

A Reading Course on the Saṃyukta Āgama (Saṃyutta Nikāya)

Lecture 11 | Aug 15, 2026

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1: The Seven Factors of Awakening: The Art of Dynamic Balance in Awakening

What Is Your Mind Feeding On? — Managing Attention through the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and the Seven Factors of Awakening.

2: Opening: The Out-of-Control Pendulum

The Attention Crisis in the Modern City

- Manhattan Streets: Bumper-to-bumper traffic and an endless stream of information.
- Urban office workers: Overwhelmed by work and constant social-media notifications.
- Emotional Extremes: At times intensely anxious and restless; at times deeply discouraged and helpless.
- A Soul-Searching Question: My mind is like an out-of-control pendulum. How do I reclaim strength and inner peace?

3: The Same Question from 2,500 Years Ago (SA714)

A Hot Afternoon at Anathapindika's Park in Jeta's Grove, Sravasti

- A young monk, diligently practicing, yet sometimes restless and agitated, sometimes dull and drowsy.
- He asked the Buddha: When body and mind are exhausted, and the mind falls into darkness, what should one rely on?
- The Buddha replied: Awakening does not come from suppressing oneself, nor from blind asceticism.
- The answer lies in activating the seven awakening energies inherent within life

4: The Seven Factors of Awakening: The Seven Inner Gems of Life

Seven Precious Remedies for Healing the Deep Illnesses of the Mind

Mindfulness - Investigation - Energy - Joy - Tranquility - Concentration - Equanimity

- Mindfulness, investigation of dharma, energy, joy, tranquility (calm ease), concentration, equanimity
- Seven lamps that illuminate the dark night; seven springs of pure water that nourish the mind.
- A core teaching of the early scriptures; energies leading to awakening and freedom.
- A "mental toolbox" equipped with both accelerators and brakes.

5: The Mindfulness Factor: The Universal Navigator

From a Scattered Mind to a Focused Mind, and Onward to a Unified Mind

- The Mindfulness Factor is the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: Constantly observing the present moment.
- Mindful of the equilibrium between concentration and wisdom: Always keeping concentration and wisdom balanced.
- As the sutra states: "The Mindfulness Factor assists in all things" (it is needed at all times and in all circumstances).
- It is a navigator that allows you continually recognize which extreme you are drifting toward.

6: The Four Foundations of Mindfulness: The Starting Point for the Seven Factors of Awakening

Contemplating the Body, Contemplating Feelings, Contemplating the Mind, Contemplating Dharmas

- Every factor of awakening must remain tied to body, feelings, mind, and dharma; otherwise, it loses its anchor.
- With sustained mindfulness and unwavering recollection, the factors of awakening gradually arise and are cultivated to fulfillment.
- Begin with contemplation of the body (internal body, external body, and internal-external body)
- The Four Foundations of Mindfulness emphasize the contemplative wisdom and serve as the operational starting point for the entire system.
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7: The Investigation-of-Dharmas Factor: The Eye of Wisdom

Using Wisdom to Discern True from False Dharma, Taking Up the True and Letting Go of the Illusory.

- Distinguish what is wholesome and leads to peace from what is unwholesome and leads to suffering.
- Otherwise, practice becomes blind and unguided - like a blind person riding a blind horse toward a deep abyss at midnight.
- A modern application: When information arrives, filter it through wisdom first.
- Ask yourself constantly: Is this piece of information worth my attention?

8: The Energy Factor: Vigorously Diligent and Tireless

Supplying the Mind's Energy, Countering Helplessness and Procrastination

- Only after selecting the True Dharma and the right attitude does one begin diligent effort.
- Focus diligent energy single-mindedly and tirelessly, using the Four Right Efforts as the anchor.
- Energy is not forcing through by brute will, but steady, sustained execution power.
- Like a gently flowing stream, neither rushing nor slacking, maintaining a continuous flow of energy

9: The Joy Factor: Dharma Joy and Meditative Bliss

Let Go of Gain and Loss, and Joy Will Arise Naturally

- Listening to the Dharma brings Dharma Joy: The mind opens up with clarity, as if a heavy burden has been lifted.
- Practicing concentration brings Meditative Bliss: A state of serene, unburdened ease - not stimulating excitement.
- Two major sources of joy: Transforming oneself through right perspectives, and supporting oneself through skillful methods.
- It serves as positive reinforcement for spiritual practice, nourishing the mind and spirit.

10: “The Serenity Factor”

The Tranquility (Lightness) Factor: Complete Relaxation of Body and Mind

Lightness means weightlessness; tranquillity means peace and stability.

- Eliminating the coarseness and heaviness of body and mind to experience a state of lightness and ease.

- Still hearing the sound of wind, rain, and traffic, but no longer in dualistic opposition.
- Sitting on the cushion, the cushion is oneself.
- Shifting from agitation to calm; body, mind, and environment become fully unified.

11: The Concentration Factor: One-Pointedness of Mind

Neither Dull Nor Scattered

- Theravāda Concentration: The mind rests on a single object, progressing through sequential meditative absorptions.
- Mahāyāna Concentration: The mind may have thoughts, but it remains unswayed by outer circumstances.
- Chinese Chan: The Way is found in everyday life; concentration and wisdom are non-dual.
- Eating is simply eating, walking is simply walking, working is simply working.

12: The Equanimity Factor: Relinquishing Letting Go When Nothing Remains to be Let Go

Transcending the Dualistic Reactions of Liking and Disliking, Observing All Phenomena As They Truly Are

- Also known as the Protective Factor: One must be liberated not only from unpleasant feelings but also from pleasant ones.
- Clinging to Meditative Bliss is still attachment - like soaking a stone in cold water, it does not lead to liberation.
- Relinquishing not only the object of attention but also the mind that attends to it.
- The most essential of the seven factors: When letting go reaches the point where nothing remains to be let go, the wisdom of emptiness manifests.

13: Saṃyukta Āgama, Sūtra 714: The Fire Metaphor

Prescribing the Right Remedy for Energy Management

- The mind is weak or sluggish (a small fire about to go out): Avoid "cooling" remedies - like adding charred coal only smothers the fire further.
- When the mind is weak or sluggish: Cultivate investigation of dharma, energy, and joy - like adding dry firewood to reignite the flame.
- The mind is restless and agitated (a great fire blazing intensely): Avoid "heating" remedies - like adding dry firewood only makes the fire flare up further.
- When the mind is restless and agitated: Cultivate tranquility, concentration, and equanimity - like covering the fire with ash to calm the blaze down.

14: The Mindfulness Factor (Whole-Process Awareness) – The Proactive Boosting Group (Investigation / Energy / Joy), The Stabilizing Noise-Reduction Group (Tranquillity / Concentration / Equanimity)

Operation Manual for Dynamic Balance

Even the Right Method Fails If Applied at the Wrong Time

- When the mind is too cold (dull, powerless): Activate the Proactive Boosting Group (investigation of dharma, energy, joy).
- When the mind is too hot (anxious, scattered): Activate the Stabilizing Noise-Reduction Group (tranquility, concentration, equanimity).
- Mindfulness runs through the whole process: First, notice whether the mind is currently sluggish or restless.
- Adjust the brake and accelerator in real time: This is the true practice of dynamic balance.

15: SA705 / SA715

What Is Your Mind Feeding On?

Cut Off Regressive Factors, Cultivate Non-Regressive Factors

- The Five Hindrances (desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, doubt) are regressive factors.
- Both the Five Hindrances and the Seven Factors of Awakening arise dependent on "nutriment" (SA715).
- The information you consume every day is directly feeding your mental state.
- Stop feeding the Five Hindrances, and begin practicing the art of dynamic balance in awakening.

Practice 1 for the Week: Information Fasting (cut off the junk information that feeds the Five Hindrances)

Practice 2 for the Week: Daily Awareness (notice whether your mind is too hot or too cold, and choose the right tool)

16: SA733 Core Formula: The Linear Logic of Sequential Awakening

Mindfulness → Investigation of Dharma → Energy → Joy → Tranquility →
Concentration → Equanimity

As one abides in mindfulness of the internal body, so too one abides in mindfulness of the external body, and of the internal-external body; likewise, with feelings, mind, and dharma. At that time, one should maintain focused mindfulness without forgetting. This applies all the way up to the factor of equanimity. When one abides in this way, the awakening factors arise one after another; and having arisen in gradual sequence, they are cultivated to fulfillment.

17: Why Is Mindfulness Placed First in SA733 When It Is Traditionally the Seventh Factor?

Ancient Term: Mindfulness

Modern Definition: Real-Time Monitoring

- Because concentration and wisdom must be tended to together during practice, and the Four Foundations of Mindfulness emphasize contemplative wisdom, they function as the entry point.
- This is why certain scriptures and commentaries place the Mindfulness Factor first among the seven factors of awakening. Once the cultivation of the Mindfulness Factor is established, one proceeds sequentially to the second, third... until reaching the seventh factor of equanimity.
- No factor of awakening can depart from the Four Foundations of Mindfulness - body, feeling, mind, and dharma - otherwise it loses its foothold.