

## The Seven Factors of Enlightenment

In the Book of the Kindred Sayings (Sutta Nikaya, Maha Vagga), references to the Bojjhanga Sutta was expounded by the Enlightened One as a protection (paritta, pirit) against pain, disease, and adversity. The term bojjhanga is composed of bodhi + anga. Bodhi denotes enlightenment — to be exact, insight concerned with the realization of the four Noble Truths. Anga means factors or limbs. Bodhi + anga (bojjhanga), therefore, means the factors of enlightenment, or the factors for insight, wisdom. “Bodháya samvattantiti kho bhikkhu tasmá bojjhaóga ti vuccanti” — “They conduce to enlightenment, monk, that is why they are so called,” was the succinct reply of the Buddha.

The seven factors are:

1. Mindfulness (sati)
2. Keen investigation of the dhamma (dhammavicaya)
3. Energy (viriya)
4. Rapture or happiness (piti)
5. Calm (passaddhi)
6. Concentration (samádhi)
7. Equanimity (upekkhá)

### Mindfulness

Right mindfulness, in a way is superior to knowledge, because in the absence of mindfulness it is just impossible for a man to make the best of his learning. Intelligence void of mindfulness tends to lead man astray and entice him from the path of rectitude and duty. Even people who are well informed and intelligent fail to see a thing in its proper perspective when they lack this all important quality of mindfulness. Men of good standing, owing to deeds done and words spoken thoughtlessly and without due consideration to their consequences, are often subjected to severe and justifiable criticism. Mindfulness is the chief characteristic of all wholesome actions tending to one's own and other's profit. It is the instrument most efficacious in self-mastery and whoever practices it has found the path to deliverance. It is fourfold: mindfulness consisting in contemplation of the body (káyánupassaná); feeling (vedanáupassaná); mind (cittánupassaná); and mental objects (dhammánupassaná).

The man lacking in this all-important quality of mindfulness cannot achieve anything worthwhile.

The Buddha's final admonition:

"Vayadhamma sankhara appamadena sampadetha.

"Transient are all component things. Work out your deliverance with mindfulness".

Moreover, the last words of the Venerable Sariputta, were this: “Strive on with Heedfulness! This is my advice to you!” (sampádetha appamádena, esa me anusásaná). In both injunctions the most significant word is appamada, which literally means incessant heedfulness. Man cannot be heedful unless he is aware of his actions — whether they are mental, verbal, or physical — at every moment of life. Only when a man is fully awake to mindful of his activities can he distinguish good from bad and right from wrong. It is in the light of mindfulness that he will see the beauty or the ugliness of his deeds. The word appamáda, throughout the Tipitaka, is used to denote sati, mindfulness; pamada is defined as absence of mindfulness. The Anguttara Nikáya states in him who is heedful, good thoughts not yet arisen, do arise, and evil thoughts, if arisen, do wane. Constant mindfulness and vigilance are necessary to avoid ill and perform good. The man with presence of mind, who surrounds himself with watchfulness of mind (satimá), the man

of courage and earnestness, gets ahead of the lethargic. The importance of sati, in all our dealings is clearly indicated by the following striking words of the Buddha: Mindfulness, O disciples, I declare is essential in all things everywhere. The Buddha's life is one integral picture of mindfulness. He is the *sadā sato*, the ever-mindful, the ever-vigilant. He is the very embodiment of mindfulness. There was never an occasion when the Buddha manifested signs of sluggish inactivity or thoughtlessness. Right mindfulness or complete awareness, in a way, is superior to knowledge, because in the absence of mindfulness it is just impossible for a man to make the best of his learning. Intelligence devoid of mindfulness tends to lead man stray and entice him from the path of rectitude and duty. Even people who are well informed and intelligent fail to see a thing in its proper perspective when they lack this all-important quality of mindfulness. Men of good standing, owing to deeds done and words spoken thoughtlessly and without due consideration to their consequences, are often subjected to severe and justified criticism. Mindfulness is the chief characteristic of all wholesome actions tending to one's own and others' profit (*Appamādo mahato atthāya sanvattati*). Mindfulness is conducive to great profit — that is, highest mental development — and it is through such attainment that deliverance from the sufferings of *samsāra* is possible. As in the *Dhammapada* (32) states, "The man who delights in mindfulness and regards heedlessness with dread, is not liable to fall away. He is in the vicinity of *Nibbāna*."

### **Keen investigation of the dhamma**

It is the sharp analytical knowledge of understanding the true nature of all constituent things, animate or inanimate, human or divine. It is seeing things as they really are, seeing things in their proper perspective. It is the analysis of all component things into their fundamental elements, right down to their ultimate. Through keen investigation one understands that all compounded things pass through the inconceivably rapid moments of Arising, Reaching, a Peak and ceasing, just as a river in flood sweeps to climax and fades away. The whole universe is constantly changing, not remaining the same for two consecutive moments. All things in fact are subjected to Conditions, Causes and Effects.

Systematic thinking comes naturally through right mindfulness and it urges one to discriminate, to reason and to investigate. Shallow thinking, unsystematic thought makes men muddle-headed and then they fail to investigate the nature of things. Such people cannot see action and reaction, cause and effect, seed and fruit, the rise and fall of compounded things. Buddhism does not demand of the follower blind faith. Buddhism, from beginning to end, is open to all those who have eyes to see and minds to understand. The Buddha tutored his disciples in the ways of discrimination and intelligent inquiry. To the inquiring *Kalamas* the Buddha answered: "Right it is to doubt, right it is to question what is doubtful and what is not clear. In a doubtful matter wavering does arise."

Thus blind belief is condemned in the analytic teaching (*vibhajjavāda*) of the Buddha. The truth of the dhamma can be grasped only through calm concentrative thought and insight (*samatha* and *vipassanā*) and never through blind faith. One who goes in quest of truth is never satisfied with surface knowledge. He wants to delve deep and see what is beneath. That is the sort of search encouraged in Buddhism. That type of search yields right understanding. The factor of investigation has led you to see what is universal in nature, in every physical and mental object. You will see that all dhammas share characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and absence of self. With the maturation of this insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and absence of self, wisdom becomes able to penetrate *nibbāna*. In this case, the word dhamma takes *nibbāna* as its referent. Thus, dhamma *vicaya* can also mean discerning insight into *nibbāna*.

### **Energy**

It is a mental property (*cetasika*) and the sixth limb of the Noble Eightfold Path, there called *sammá-váyāma*, right effort. “Be ye islands unto yourselves, be ye your own refuge.”<sup>12</sup> Thus did the Master exhort his followers to acquire self-reliance. A follower of the Buddha should not under any circumstances relinquish hope and effort; for the Buddha was one who never gave up hope and courage even as a *Bodhisatta*. As an aspirant for Buddhahood, he had as his motto the following inspiring words: *ía nivatta, abhikkhama* — “Falter not; advance.” The man who is mindful (*satimá*) and cultivates keen investigation should next put forth the necessary effort to fight his way out.

The function of energy is four-fold: (1) the effort to eradicate evils that have arisen in the mind; (2) the effort to prevent the arising of unarisen evil; (3) the effort to develop unarisen good; (4) the effort to promote the further growth of good already arisen. Buddhism is for the sincerely zealous, strong and firm in purpose, and not for the indolent (*áraddhviriya* *sáyaí dhammo náyaí dhammo kusitassa*).<sup>11</sup> The Buddha has not proclaimed himself a savior willing and able to take upon himself the evil of mankind. On the contrary, he declares that each person has to bear the burden of his ill deeds. In the words of the Buddha, each individual has himself to put forth the necessary effort and work out his own deliverance with diligence. The Buddha is only a path-revealer and not a savior who endeavors to save ‘souls’ by means of a revealed religion. The idea that another raises a man from lower to higher levels of life, and ultimately rescues him, tends to make a man indolent and weak, supine and foolish. Others may lend us a helping hand indirectly, but deliverance from suffering must be wrought out and fashioned by each one for himself upon the anvil of his own obtained by prayer and entreaty. That door is free of all bolts and bars save those the man himself has made. Thus the path of purification is impossible for an indolent person. The aspirant for enlightenment (*bodhi*) should possess unflinching energy coupled with fixed determination. Enlightenment and deliverance lie absolutely and entirely in his own hands. “Man must himself by his own resolute efforts rise and make his way to the portals of liberty, and it is always, in every moment, in his power so to do. For this you need to develop a persistent effort that neither decreases nor stagnates. It grows and grows until it finally brings you to your destination. When effort is well developed in this way, it is called in Pāli *paggaḥita vīriya*.”

## Happiness

The fourth enlightenment factor is *pīti*, rapture or happiness. This, too, is a mental property (*cetasika*) and is a quality which suffuses both the body and mind. The man lacking in this quality cannot proceed along the path to enlightenment. There will arise in him a sullen indifference to the *dhamma*, an aversion to the practice of meditation, and morbid manifestations. It is, therefore, very necessary that a man striving to attain enlightenment and final deliverance from the fetters of *saísára*, that repeated wandering, should endeavor to cultivate the all-important factor of happiness. No one can bestow on another the gift of happiness; each one has to build it up by effort, reflection, and concentrated activity. As happiness is a thing of the mind it should be sought not in external and material things though they may in a small way be instrumental. Contentment is a characteristic of the really happy individual. The ordinary worldling seems to think that it is difficult to cultivate and develop contentment; but by dint of courage, determination, systematic attention, and thought about the things one meets with in everyday life, by controlling one’s evil inclinations, and by curbing the impulses — the sudden tendencies to act without reflection — one can keep the mind from being soiled and experience happiness through contentment. In man’s mind arise conflicts of diverse kinds, and if these conflicts are to be controlled, while still not eliminated, man must give less rein to inclinations and longings — in other words, he must cultivate contentment.

When discussing happiness, in the context of *sambojjhaógas*, we must bear in mind the vast difference between pleasure and happiness. Pleasure — pleasant feeling — is something very momentary and fleeting. Is it wrong to say that pleasant feelings are the prelude to pain? What people hug in great glee this moment, turns to be a source of pain in the next moment. “The desired is no longer there when the outstretched hand would

grasp it, or, being there and grasped, it vanishes like a flake of snow.” Seeing a form, hearing a sound, perceiving an odor, tasting a flavor, feeling some tangible thing, cognizing an idea, people are moved; and from those sense objects and mental objects they experience a certain degree of pleasure. But it is all a passing show of phenomena. Unlike the animal whose sole purpose is to derive a feeling of pleasure from any source, at any cost, man should endeavor to gain real piti or happiness. Real happiness or rapture comes not through grasping or clinging to things animate or inanimate but by giving up (nekkhamma). It is the detached attitude toward the world that brings about true happiness.

## **Calm**

Passaddhi — calm or tranquility — is the fifth factor of enlightenment. Passaddhi is two-fold. Káya passaddhi is calm of body. Káya here means all the mental properties rather than the physical body; in other words, calm of the aggregates of feeling (vedanákkhandha), perception (saññákkhandha), and the volitional activities or conformations (samkhárákkhandha). Citta passaddhi is the calm of the mind — that is, the aggregate of consciousness (viññáóakkhandha). Passaddhi is compared to the happy experience of a weary walker who sits down under a tree in a shade, or the cooling of a hot place by rain. Hard it is to tranquillize the mind; it trembles and it is unsteady, difficult to guard and hold back; it quivers like a fish taken from its watery home and thrown on the dry ground. It wanders at will. Such is the nature of this ultra-subtle mind. It is systematic reflection (yoniso manasikára) that helps the aspirant for enlightenment to quieten the fickle mind. Unless a man cultivates tranquility of mind, concentration cannot be successfully developed. A tranquillized mind keeps away all superficialities and futilities. Many a man today thinks that freedom and unrestraint are synonyms and that the taming of the self is a hindrance to self-development. In the teaching of the Buddha, however, it is quite different. The self must be subdued and tamed on right lines if it is to become truly well. The Tathágata, the Tamed, teaches the Dhamma for the purpose of taming the human heart (danto so Bhagavá damatáya dhammaí deseti). It is only when the mind is tranquillized and is kept to the right road of orderly progress that it becomes useful for the individual possessor of it and for society. A disorderly mind is a liability both to the owner of it and for others. All the havoc wrought in the world is wrought by men who have not learned the way of mental calm, balance, and poise. Calmness is not weakness. The calm attitude at all times shows a man of culture. It is not too hard a task for a man to be calm when all things around him are favorable. But to be composed in mind in the midst of unfavorable circumstances is hard indeed, and it is this difficult quality that is worth achieving; for by such control one builds up strength of character. The most deceptive thing in the world is to imagine that they alone are strong who are noisy, or that they alone possess power who are fussily busy. The man who cultivates calm of the mind does not get upset, confused or excited when confronted with the eight vicissitudes of the world (abphaloka dhamma). He endeavors to see the rise and fall of all things conditioned, how things come into being and pass away. Free from anxiety and restlessness he will see the fragility of the fragile. A story in our books tells us how when a mother was asked why she did not lament and feel pain over the death of her beloved son, said: “Uninvited he came, uninvited he passed away, as he came so he went, what use is there in lamenting, weeping, and wailing? ”Such is the advantage of a tranquillized mind. It is unshaken by loss or gain, blame and praise, and undisturbed by adversity. This frame of mind is brought about by viewing the sentient world in its proper perspective. Thus calm or passaddhi leads man to enlightenment and deliverance from suffering.

## **Concentration**

The sixth enlightenment factor is samádhi, concentration. It is only the tranquillized mind that can easily concentrate on a subject of meditation. The calm concentrated mind sees things as they really are (samáhito yathá bhútam pajánáti). The unified mind brings the five hindrances (pañca nivaránáni) under subjugation. Concentration is the intensified steadiness of the mind comparable to an unflickering flame of a lamp in a windless place. It is concentration that

fixes the mind aright and causes it to be unmoved and undisturbed. Correct practice of samádhi maintains the mind and the mental properties in a state of balance like a steady hand holding a pair of scales. Right concentration dispels passions that disturb the mind, and brings purity and placidity of mind. The concentrated mind is not distracted by sense objects; concentration of the highest type cannot be disturbed under the most adverse circumstances.

### **Equanimity**

The seventh and the last factor of enlightenment is equanimity (upekkhá). In the Abhidhamma, upekkhá is indicated by the term tatramajjhataá, neutrality. It is mental equipoise and not hedonic indifference. Equanimity is the result of a calm concentrative mind. It is hard, indeed, to be undisturbed when touched by the vicissitudes of life, but the man who cultivates this difficult quality of equanimity is not upset. Amidst the welter of experience (appha loka dhamma) — gain and loss, good-repute and ill-repute, praise and censure, pain and happiness — he never wavers. He is firm as a solid rock. Of course, this is the attitude of the Arahant, the perfect one. Of him it is said: “Truly the good give up longing for everything. The good prattle not with thoughts of craving. Touched by happiness or by pain, the wise show neither elation nor depression. Refraining from intoxicants and becoming heedful, establishing themselves in patience and purity, the wise train their minds; it is through such training that a quiet mind is achieved. Can we also achieve it? Lord Horder answers the question thus: “‘Yes.’ But how? Well, not by doing ‘some great thing.’ ‘Why were the saints saints?’ someone asked. And the answer came: ‘Because they were cheerful when it was difficult to be cheerful and patient when it was difficult to be patient. They pushed on when they wanted to stand still, and kept silent when they wanted to talk.’ That was all. So simple, but so difficult. A matter of mental hygiene...”