

## **The seven factors of Awakening- Part four**

By Bhante Anuttara

Through our previous articles, we have discussed the seven enlightenment factors. In this article, I would like to focus on Viriya (energy) and Piti (rapture, joy). These third and fourth factors of Awakening are sequential byproducts of the first and second factors, Sati (mindfulness) and Dhammavicaya (investigation of phenomena).

Buddha said, "Abiding thus mindful, he investigates and examines that state with wisdom and embarks upon a full inquiry into it. In one who investigates and examines that state with wisdom and embarks upon a full inquiry into it, tireless energy is aroused. In one who has aroused energy (Viriya), unworldly rapture (Piti) arises" (MN: Anapanasati sutta).

If you investigate phenomena correctly with sufficient mindfulness and the basic teachings of the Buddha, your clear observation of the world and deeper understanding of truths like impermanence, dukkha, and no self will increase your energy (Viriya) to practice further. In other words, there will be energy, caused by the urgency to be free from the limited human condition and inspired by its sheer possibility as expounded by the Buddha.

In our mundane life, unpleasant and unexpected happenings may cause frustration and depression. However, with mindfulness and the right frame of contemplation, these can serve as opportunities for exertion in practice. Instead of being discouraged by a lack of energy in unlucky situations, one should investigate phenomena with mindfulness and wisdom, even if initially not deeply.

How can we start when lacking mindfulness and wisdom? Buddha offers plenty of advice on this here are few simple but essential pieces of advice we can apply in our daily life. "Avoiding foolish ways, associating with the wise, honouring those worthy of honour, dwelling in the right place, and frequently listening to and discussing Dhamma...."(from MN Mangala Sutta).

In that sense, The Sangha (the community of practitioners) is crucial for spiritual development, connecting with like-minded people who pursue a wholesome direction.

I believe that because you are reading this article, you are more or less on the right track. Anyway, the investigation of Dhamma will generate and increase the energy

leading you in a wholesome direction—this direction is vertical, not horizontal. When energy flows horizontally it flows outward and is often scattered and wasted. When energy flows vertically, it flows inward and upward. The Piti (Rapture), the fourth factor of Awakening, is that upward-flowing energy, which is conducive to Awakening, opening your heart and giving the supportive stimulation to open up the eye (called Dhamma Eye or the third eye) that sees things as they truly are.

This Piti (rapture, joy) has various pleasurable physical manifestations (trembling, shivering, tears of joy or even strong electrical sensations through your body). And also, it brings unworldly psychological satisfaction. Even modern scientific research shows it's dopamine related positive neurological effects on our brain. Anyway, these experiences of Piti are an essential step for the enlightenment process according to Buddha.

We can say, the way of Buddhist practice is the way of joy and pleasure born out of wholesome cultivation. Mindfulness practice has been proven as an effective antidote for depression over decades, surpassing many modern medicines. When considering mindfulness in conjunction with the enlightenment factors of Energy and Joy, its effectiveness in terms of the mental health of modern humanity becomes obvious.

Do you have enough energy and joy in your practice? If not, one should check what is missing. Most probably, the cause would be a lack of mindfulness or insufficient investigation of phenomena. Or, more basically, you may not have a suitable condition for the practice. Remember Buddha's simple guidance mentioned above, and put in the right effort and energy to create favourable conditions for spiritual development.

We should not just dream about spiritual progress; rather, we should cautiously organise our daily timetable and long-term plan in a way that is conducive to our spiritual accomplishment.

With metta,

Bhante Anuttara