

The Fourth Foundation of Mindfulness: dhammas (continued from session 7)

In session 7, we mentioned that in this practice group we are covering only two of the five sets of dhammas, or mind objects, listed in the complete sutta. Last time, we covered the hindrances and talked about:

“If sensual desire is present in him, he knows “there is sensual desire in me.”; If sensual desire is not present in him, he knows “there is no sensual desire in me”; and he knows how unarisen sensual desire can arise, how arisen sensual desire can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed sensual desire can be prevented” ... and so on for the other hindrances.

We also mentioned that Ven. Anālayo has concluded through his scholarship that there were probably only two lists of dhammas in the original versions of the sutta: the Hindrances and the Seven Factors of Awakening.

Seven Factors of Awakening (Seven Factors of Enlightenment)

This makes sense. The seven factors are sometimes referred to as the anti-hindrances. In the same way that we know whether a hindrance is present and how an unarisen hindrance can be prevented from arising, with the seven factors we know whether a factor is present and how an unarisen awakening factor can be developed. These two lists work together and represent the unwholesome and the wholesome.

“Here, if the mindfulness awakening factor is present in him, he knows ‘There is the mindfulness awakening factor in me’; if the mindfulness awakening factor is not present in him, he knows ‘There is no mindfulness awakening factor in me’; he knows how the unarisen mindfulness awakening factor can arise, and how the arisen mindfulness awakening factor can be perfected by development.”.. same with the other 6 factors.

One more quote shows the importance the Buddha gave to the awakening factors

“Bhikkhus, I do not see even one thing that, when developed and cultivated, leads to the abandoning of the things that fetter, so effectively as this: the seven factors of enlightenment.” “Bhikkhus, the seven factors of enlightenment, when developed and cultivated, are noble and emancipating; they lead the one who acts upon them to the complete destruction of suffering.”

Here is a brief review of each one, mostly drawn from Joseph Goldstein’s commentary

1. Mindfulness

And as we look at each one of these aspects of mindfulness, we can understand why it is the one factor of mind that is useful in every situation. While the other factors of enlightenment can be out of balance with one another, there can never be too much mindfulness. In fact, it serves to both bring about and balance all the other factors. (See the comments below on the “active” and “passive” factors).

Not Forgetting The first application of mindfulness is the quality of not forgetting, not losing what is before the mind in the present moment. Mindfulness stays firmly with the object without wobbling or

drifting off. We could call this aspect “the stability of awareness” because it stays as steady as a post set firmly in the ground. It also serves to bring us back to the object each time we get lost, like a signpost

Presence of Mind The second aspect of mindfulness is its quality of “standing near the mind”, which manifests as being face-to-face with whatever is arising, rather than giving it only sidelong glances. Thich Nhat Hanh calls this “the world becoming present for us.”

Remembering: The third aspect of sati is one we don’t often associate with mindfulness, but it hearkens back to its root meaning of remembering. Here, mindfulness calls to mind, or remembers, what is skillful and what is not, what is inferior and what is refined, what is beneficial and what is harmful.

Close Association with Wisdom. The last aspect of mindfulness is its close association with wisdom. This comes about through bare attention and clear comprehension. The other aspect of mindfulness, closely associated with wisdom and conducive to its arising, is called “clear comprehension.” This means seeing something precisely, thoroughly, from all sides. Clear comprehension broadens the practice of bare attention from a narrow focus to one that sees things in context.

2. Investigation of dhammas

Discerning What Is Skillful and What Is Not. We described one function of mindfulness as remembering and calling to mind what is skillful and what is not. Mindfulness brings us face-to-face with these arising states; the wisdom factor of investigation then illuminates the states themselves and discerns the difference between the two.

Clarity of discernment. Investigation of dhammas can bring acceptance because we are aligning ourselves accurately with the present-moment experience. It is a way of acknowledging, “Yes, this is what’s here.”

Seeing personality as not self. From this place of acceptance, we can see more clearly the emotions’ impermanent, selfless nature and free ourselves from identifying with them: letting go by letting be.

Understanding the nature of thought. Mindful of thought as an object of awareness, we begin to notice what we’re thinking, and then, on a deeper level, wisdom sees the very ephemeral, impermanent nature of thought itself.

Exploring the processes of mind and body.

3. Viriya

Energy (viriya, in Pali) is the root of all accomplishments, and in this way, it is in direct opposition to sloth and torpor. It has been translated variously as “energy,” “effort,” “strength,” “courage,” “vigor,” “perseverance,” and “persistence.” Each one of these words points to a different facet of the Pali term.

Strength - The quality of persistence and patience

Courage - This is a quality that powerfully energizes our heart as we walk on the path. While the nature of sloth and torpor is to retreat from difficulties, the nature of courage is the opposite. Courage is energized by challenges; it is inspired by difficult tasks and even seeks them out.

As the Burmese meditation master Sayadaw U Tejaniya remarked: “Avoiding difficult situations or running away from them does not usually take much skill or effort. But doing so prevents you from testing your own limits and from growing.”

Balancing the Quality of Effort - Effort can become unskillful when there is a forcing of mind - “efforting”—rather than a relaxation of mind. Effort becomes unskillful when there’s some idea of gain and a mind full of expectations, rather than an openness and receptivity to what is already there.

The Cycle of Effort and Energy in Our Practice

In exploring this energy factor of enlightenment, it is helpful to see how effort creates energy. Usually, we think we need energy to make an effort, and that if we’re low on energy, we simply need to rest. And at times that may be the case. But think of times when you’re feeling low energy, and then you make the effort to engage in some physical exercise or some mental challenge. It’s surprising how often and how quickly this effort energizes and renews you.

Causes for energy to arise:

Spiritual urgency and reflecting on samsara.

4. **Pīti** - This word has been translated in many ways, including “rapture,” “happiness,” “joy,” “delight,” and “pleasurable or rapt interest.” Reflect for a moment on your felt sense of what these words suggest. Pīti has the function of refreshing and delighting the mind and body, like a cool breeze on a hot day. Because rapture directly opposes ill will and is incompatible with it, when the mind is filled with pīti, there’s no room for anger or ill will to arise. Just as the Buddha distinguished between worldly and unworldly pleasant feelings in the second foundation of mindfulness, here too, there is a distinction between rapture associated with sense pleasures and unworldly rapture born from seclusion and renunciation. Seclusion and renunciation here refer both to external conditions and, perhaps more importantly, to the seclusion of mind when the hindrances, those factors that trouble and disturb the mind, are overcome or temporarily subdued.
5. **Passaddhi - Tranquility or Serenity.** Pīti, the fourth factor usually is paired with sukha, ease or contentment. The pleasurable or more energetic quality of Pīti is usually followed by the calmer mental and emotional energy of ease. Passaddhi, by virtue of its place as factor five, functions in the same way. These are both factors for the arising of concentration.

6. Samadhi - Concentration

THE TWO ACTIVITIES OF THE MIND

The Pali word for concentration is samādhi, and it refers to two different but related activities of mind: **the mental factor of one-pointedness and the settled meditative states of concentration.** The Mental Factor of One-Pointedness One-pointedness serves to unify all the different factors of mind on a single object, or on moment-to-moment changing objects. When one-pointedness is strong, we are undistracted, and we feel this nondistractedness as peace both in our meditation practice and in our lives.

A strong one-pointedness directed to changing objects moment after moment leads to momentary concentration, the second type of samādhi. When there is continuity of mindfulness, this momentary samādhi remains steady, and as it strengthens over time, we begin to feel a natural, easeful momentum in practice. This kind of one-pointedness does not lead to absorption, but it is the basis for different vipassanā insights.

7. **Equanimity** arises out of concentration in the sequential progression of the seven awakening factors, because concentration has the power to keep the mind secluded from the hindrances. This seclusion then allows for balance and neutrality to be established, and the mind to be unmoving in the face of pleasure or pain. In English, when we speak of neutrality of mind, the phrase might suggest a feeling of indifference or being disconnected from experience. But as we explore the many ways equanimity actually manifests in our lives, we see that it is not indifference at all. We begin to understand why equanimity is called a “beautiful factor” and why it would be hard to overestimate its beneficial effects.

EQUANIMITY AS A QUALITY OF BALANCE The first way we experience the cool, restful quality of equanimity is in the peace and balance it brings to our daily lives. Each of us is touched by what are called “the eight worldly vicissitudes.” These are the endlessly changing conditions of gain and loss, praise and blame, fame and disrepute, and pleasure and pain. When equanimity is developed, we ride these waves with balance and ease.

EQUANIMITY AS A DIVINE ABODE The second type of equanimity manifests as the fourth of the brahmavihāras, those mind states called “the divine abodes”: lovingkindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity. It is impartiality, equanimity’s ability to hold all equally, that gives the other brahmavihāras their boundless capacity. When we remain unmoved in the face of those who praise and those who blame, we remain able to seek the welfare of both.

THE WISDOM ASPECT OF EQUANIMITY The third manifestation of equanimity takes us deep into the experience of meditative awareness. Practicing the great way, the equanimity of nonpreferential awareness, supports the development of all the awakening factors. As they become strong, we gain

ever-deeper insights into the three characteristics. We know the truth of change, not only as a conceptual understanding, but also in the direct experience of things arising and passing away. We experience the truth of dukkha, the unreliability and unsatisfying nature of conditioned phenomena. And we experience the truth of selflessness when we see nothing lasts long enough to be called “self.” All phenomena arise out of appropriate causes and conditions, unsubstantial, empty of any inherent self-existence. Phenomena are like rainbows—colored light arising out of momentary changing conditions, both vivid and insubstantial at the same time. We remind ourselves that all beings are the owners of their actions.

Associating with wise and equanimous people, who don’t seek out drama for the sake of excitement, is a support for the development of equanimity.

Practice Wise Attention and Continuous Mindfulness Finally, we develop equanimity in our insight practice through wise attention and continuous mindfulness. We practice inclining the mind toward equanimity and not being seduced by the lesser happiness of excitement or the simple enjoyment of pleasant feelings. This is a mind that is imperturbable and balanced, with an impartiality that embraces all.

Suggested Practices

1. Continue daily meditation practice. With whatever meditation practice you are drawn to, bring in the Satipaṭṭhānas at least at the beginning and ending of a sitting by asking yourself, How is my body right now? What am I liking or not liking (or neutral) about this moment? What is the basic attitude of my mind? What is the quality of my energy and awareness? As you begin to be aware of thoughts and emotions, ask: Should this quality, thought, or emotion be encouraged and supported, or let go of?
2. Check in several times during your day in the same way. Always invite both the body and mind to relax.
3. In the commentaries, the factors are divided into active and passive factors. Mindfulness remains a constant and can help discern if awareness is balanced. If you are feeling that there is too little or too much of a factor present, or if you are noticing the hindrances of sloth & torpor or restlessness, try working with this list to help rebalance, encouraging active factors to work with sloth & torpor and passive factors to calm restlessness and worry

	Mindfulness	
<i>active</i> factors		<i>passive</i> factors
Investigation		Passaddhi (Tranquility)
Viriya (Energy)		Samadhi (Concentration)
Piti (Joy)		Equanimity

4. Investigate if the Factors of Awakening can really function as the anti-hindrances

<i>Hindrance..</i>	<i>Can be countered by developing..*</i>
Sensual Desire	Investigation, Serenity, Concentration
Aversion	Joy, Equanimity
Sloth & Torpor	Investigation, Energy
Restlessness and Worry	Serenity, Concentration, Equanimity
Doubt	Investigation, Serenity

*Mindfulness is always helpful.

Thank you for your practice! Working with the core sutta of Satipaṭṭhāna can be a complete practice, especially since the full translation also includes the Four Noble Truths. I hope you found our time together helpful. I certainly was inspired by your energy and dedication. May your practice lead you to liberation in this very life, and may it be a benefit to all beings!

Much metta,

Jim