**Working With The Mindfulness Awakening Factor**

Sati (sah-tee) is the Pali word for mindfulness, which is probably the most important concept and acquired skill in the Buddhist process of Awakening. It is characterized in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, which is represented as Right Mindfulness in the Noble Eightfold Path. It also is referenced as one of the Five Powers, a coordination of different factors that releases energy towards Awakening. The focus of this talk is the pre-eminence of Sati as the first of the Seven Awakening Factors, the topic for review on the previously posted talk of June 3, 2020. This quality of mind is called sati bojjhanga (sah-tee bow-jahn-gah). Bojjhanga is translated as Awakening Factor.

The meaning of the word sati goes beyond the traditional Western “mindfulness”. Originally the word referred to a skill required of the Brahmin priests. They were responsible for memorizing the vedas, religious teachings that preceded the Buddha. They were also responsible for recalling with precision the various rites and rituals associated with vedic teachings—if they were in error, the consequences for themselves and humanity would be unfortunate karmically. In this regard, the word sati was understood to represent remembering and re-enacting the chants, rites and rituals perfectly and with great clarity.

As was often the case with the Buddha, and perhaps with those Buddhists who came after him, the vedic concepts were repurposed and applied differently, so that sati came to mean proficiency in understanding and repeating the Suttas of the Pali canon and to be able to reliably apply the practices that reproduced the various states of mind necessary for Awakening. In contemporary practice, this involves persistent present moment awareness that supports the highest functioning of other wholesome mind conditioning factors; this proficiency of awareness is best represented by the Seven Awakening Factors.

In his book *Satipatthana—The Direct Path To Realization*, Analayo describes a particular quality of attention that emphasizes the skillful application of sati in all four foundations of mindfulness:

Here, monks, in regard to the body a monk abides contemplating the body, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world.

In regard to feelings he abides contemplating feelings, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world.

In regard to the mind he abides contemplating the mind, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world.

In regard to dhammashe abides contemplating *dhammas,* diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world.

The words highlighted in blue, *diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful* in Pali are *atapi* (ah-tah-pee), *sampajanna* (sahm-pah-jah-nyah) and *sati*. These practice points are precursors to the higher function of sati as bojjhanga, an Awakening factor. An analogous term is *yoniso manasikara* (yo-nee-so mah-nah-see-kah-rah), translated as *wise attention*, which can be understood as meaning the sort of attention that “gives birth to Wisdom”.

The function of sati is to monitor the characteristics and qualities of the remaining six factors, dhamma vicaya (dah-mah vih-chah-yah), investigation/analysis of mental phenomena, viriya (vihr-yah), energy/effort, piti (pee-tee), rapture/enthusiastic interest, passadhi (pah-sah-dee), tranquility, samadhi (sah-mah-dee), stability of mental functions and upekkha (ooh-peh-kah), equanimity/balance. These other factors will be reviewed in further talks.

“Just as a royal frontier fortress has a gatekeeper—wise,

experienced, intelligent—to keep out those he doesn’t know

and to let in those he does, for the protection of those

within, and to ward off those without; in the same way, a

disciple of the noble ones is mindful, endowed with

excellent proficiency in mindfulness, remembering &

recollecting what was done and said a long time ago. With

mindfulness as his gatekeeper, the disciple of the noble ones

abandons what is unskillful, develops what is skillful,

abandons what is blameworthy, develops what is blameless,

and looks after himself with purity.” — AN 7:63 Translated by Thanissaro

There are also references to sati as representing the Chief Minister for the other Awakening Factors—the function of a chief minister is to monitor the various departments of a government, make observations and report on the levels of proficiency and coordination, or lack thereof, among them. In this regard, the action of *sati* cultivates a “meta-awareness”, that “hovers over” whatever is arising and passing away in the mind. This also involves *dhamma vicaya*, the ability to “zoom in” on emerging self-state processes and investigate their characteristics with persistence and to activate *viriya* to either channel energy into the cognitive process or divert the energy of attention away from unwholesome self-state organizations; when energy is not bound up in unwholesomeness, *piti* is activated, producing an enthusiastic interest and engagement with sati. The function of sati also involves the ability to investigate and regulate levels of activation in the nervous system, balancing between too much energy (the hindrance of restlessness/worry) or too little energy (the hindrance of sloth/torpor). This monitoring and regulating process stabilizes and coordinates these functions, *samadhi*, creates *passadhi* and supports the best balancing of the functions to produce equanimity, *upekkha*.

The initial activity of the Awakening factors produces the stability and calmness experienced as samadhi and passadhi, which is the flow of experience that is not adversely impacted by the five hindrances, the topic of a previous talks posted in May, 2020. That quality of attention supports the maturing of the Awakening Factors, which fosters the ability to become clearly aware in an ongoing way of the three characteristics emphasized in Buddhist teachings: anicca (ah-nee-chah), the transient nature of conscious awareness, dukkha (dew-kah), the distress and confusion that is characteristic of the unawakened mind and anatta (ah-nah-tah), the absence of an enduring, autonomous self. This is the practice of vipassana, insight into these three characteristics.

It is important to have confidence that we are cultivating sati every time we are diligent in bringing attention to the breath and sustaining that process, seeking clarity of insight into the transient nature of the breathing cycle. This fosters a willingness to continue practicing mindfulness meditation and integrating this into daily life. Persistent practice will produce setting aside the five hindrances, experienced as the quality of consciousness highlighted in yellow. This will allow direct observation of the Seven Awakening Factors to bring the greatest clarity, joy and serenity to life.