

The joy of meditation (1 of 2)

In traditional Buddhist terms, there are two teachings that can help us improve our meditation. These are the 7 awakening-factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*) and the 5 grounds of liberation. The teachings are part of the higher spiritual progress on the path to awakening, but we will here apply them to our basic meditation, suitable even if we are beginners.

The 7 awakening-factors

The 7 awakening-factors are:¹

1. mindfulness,
2. investigation of mental states,
3. effort,
4. zest (joyful interest),
5. mental tranquility,
6. concentration, and
7. equanimity.

(1) Any proper meditation begins with **mindfulness**, grows with mindfulness, and continues with mindfulness. This basically means that we understand and accept the fact that there is only one reality we can effectively work with, that is, the present moment. Good meditation, essentially, is based on our ability to enjoy the present moment right before us – there’s nothing else, really.

Mindfulness also means a good memory of what’s right and good. This means our readiness to bring our mind back to the present moment as soon as we notice that it is stuck in the dead past, or dreaming ahead into the non-existent future.

(2) There are two levels of being mindfully present: the sense-based and the mind-based. Our sense-based presence of mind refers to **the investigation of mental states** as they occur through our 5 physical senses. This means that we must train ourself to keep things “objective.” What does this mean?

It means not to be “subjective” about our sense-experiences, not to add anything to them more or other than what they really are – to accept them just as they are. It’s like we are simply happily watching a sunset: there is just the sunset, and nothing else at that moment.

When we see something, there is just seeing. When we hear a sound, there is only hearing or just sound. When we smell something, it’s just smelling or a smell. When we taste something, it’s just taste. When feel something, it’s just feeling.

We neither evaluate nor discriminate, so that we do not end up liking or disliking any of them. We simply experience each of these sense-experiences as and when they arise. The purpose here is simply to prepare the mind to look into itself. In other words, we are working towards a mind-based mindfulness.

In mind-based mindfulness, we may notice the mind falling back to the past, or trying to jump ahead into the future. We at once but gently bring the mind back to the present. Even in the present, we simply notice what ideas are there. We notice

¹ For technical details on the 7 awakening-factors, see [SD 10.15](#).

them objectively as “ideas.” The purpose here is to clear the mind of all thoughts (actually, we are pushing them aside so that they we do not have to process them at all).²

(3) All this takes **effort**. If we do this in a gentle but firm manner – with a happy inner smile – then, we are likely to lighten up the mind more quickly and effectively. When the mind is lighter (free of having to process sense-data and mental data), then, it has this really a great feeling of “being itself”: (4) this is called **zest**, joyful interest. It’s the kind of feeling we enjoy when doing something wholesome, and we want to keep on doing it in a smooth flow of joyful energy.

(5) This joyful interest arises from a growing feeling of deep peace and joy. We feel so joyfully peaceful that we are able to set aside all other feelings. We have temporarily suspended all perceptions (recognizing of things of the past or the future). We stop forming any other kind of ideas: we don’t need to do anything except lose ourselves in the beautiful present joyful peace – this is all that we are conscious of. This is called **tranquillity**.

(6) When we allow our mind to continue to be joyfully tranquil, it peacefully settles and clears up even more so. The result: **mental concentration** or samadhi. The mind is joyfully peaceful and stays peacefully joyful. We do not even sense our body anymore (all our senses, even the mind, seems to be at rest).

(7) There is just this bright and clear presence (“present moment”) before us: we are this real joy and beautiful peace. Nothing else bothers us; there is nothing to bother us anyway. Our mind is then like a perfect shiny sphere staying very still on a perfectly level and smooth plane at a perfect tangent. We could stay like this forever, as it were. This is **equanimity**.

We have progressed through our meditation exercise by way of the 7 awakening-factors. They are called “awakening-factors” because these are qualities that keep us awake to the moment: seeing the present as it arises and falls away. Once we are able to stay awake in this manner and comfortable with it, we may, in time, notice some of our cognitive processes returning – just enough for us to feel (directly experience) this on-going rise-and-fall of whatever is in our mind.

This is called the perception of impermanence (on a mental level). We need to do this regularly until it becomes our second nature to see all our mental processes and events in this way. This is true reality: it is the basic process of how even things outside, and people and life all around us behave. This is the law of universal change that we have directly felt. We are ready to awaken to true reality.

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² Basically, our thoughts are our consciousness “of” this or that sense-object arising through the 6 senses. As long as we are not awake, this process will go on. We cannot stop this process, except when we are asleep or unconscious. We can, however, with wise attention, let them go so that they settle in the background of our mind, and not demand our attention which can then refine according to our ability. On **consciousness**, see **Viññāṇā**, esp [SD 17.8a](#) (7+9).