, and inhibits voiding of the bladder and [gastrointestinal motility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gastrointestinal_motility).

Along with norepinephrine, the neurohormones glutamate and dopamine “accelerate” the activation of norepinephrine—our nervous system is “hardwired” towards impulsive reactivity, necessary for survival earlier in our evolution, and dopamine provides that quick response. The hindrance associated with this process is restlessness and worry. As a result of skillful applications of mindfulness, investigation of mental phenomena and energy/effort/persistence in the form of Right Effort, the fight-or-flight response is set aside, while the mind is benefitted by alertness and vigilance and focused attention, without agitation or restlessness in the body, thanks to the affects of the tranquility and concentration Awakening factors.

**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 with appropriate 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 for practice. 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 motivate your practice.
3. Cultivate the Awakening factors of concentration and tranquility to the level of access concentration, which is the flow of energy in awareness unaffected 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 which is serene, tranquil, stable and calm*. It is so congruent with *samadhi* (sah-mah-dee), the next Awakening factor, that I routinely combine the two terms as samadhi/passadhi. The cultivation of passadhi is the antidote for the hindrance of restlessness and worry. In this way, the effect of passadhi is integrated 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). This balance is accomplished through the cultivation of the Equanimity/Balance Awakening factor.

The parasympathetic system calms emotions, relaxes muscles and slows reactivity. The optimal functioning of the nervous system requires a balanced integration of the two systems. The primary activities of the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems operate through the very extensively distributed vagus nerve complex, a very large neural pathway that extends from the brain through the neck and torso, all the way to the lower abdomen and then back to the brain. This complex operates in two ways: Peripheral stimulation sends signals to the brain about what is happening in the body, particularly the torso—alternatively, the brain activates the vagus nerve to affect various organic functions in the body.

 What happens during mind/body processes to provide the counterbalancing effect of tranquility, which is the parasympathetic system’s function? Within the complex array of neurohormones that operate in the brain there are three neurotransmitters which are important considerations—serotonin, gamma aminobutyric acid (GABA) and acetylcholine. Serotonin provides a balancing function, to modulate the impulsive urgency resulting from the actions of norepinephrine. Gaba functions function to provide a reduction in neural excitation. Acetylcholine is a primary neurohormone for either activating or modulating muscular activity.

Research strongly suggests that the production of parasympathetic neurohormonal actions is facilitated by mindfulness meditation through the factors of mindfulness, investigation of mental phenomena and energy/effort/persistence (as Right Effort), sending a signal out through the vagal system to produce tranquility in the form of emotional calmness and alert relaxation in the body.

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 the tranquility Awakening factor. 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 way passadhi facilitates 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 like one of the boats, 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 that is the undercurrent of consciousness 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 and passes away 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.