



Samatha at Home *(and elsewhere)*

A weekly newsletter for the Southern Sangha: 9

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www.samatha.org

Samatha at Home 9

Dear friends,

So – lockdown could be easing, a bit....we may gradually return to something called Normal Life. It has shaken up perceptions, probably made us all more mindful, and more equanimous too. We have just had to accept that some things are just beyond our control. It has been, oddly, one of the curious adventures in most of our lives, however painful or worrying. We have all, it seems, learnt to appreciate the simple, the repetitive and the detail: the small things in life that we might have overlooked before.

Against a dark backdrop there have been some wonderful new ventures. From a *samatha* point of view, there are now all kinds of podcasts by various people, including a sequence of talks by Paul Dennison on the factors of awakening. These have become available on the *samatha* website. And the online beginners' courses and groups have proved very popular. All of these things will continue, we hope. It is so extraordinary to know you are meditating with someone in Sweden, or the States, or Australia.

Personally, we have all had different kinds of tests, ranging from the most profound, in the loss of relatives or job opportunities, to finding out what it is like to be alone for a while. Everyone's lives have been wrenched apart in some ways, and we are still just taking it in. Some of the things learnt have been quite small but significant: those of us who have cut our own hair for the first time in our lives have learnt that hairdressers are a quite crucial public service, where a high degree of skill is clearly needed!

And it is not over yet, and we do not know how long this all will last. So we would like the newsletter to continue. It will probably be fortnightly after next week. So please do send in photos, contributions, articles and poems! It is terrific for us to hear from other meditators, often in places that seem very exotic to us here. Do send them in....life goes on, and we hope *samatha* practice does too, and would like to hear from you.

Many thanks for contributions this week from Paul Beck, Peter Harvey and Paul Shelves

With warm wishes,

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The story this week is about Nandiya the Deer, and the development of the ninth perfection, mettā



You can view the video online via the link here: <https://player.vimeo.com/video/422932956>

Or if you prefer, you can download it and play on your own device via the link here:

<https://vimeo.com/silverbrookfilms/download/422932956/03d643729a>

All previous issues of Samatha at Home can be found at: www.samatha.org/samatha-at-home

The Factors of Awakening

The whole process

The factors of awakening are that: what can be present, for a while, at different times, when we are awake. One early text compares them to the clothes of a monarch, who can choose which one is needed at a particular time (SN 5.70). The chant of them all is a healing practice, said to produce balance in heart and mind and body. They are associated with good health and happiness: mindfulness, investigation, vigour, joy, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity, and the ability to let go. I see them as the qualities we all want for a balanced and cheerful existence: and things we would like to see from time to time in young children, when all is going well. In the practice they can be developed much more, and, we are told, each then can be available whenever needed, like the wardrobe of the king...

So far, we have had a look at the factors as singles – one at a time. Towards the end, it was noticeable that it was somehow difficult to do this for the last two or three: What do you make tranquil if you have not started something energetic first? How does stillness or concentration arise in the practice, with a sense of moving on, if you have not got some basic mindfulness and a sense that you are exploring and enjoying the breath a little first? How can you have real equanimity without, potentially, all of the factors operating a bit first? They all somehow cluster around one another, and need each other for support.

So this week it will be interesting to explore the whole working as a process in real time. How do the factors arise then? In many ways, we have all been through such a process over the last two or three months. At the outset, in March we all had to establish new fields of mindfulness. We could not do what we usually do! Learning to distance, to resist the temptation to hug someone, and to step away, rather than near neighbours needed this. Then we needed to investigate: how on earth do we manage without coffees waking us up every morning in the nearby café? How do we manage to organise shopping for a week at a suitable time? Where do we put our workspace at home? These questions needed the mindfulness first, and then applications of it to be explored and options tried out. There was an odd rush of energy when this had been organised. Some, true to their nature, found themselves busier than usual on what they normally do, and others attacked the garden, or enjoyed getting into new projects. Others, still working in public spaces, were sustained by the strangeness of it all, driving through now deserted streets and working in the hushed urgency of often emergency conditions. And then... some people, oddly enough, started to find joy. They had given up so many things, that seem trivial, but which punctuated the day. No mooching round shopping malls, wondering what to buy; no chats involving groups of people in reception at work. And so joy emerged, sometimes surprisingly. Yesterday I was looking sceptically at some poppy buds overshadowed by dark bushes in the garden. Overnight, one of them has suddenly burst out bright red and wide open from being a scrunched-up ball. So, after feeling the constrictions of the new way of life, people surprised themselves by being able to “bloom” and have fun. At last some got the hang of zoom, or found a load of vegetables left on their doorstep as a friendly gesture by a neighbour they hadn’t spoken to before, or just, at last, found time to do something they have wanted to for a long time, like learning a language or playing the guitar. And joy fosters and arises from creativity: being able to perch your chair on the

landing, like one elderly lady I know, meant she could have chatty coffee mornings across the stairs with her neighbours. People in samatha recorded podcasts, started new groups, and made videos. Or some people realised they actually enjoyed – for a while at any rate – not getting the bus every morning and just happily spent the time having a long breakfast instead, and if they have a garden, just enjoying the moment. And so some became tranquil. They might not be able to take the holiday they had booked, and had to enjoy one at home, or they found a rhythm and pace in the new timetable and weekly routine they had frantically tried to set in motion a few weeks before. Concentration could arise: online meditation sessions really do not suit some, who find zoom or skype tiring, but, for many, moments of real stillness and communion arose during a quiet meditation with others. With skies clear of pollution, and the weather improving, a kind of quiet could be felt in many places that had not been there before. In Scotland, where I am at the moment, it was so quiet goats came down from the mountains to the coast, as there just weren't the cars around that had kept them away before.

And then we all had to develop equanimity, and to let go. Because clearly the processes people have been going through over the last few weeks have not been easy, and for some painfully lonely and full of fear. Accepting that there is nothing one can do has sometimes been so hard. One of my in-laws, with dementia, could not understand why we were not visiting. We have just had to accept. Clearly too, hindrances have punctuated our movement through these stages. Joy is a pleasant surprise, not necessarily there all the time. But the whole has been a process, and although we do not know how it is going to go next, we have to find ways of letting go in other ways. How much, and in what way does one start to engage? A new cycle is beginning.

In the practice, many people took advantage of lockdown to start samatha practice, and start learning online. Welcome to the group! For the process of the factors of awakening of course works in the breathing practice too. Getting the posture right at the beginning, so you don't suddenly get pins and needles halfway through, making sure the back is straight, the shoulders and hands relaxed, and that the thumbs really are at rest on the hand: these are all ways of setting up mindfulness, and getting settled. Investigation, based on mindfulness of the first stages, starts to find ways to encounter the breath and the numbers. How do I get the balance? How can I find the awareness to keep aware of the body as a whole, and the whole breath, at the same time as counting. As they say, one is always in one way a beginner, or should be, in samatha breathing mindfulness. What the beginner may be finding out for the first time is what all meditators need to do at the beginning of a practice. On the basis of investigation, vigour can arise: but it needs a kind of letting go to do this, as it is, at any stage, too easy to make too much effort. How to allow one's natural energy to find an outlet in the longest of counting, so that one feels it is comfortable, and that there is a balance between trying to do the stage, and letting it do it itself? That is something that goes on at all stages of meditation. The breath has been breathing quite happily for all of our lives, for a long time – it does know what it is doing. How to find a way of allowing it to do what it does best, and to relax and find its expression in the stage of the practice I am doing at the time? Sometimes a pace and rhythm seems to come up in the breath that one needs to listen to and accept. For me it is the key to finding enjoyment and appreciation in the breath.

Indeed, someone said at a group meeting this week that sometimes one's body knows something you do not. It tends to find its balance in its own way. If I listen to that, while doing the stages, the body and the mind stops feeling separate, and joy can arise. This is the fuel for tranquillity, as, if there is mindfulness of the breath, the joy starts to settle. Concentration, when found, can feel, paradoxically, like finding a way of looking at the breath and the object which is less 'focused', but more like a watching on, out of view.

So, for the settling, I very much like Boonman's suggestion that it is like waiting for a friend to visit you. You need to allow there to be a space – by moving the attention from the tip of the nose to the visual field, but it helps to let that be open, so there is no strain. But you also do not need to chase after anything: the friend will come in time. It feels a bit like watching a deer in the field: it is important not to let it know you are there, but just wait quietly. Or watching stars, that can be seen better around the edges rather than head on.

And equanimity is the letting go of the practice in the end. We do it in gradual stages. And appreciating each one, for a short time, helps in that process of letting it go, and moving on to the next, until you are back with the longest of counting, and then again, the normal breath. Equanimity, in the Buddhist tradition offers an opening to all kinds of skills – higher knowledges, the movement to formless meditation, or, simply, the capacity to allow past experience to be remembered, and recollected. In some groups I have been to recently, there has been some discussion of how to finish a meditation. If you dash up too quickly, you somehow feel panicked, and are liable to get a bit unmindful too. The concentration has not been allowed to disperse. When you open the eyes, instead of taking the surroundings in, being aware of contact with the ground, and just remembering where you are, it is easy to dash off to get emails sent. But, like after a good meal, it does feel important to digest. One practice I have been experimenting with is the recollection of peace at the end of the meditation. This is to go back in the meditation and just remember any moments when peacefulness was there, bring them to mind, and just let them go. It just seems to let the practice settle, and become part of one's experience, and to fit it in place, rather than being something forgotten. This is not mine, I am not this, this is not self....if I do that at the end of the practice it feels like a completion, and it is easier to pick up the meditation again when I sit next time. The real art in meditation is to allow this equanimity to arise, in practice or outside. Perhaps it is from this space, a clearing in our minds, that things can happen: the phone call that comes in from someone you are in the middle of emailing, the decision to start a venture, or the recollection sometimes in the settling of the practice itself, of a time of happiness or insight, sometimes from long ago.

Many Buddhist texts describe the factors as a sequence. Something arouses mindfulness – maybe putting a meditation instruction into practice, or mulling over some new way of seeing things, and the process naturally goes to investigation, then vigour right through to equanimity. I think it applies too to all sorts of situations, from meditation to making bread. Some people have told me that the thing they felt they needed as lockdown eases is a challenge. In my experience, if I have a challenge, that – crucially! – I enjoy, the mind and body do experience these stages, and feel as if both are being fulfilled, going through the stages together. They seem there in all sorts of processes, from knitting a jumper, learning languages, laying out a garden, to planning podcasts. That sort of challenge, for me, helps me to go through stages of the practice too. Though I should also say, that sometimes it is important to remember we really don't need these things; the mind can breathe better without any objective at all! And then for all us the awakening factors can just seem to happen: a lucky byproduct arising from the simple enjoyment of a mindful and sunny day.



Hat

I was drawn out of a hat - so to speak.
But what was I doing in there in the first place?
Foolish or brave
to be at the mercy of such blind chance.
And then to get pulled out!
Luck. Or bad luck. Or if the cap fits?

Although a bit of me does wonder
about hats and what happens
when you're in there and then you're out.
It seems that some hold their breath
and some breathe a sigh of relief.
I'm thinking I should find out more about the hat.



The Four Noble Truths and the meaning of *dukkha*

The four Noble Truths are widely known as the central teaching of the Buddha, and the first Noble Truth, *dukkha*, is the truth that is the most memorable. However, it is important to remember that in the Buddha's teaching there are four truths, not one.

The first Noble Truth is that there is *dukkha*

The second Noble Truth is that the cause of *dukkha* is craving and ignorance

The third Noble Truth is that there is an end to *dukkha*

The fourth Noble Truth is that there is an eightfold path that leads to the end of *dukkha*.

There is a recognition that *dukkha* is present, but that there is a cause and a cure for *dukkha* which is within our means, in other words, a message of hope and optimism.

The *pāli* word *dukkha* is commonly translated as “suffering” usually with the qualification that this does not cover the full range of the meaning implied by the original word. I have also heard “hard to bear” offered as a translation of *dukkha*. Another common translation is “unsatisfactoriness”. This has the advantage of covering a wider range of the meaning – even pleasant feelings and happiness are ultimately unsatisfactory in that they do not last.

However, the translation that has most appealed to me is one that was once given by a speaker who came once a year to the Manchester University Buddhist Society which organised a series of talks every Thursday evening during the first two terms. The speaker was a monk from the London Sri Lankan vihara, and his name was the Venerable Piyatissa. He said that *dukkha* could be defined as “clinging to emptiness”. This definition offers a powerful image that covers both the cause and effect of *dukkha*. The cause of *dukkha* is given in the second Noble Truth as craving. Craving for sense objects, craving for becoming and craving for non-becoming are the three types of craving that are being referred to. Craving leads to clinging in the chain of dependent origination and so the translation “clinging to emptiness” points directly to the cause of the arising of *dukkha*, as well as *dukkha* itself.

This translation also resonates with the last words of the Buddha, which are also his final teaching and instruction:

“*Vayadhammā sankhārā, appamādena sampādetha*”

“All dhammas* and formations are empty, strive on with heedfulness”

*Dhammas in this context mean all material and mental objects.

With heedfulness, the nature of that which we crave is seen for what it really is: empty and without substance.

I have long been aware conceptually of the cause of *dukkha* being craving, but out of curiosity, I began to pay it much more attention recently. I think it is a consequence of

having much more time on my hands due to the lockdown (and I appreciate this is not the case for everyone).

So I began with bringing to mind the notion that craving is the cause of suffering, and then, in the spirit of direct impartial observation, to look for it arising. What I found interesting is how clear the craving is if it becomes the focus of attention. Everything seems to be driven by one of the three types of craving. So, from time to time, I decided to be contrary and not follow the craving. When it arose and was driving and motivating some course of action, I let go and stepped back. A sense of space and peace arose. Less suffering. I perceived things went better than if I had acted on the craving and followed a course of action. Sometimes, just slowing down was useful. This is what we do when we are more mindful, things slow down, there is not so much of a rush, and in my experience, we accomplish just as much, perhaps more. So when carrying out tasks that are necessary, mindfulness is key to ensuring that craving is not the driving force to complete the task, rather the bare attention to the task itself, which may lead to really seeing the usefulness, either by helping another person, helping oneself or both.

Focusing on little things, just noticing the craving arising, and either pulling back or simply being more mindful of the craving, reminded me of something Lance Cousins once said to a group of students: “It’s interesting how paying attention to small things in the day can change your whole life.”

By gently practising this awareness of craving arising at the various sense doors from time to time, just noticing the nature of craving, the way it reaches out to cling and hold on, and when noticing, sometimes stepping back, sometimes mindfully following on, the tendency to notice craving in the samatha practice also arose. The mind reaching out away from the breath, craving for the sense contact that has just arisen, craving for something to come into being, craving for something to end; wanting to be somewhere else, not mindful, not present. Noting this, letting go of it and bringing the mind back to present moment awareness of the breath gently resets the practice until the mind can settle on the breath completely.



The Seven Awakening-factors (*Bojjhaṅgas*)

These are factors (*aṅgas*) which conduce to awakening/enlightenment (*bodhi*), and which at full strength *are* awakening.

They are often referred to as a contrast to the five hindrances (desire for sense-pleasures, ill-will, dullness & lethargy, restlessness & worry, vacillation), in the context of attaining *jhāna*. The hindrances cover up, close up and obscure the mind, while the awakening-factors uncover it and open it up to wisdom. The awakening-factors are said to ‘be dependent on seclusion (from the hindrances etc.), dependent on non-attachment, dependent on cessation (of craving), ripening in letting go’.

Mindfulness of breathing develops the four applications of mindfulness (the *satipaṭṭhānas*), which in turn develop the factors of awakening. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* describes mindfulness of the body (including breathing), of feeling, of mind-states, and of *dhammas*, or key basic patterns in reality. Mindfulness of *dhammas* includes mindfulness of the factors of awakening, knowing, for each of these: if it is present or absent; how it can arise; how it can be perfected by cultivation (*bhāvanā*).



Factor and its nature	Characteristic (C) – what it is; property (P) – what it does; manifestation (M) – how it shows itself; food that nourishes it (F) – supports for it
1. Mindfulness (sati): Clarity and presence of mind, and the ability to clearly remember and bear in mind Dhamma.	C: standing near, and calling up. P: not-forgetting. M: the state of facing a field of observation. F: wise, probing attention to dhammas providing a basis for it.
2. Dhamma-discrimination (dhamma-vicaya): Discerning investigation, analysis and comprehension, through wisdom, of various inter-related basic patterns (dhammas), so as to discern the Basic Pattern (<i>Dhamma</i>) which they make up.	C: discrimination. P: illumination. M: non-delusion. F: wise, probing attention to dhammas that are skilful/wholesome or unskilful/unwholesome, blameless or blameworthy, refined or base, to exercise and stimulate wisdom (<i>paññā</i>).
3. Vigour/energy/mental strength (viriya): An energised strength of mind, aliveness, vigour; unshrinking application to what needs attention: ‘get to it and keep at it’.	C: taking on. P: supporting. M: non-collapse. F: wise, probing attention to the bases of initiative, exertion and persistence.
4. Joy (piti): Non-sensual joy associated with meditation. It arises from gladness, and leads on to tranquility, happiness and concentration. It has five levels of intensity: minor, momentary, descending, transporting and suffusing, and at its deepest level is an awakening-factor.	C: suffusing, and contentment. P: delighting body and mind. M: elation/exultation. F: wise, probing attention to dhammas providing a basis for it.
5. Tranquillity (passaddhi): tranquillity of both mind and the way the body feels through various associated mental states. It brings a healthy, open, clear and receptive state.	C: stilling. P: overcoming the distress of body and mind. M: absence of trembling, and the state of coolness. F: wise, probing attention to tranquillity of body and of mind.
6. Concentration/unification (samādhi): A state of mental unification, centredness. ‘For one whose body is tranquil and who is at ease, the mind becomes concentrated’.	C: non-distraction, and non-diffusion. P: collecting together. M: stability of mind. F: wise, probing attention to the nimitta/sign of calm (<i>samatha</i>) and of non-distraction.
7. Equanimity/equipoise (upekkhā): A state of balance regarding arising skilful states of mind, allowing them to proceed evenly, without subtly shifting to unskilful states. Like a charioteer overseeing a balanced team of evenly-pulling horses, without urging any on, or restraining any.	C: (balanced) judgement, and causing to proceed evenly. P: preventing deficiency or excess, and cutting through partiality. M: a state of balance. F: wise, probing attention to dhammas providing a basis for it.

The seven factors are seen as a progression, with one leading on to the next (as in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*), especially through mindfulness of breathing, though once all are operating there is the idea (*Vism.135*) that some of them may need emphasising in certain situations:

- When the mind needs to be exerted, to overcome a slack or low state, 5, 6 & 7 should not be developed, but 2, 3 & 4 should be: just as you would not throw damp fuel on a small fire that one wanted to blaze up.
- When the mind needs to be restrained, as it is excited or overactive, 2, 3 & 4 should not be developed, but 5, 6 & 7 should be: just as you would not put dry fuel on a great fire that you wanted to dampen down.
- Mindfulness is of benefit in each case.
- It is also said that a listless mind that is sluggish in understanding or not attaining the happiness of inner peace should be encouraged/stimulated by recollecting the qualities of the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Saṅgha* and reflecting that which arouses a sense of spiritual urgency: birth, ageing, sickness and death, and the suffering entailed in making a living, and the worst states in rebirths below the human level, as animals, ghosts and hell-beings.
- One should look on with equanimity, like a charioteer allowing evenly-pulling horses to do their work, when the mind is calm, balanced, unidle, unagitated, unlistless, without the need to be exerted, restrained or encouraged,

Reflection on and rejoicing in the seven awakening-factors helps one overcome illnesses.



Things which conduce to each *bojjhaṅga* (*Visuddhimagga* pp.130-35; ch.IV, sections 51-64):

Mindfulness: mindfulness and clear comprehension; avoiding people of lost mindfulness; associating with people of established mindfulness; inclining the mind to mindfulness.

It is clear that the kind of people one spends time with can affect one's state of mind. In many contexts, e.g. at work, there may be little choice on who one is with. To the extent that there is a choice, it is good to be with more mindful and calm people. Practice in a group, or on a retreat with others, can be particularly powerful. That said, choosing work that helps people that are not in very good states of mind is an expression of generosity in which one may be a good influence on others. Moreover, inclining the mind towards a quality – by actively recollecting it, appreciating and valuing it, and resolving on engaging in it – helps to enliven and strengthen it.

Dhamma-discrimination: asking questions (this aids understanding); keeping one's person and belongings clean (there is a clarity to this that parallels discerning discrimination); balancing the five faculties (faith, vigour, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom); avoiding unwise people; associating with wise people; reflecting on the practice with deep knowledge; inclining the mind to Dhamma-discrimination.

Vigour: reflection on the dangers of sub-human states of mind and rebirths; seeing the benefits of vigour; reflection on the value of long-term spiritual practice; respecting and making good use of teachings, guidance and time given to one; reflection on the greatness of one's spiritual tradition and of one's teachers, the spiritual opportunities of one's situation, and of other practitioners; avoiding lazy people; associating with people with vigour and mental strength; inclining the mind to vigour.

Joy: recollection of the Buddha and of the Dhamma, the *Saṅgha*, ethical discipline, generosity, the gods, and of the peace of *Nirvāṇa*; avoiding rough people; associating with refined people; reviewing encouraging teachings; inclining the mind to joy.

Tranquillity: good food (sustaining, healthy and enjoyable – as on Samatha retreats!); agreeable weather; keeping a comfortable posture (these first three help one be relaxed and at ease); maintaining a balanced attitude; avoiding restless/agitated /over-energised people; associating with people of tranquil behavior; inclining the mind to tranquillity.

Concentration: keeping one's person and belongings clean; skill with regard to the *nimitta*; balancing the five faculties; when appropriate, exerting the mind, restraining the mind, encouraging the listless mind by faith & a sense of urgency, and looking on with equanimity at what is occurring rightly; avoiding unconcentrated people; associating with concentrated people; reflection on the *jhānas* and states of liberation; inclining the mind to concentration.

Equanimity: a balanced attitude with regard to people; a balanced attitude with regard to things; avoiding people with a bias with regard to people and things; associating with people with a balanced attitude with regard to people and things; inclining the mind to equanimity.

Haiku

My body and mind,
A flowing river of change,
Not mine after all.

