



The Seven Factors of Enlightenment

Dominique Side

The Pali canon is full of references to the seven factors of enlightenment taught by the Buddha on different occasions. They are called *bojjhanga*-s. The term *bojjhanga* is composed of *bodhi* + *anga*. *Bodhi* denotes enlightenment — to be exact, insight concerned with the realization of the four Noble Truths; and *Anga* means factors or limbs. *Bodhi* + *anga* (*bojjhanga*) therefore means the factors of enlightenment, or the factors for insight and wisdom. They are so-called because they are conducive to enlightenment. Anyone who cultivates and strengthens these seven factors inclines towards nirvana.

The seven factors are:

1. Mindfulness
2. Keen investigation of the *dhamma* (*dharma*)
3. Energy
4. Rapture or happiness
5. Calm
6. Concentration
7. Equanimity.

The seven factors of enlightenment set out what one needs to do to attain freedom from samsara. At the same time, they show what the qualities of an enlightened person are.

1. Mindfulness is the most effective tool for self-mastery. It is fourfold: mindfulness of the body, feeling, mind and mental objects.

The person who delights in mindfulness and regards laziness with dread is not liable to fall away. They are nearing nibbana. [Dhammapada 32](#)

2. Keen investigation of the Dhamma is the sharp analytical knowledge of understanding the true nature of all things as summarized in the Three Marks of Existence. Systematic reflection comes naturally through mindfulness, and it urges one to discriminate, reason and investigate. That type of search yields Right Understanding.



Understanding the rise and fall of the aggregates, one experiences unalloyed joy and happiness. To the discerning one that (reflection) is deathless, nibbana. [Dhammapada 374](#)

3. Energy is a mental quality and the sixth limb of the Noble Eightfold Path, there called Right Effort. The life of the Buddha clearly reveals that he was never subjected to moral or spiritual fatigue. Though physically he was not always fit, mentally he was invariably vigilant and energetic. Buddhism is not for the lazy. Each individual has to put in the necessary personal effort and work for their own enlightenment with diligence.

Now is the time to wake up, when you are young and strong. Those who wait and waver, with a weak will and a divided mind, will never find the way to pure wisdom. [Dhammapada 280](#).

4. Rapture or happiness is a mental quality which suffuses both the body and mind. Without it one develops a certain indifference to the dharma, an aversion to the practice of meditation, and feelings of sadness or being jaded. No one can bestow on another the gift of happiness; each one has to build it through effort, reflection, and concentrated activity. Contentment is a characteristic of the happy individual. Happiness in this context is vastly different from pleasure which is momentary and fleeting. Real happiness or rapture comes not through grasping or clinging to things but by giving up. It is the detached attitude toward the world that brings about true happiness.

5. Calm or tranquility here refers to mental calm rather than physical calm. Systematic reflection quiets the restless mind. Without mental tranquility concentration cannot be successfully developed. It's hard to be composed in the midst of unfavorable circumstances but this is the way to build strength of character.

6. Concentration, another element of the Noble Eightfold Path, is only possible for a mind that is calm. Only a calm, concentrated mind sees things as they really are. The concentrated mind is not distracted by sense objects; concentration of the highest type cannot be disturbed under the most adverse circumstances.

When a monk retires to a secluded spot, has a still mind and clearly discerns the dhamma, his heart will be full of joy and happiness, transcending that of humans. [Dhammapada 373](#)

7. Equanimity means mental equipoise, not indifference to pleasure. It's the result of a calm concentrative mind. It means one is not upset even in difficult situations; one remains steadfast. The arhat is described as follows:

Good people keep on walking whatever happens. [Dhammapada 83](#).



In summary:

They leave darkness behind and follow the light. They give up home and leave pleasure behind. Calling nothing their own, they purify their hearts and rejoice. Well trained in the seven factors of enlightenment, their senses disciplined and free from attachments, they live in freedom, full of light. Dhammapada 87-89

Stories

There are some amazing stories about the sheer power of simply teaching about the seven factors of enlightenment, let alone practising them. One of them concerns the Buddha who was staying near Rajgir in Veluvana, the squirrel's feeding ground. His disciple Mahakassapa was seriously ill, so one evening the Buddha paid him a visit.

"Well, Kassapa," he said, "how is it with you? How are you bearing up? Are your pains lessening or increasing? Are there any signs you are getting better?"

"No, Lord," replied Mahakassapa, "I am not bearing up very well. The pain is very strong and it's getting worse."

The Buddha responded by reminding him of the seven factors of enlightenment, one by one. He repeated that when these factors are cultivated they lead to full realization, perfect wisdom and nirvana itself. It is said that Mahakassapa was full of joy on hearing the Buddha's words. He got up from his sick bed, and there and then his ailment vanished. (Samyutta Nikaya 46.14)

Another Sutra (the Maha Cunda Bojjhanga Sutta) reveals that once, when the Buddha himself was ill, the Venerable Maha Cunda recited the seven factors of enlightenment and the Buddha's illness vanished. (Samyutta Nikaya 46.16)

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