

The joy of meditation (2 of 2)

The 7 awakening-factors are the ideal process for our meditation. Like any ideal, we may not be able to experience them, or all of their factors, all the time. But it is quite sufficient for us to experience just a few of the factors during each sitting. We may notice that we experience a few of the factors better than others.

However, we should be fully absorbed in these awakening factors as they arise, but think nothing of them in those moments. We are those factors as they arise: when we try to analyze them during those moments, we actually push them away: we lose them. Any analysis or evaluation should be done during the review period at the end of each meditation.

When we notice that we have difficulties at any of these stages, then, we should resort to another set of meditation tools (as it were), that is, the 5 grounds of liberation (*vimutt'āyatana*). They are so called because they help us to free of the difficulty that hold us back in our meditation. Their total effect is also that of liberating our mind. Hence, they are called “ground of liberation.”

The 5 grounds of liberation

These 5 grounds of liberation are the vital energy that underpin the 7 awakening-factors as a whole. They help the awakening-factors to fully function and bear fruit. The 5 “grounds of liberation” (*vimutt'āyatana*) are: (1) gladness, (2) zest, (3) tranquility, (4) happiness and (5) concentration. Notice that these 5 grounds are very much the awakening-factors themselves. In fact, they are like a short-form or essence of the awakening-factors. They, in fact, help us to strengthen these awakening-factors.

The Vimutt'āyatana Sutta (A 5.26) lists 5 ways which, when properly cultivated, can be a ground for mental liberation. In other words, these are the 5 grounds for mental liberation. Sometimes somewhere in our meditation process, we realize that something is missing in our practice: we need to fill in some blanks. In simple terms, we have not yet really tasted the joy of meditation.

Joy is that catalyst – the secret ingredient – for the wholesome success of our meditation. If we lack joy, we are not likely to progress properly, or our meditation will not be really wholesome or wholesomely effective. We will not really be happy, despite our meditation.

The 5 grounds *for* mental liberation are:¹

- (1) listening to the Dharma (the teachings of the historical Buddhism) ,
- (2) teaching the Dharma,
- (3) reciting and learning the Dharma,
- (4) reflecting on the Dharma, and, of course,
- (5) meditation.

The purpose of each of these 5 grounds of liberation is to cultivate joy or gladness (*pāmuja*), that is, a weak kind of zest. This is the first of 5 factors leading to mental liberation, that is, **the 5 grounds of liberation**, which are gladness, zest, tranquility,

¹ For details on these 5 ground for mental liberation, see [SD 21.5](#) (3).

happiness and concentration. Since gladness or *pāmuja* forms the first list, we can call this list the *pāmuja* formula for easier remembering.

The 5 grounds for liberation

These 5 qualities form a famous set known as “the 5 grounds for liberation” (*pañca vimutt’āyatana*)—that is, the *vimutt’āyatana* pericope—which is formulated in **the Vimutt’āyatana Sutta** (A 5.26),² thus:

knowing the goal and the Dharma [knowing the Dharma in the spirit and in the letter],

gladness arises in him;

because of gladness, zest arises;

because of zest, the (mental) body becomes tranquil;

when the body is tranquil, he feels happiness;

a happy mind becomes concentrated.

We have already discussed [[R486](#)] how gladness works to give rise to zest, which makes our mind tranquil, so that it is happy, and then concentrated. Here, we will look a little deeper into the most difficult term in the set.

Tranquillity

Tranquillity (*passaddhi*) is the most difficult term here. More fully, it is “tranquillity of the body” (*kaya, passaddhi*). The “body” here is the “mental body” (*nāma, kāya*), which, according to Buddhaghosa (Vism 14.144/465), refers to the three mental aggregates: feeling, perception and formations (Dhs 40).

In practical terms, this means that all our 5 sense-doors (the mind-door deals the consciousness itself), have been settled, free from distractions, and ready for dhyana (*jhāna*) or some level of deep concentration (*samādhi*).

Our meditation efforts must begin with learning some “quality control” for our sense-experiences. We must turn away from what pollutes and saps our mind, and nurture wholesome mental habits. This habit builds an ever stronger mind that is able to stand by itself, to know itself fully and so liberate itself from self-limiting hindrances.

One of the most helpful contemplative exercises (other than the perception of impermanence described earlier) is that of **self-renunciation**, letting go of the “I.” This practice of “not owning the pain” means that we define and examine the problem without identifying with it (without using “I,” “me” or “mine”). We examine the problem (not the person) following the 4 noble truths formula.

When we apply this self-renunciation exercise in meditation, we identify the distraction as it is. Then, we smile at it, and let it go: we may even mentally repeat, “Letting go.” Then, we go back to our practice proper, and stay with it right to the end.

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² Vimutt’āyatana Sutta (A 5.26,2.3), [SD 21.5](#).