THE JOY AWAKENING FACTOR

Previously, it was pointed out that the first three of the seven Awakening Factors, Mindfulness, Investigation of Mental Phenomena and Energy/Effort create the conditions that foster the development of the remaining factors: Joy, Tranquility, Concentration and Equanimity. Mindfulness maintains present-moment awareness of the self-shaping process, Investigation discovers the characteristics of the factors involved in the self-shaping process and Energy/Effort channels the energy of attention away from unwholesome mind conditioners and towards the fulfillment of wholesome mind conditioners.

In the untrained mind, the energy of attention is bound up in the interactive mix of the five hindrances: Sense Desire, Aversion/Ill-Will, Sloth/Torpor, Restlessness/Worry and Skeptical Doubt. Because these unwholesome self-state conditions tend to organize thoughts, moods and behaviors through craving and clinging, the energetic aspects of them are “energy dumps”, that is, the available energy of attention is enchanted by craving and clinging and lacks adaptive creativity.

When the hindrances are subdued in the ability to influence the flow of energy, that freed-up energy of attention manifests as Joy, Tranquility, Concentration and Equanimity. This freed-up energy is buoyant (Joy), stable in the energetic flow (Concentration), relatively free from disturbance (Tranquil) and well-balanced (Equanimity). The areas mentioned above will be more thoroughly discussed in future talks; the main topic for this discussion is Piti, that is, the Joy Awakening Factor.

Most frequently, Piti is associated with the extraordinary states of consciousness called Jhana, particularly the first Jhana and is described as rapture. There are different levels of rapture in the commentaries (found in Wikipedia): *weak rapture* (causing the hair on your neck to rise up), *short rapture* (brief, exciting bursts of delight in the body), *going down rapture* (waves of delightful sensations up and down the spine), *exalting rapture* (the body seems to be floating) and *fulfilling rapture* (the body seems to be immersed in very strong pleasurable sensations).

First Jhana has five characteristics that are “secluded from the five hindrances”: *vitakka* (directed attention), *vicara* (sustained attention), *piti* (joy/enthusiastic interest), *sukha* (happiness/satisfaction) and *ekagatta* (one-pointed, persistently focused attention). The experience of piti in the First Jhana can be overwhelmingly, orgasmically pleasurable, and becomes an obstacle to further development of the jhana states. In the Second Jhana the intensity of piti decreases, becoming more like the Awakening Factor of Tranquility in the Third Jhana. One of the reasons why the intensity of rapture diminishes is that the feeling becomes an irritant—one senses that there is a more quiet and peaceful happiness, sukha, which becomes more evident. Eventually sukha becomes an obstacle to passadhi, the tranquility characteristic of the Third Jhana.

In her book entitled “Cetasikas”, Van Gorkom describes piti as an enthusiastic aspect of human experience, a sense of buoyancy regarding the experience. *In my experience, piti is recognizable as the ability to be interested and curious about what is emerging into awareness whether the experience is pleasant or not*. In this regard it manifests in ways that are supportive of Investigation, Tranquility and Equanimity, even though tranquility and equanimity are soothing factors, while joy is an energetic factor.

The commentaries suggest that the cultivation of jhana is alternatively necessary for the practice of vipassana (insight into the impermanent and non-self characteristics of lived experience and that distress and confusion are bound up with craving and clinging) and a potential sidetrack from vipassana. The ability to set aside the predominance of the hindrances seems to be necessary for vipassana practice, and the cultivation of the Seven Awakening Factors provides the antidote for the hindrances according to some commentaries. This suggests that one can practice vipassana towards Awakening successfully without mastering the jhanas; this belief seems to be a development of early 20th century Buddhism through the influence of Ledi Sayadaw and his promotion of “dry vipassana”. In this regard, the cultivation of joy as heightened and buoyant interest seems a viable alternative to the rapture that seems to be part of the earlier traditions.