

# Bodhi,pakkiyā Dhammā

## The 37 Limbs of Awakening

An introduction by Piya Tan ©2003

### 1 The seven sets<sup>1</sup>

#### **The four focusses of mindfulness (*cattāro satipaṭṭhāna*) [SD 13]**

1. the contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*);
2. the contemplation of feeling (*vedanā'nupassanā*);
3. the contemplation of mind (*cittānupassanā*);
4. the contemplation of phenomena (*dhammānupassanā*).

#### **The four right efforts (*samma-p, padhāna*) [SD 10.2]**

- [5] 1. the effort to prevent unarisen evil states from arising (*saṁvara padhāna*);
- [6] 2. the effort to abandon arisen evil states (*pahāna padhāna*);
- [7] 3. the effort to cultivate unarisen wholesome states (*bhāvanā padhāna*); and
- [8] 4. the effort to maintain arisen wholesome states (*anurakkhanā padhāna*).

#### **The four paths to spiritual power (*iddhi, pāda*) [SD 10.3]**

- [9] 1. the desire to act (*chanda*);
- [10] 2. effort (*virīya*);
- [11] 3. mind or consciousness (*citta*); and
- [12] 4. investigation (ie wisdom) (*vīmaṁsā*).

#### **The five spiritual faculties (*pañc'indriya*) [SD 10.4]**

- [13] 1. faith (*saddh'indriya*);
- [14] 2. effort (*viriy'indriya*);
- [15] 3. mindfulness (*sat'indriya i*);
- [16] 4. concentration (*samādhi*); and
- [17] 5. wisdom (*paññ'indriya*).

#### **The five spiritual powers (*pañca, bala*) [SD 10.5]**

- [18] 1. faith (*saddhā bala*);
- [19] 2. effort (*virīya bala*);
- [20] 3. mindfulness (*sati bala*);
- [21] 4. concentration (*samādhi bala*); and
- [22] 5. wisdom (*paññā bala*).

#### **The seven awakening factors (*satta bojjhaṅgā*) [SD 10.15]**

- [23] 1. mindfulness (*sati sambojjhaṅga*);
- [24] 2. investigation of states (*dhamma, vicaya sambojjhaṅga*);
- [25] 3. effort (*virīya sambojjhaṅga*);
- [26] 4. zest (joyful interest) (*pīti sambojjhaṅga*);
- [27] 5. tranquillity (*passaddhi sambojjhaṅga*);
- [28] 6. concentration (*samādhi sambojjhaṅga*); and
- [29] 7. equanimity (*upekkhā sambojjhaṅga*).

#### **The noble eightfold path (*ariyo aṭṭh'aṅgika magga*) [SD 6.10]**

- [30] 1. right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*);
- [31] 2. right thought (*sammā saṅkappa*);
- [32] 3. right speech (*sammā vācā*);
- [33] 4. right action (*sammā kammantā*);
- [34] 5. right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*);
- [35] 6. right effort (*sammā vāyāma*);
- [36] 7. right mindfulness (*sammā sati*); and
- [37] 8. right concentration (*sammā samādhi*).

<sup>1</sup> This section is a revised version of §§10bc of **Mahāparinibbāna S** (D 16) = SD 9 & Intro to **Mahā Sakul'udāyī S** (M 77.15-21) = SD 6.18 Intro. The latter sutta lists the 7 sets.

**1.1 THE SEVEN SETS IN THE NIKĀYAS.** Although Buddhism today has evolved into a religion of the book, like all the other world religions today, early Buddhism, however, is founded on the oral tradition, that has two vital features, namely, a direct teacher-pupil communication of teachings and experiences, and the precedence of personal insight over textual tradition. This is not to say that the text (here, the Pali Canon, for example) has no role in the spiritual life, but that the dead letters only become living word only through some level of inner calm and insight.

In theoretical terms, that is, in terms of doctrines, the essence of the early Buddhist teachings are found in what are today known as “the seven sets,”<sup>2</sup> that collectively comprise what are known as the 37 limbs of awakening (*bodhi,pakkhiya,dhammā*) [2]. This set of teachings forms the heart of Buddhist doctrine as found in the Nikāyas. The 37 factors leading to awakening in the form of a set of seven teachings as tools in the preservation of the Teaching are also found in a number of other suttas, such as

**the Sampasādanīya Sutta** (D 28/3:99-116),  
**the Pāsādika Sutta** (D 29/3:117-141),  
**the Kin,ti Sutta** (M 103/2:238-243), and  
**the Sāmagāma Sutta** (M 104/ 2:243-251).<sup>3</sup>

Rupert Gethin’s *The Buddhist Path to Awakening* (2001) is a monograph on the 37 factors leading to awakening and he discusses them by way of these “seven sets” of teachings. The best known text that mentions the seven sets is **the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), which recounts how the Buddha, staying at the Hall of the Gabled House (*kūṭ’āgāra,sālā*) in the Great Wood,<sup>4</sup> mentions **the seven sets**.

**3.50a** Then the Blessed One, along with the venerable Ānanda, went to the Hall of the Gabled House in the Great Wood. Having reached there, he sat down on the prepared seat. Thus seated down, the Blessed One addressed the monks:

**3.50b** “For this reason, monks, whatever teachings that have been shown to you by me through direct knowledge, you should learn them well, associate with them, cultivate them, develop them, so that the holy life will last long, so that it will stand long, for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare and happiness of gods and humans!

What are the teachings that have been shown to you by me through direct knowledge, you should learn them well, associate with them, cultivate them, develop them, [120] so that the holy life will last long, so that it will stand long, for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare and happiness of gods and humans?

They [the teachings] are as follows:<sup>5</sup>

the four focusses of mindfulness (*cattāro satipaṭṭhānā*).<sup>6</sup>

the four right efforts (*samma-p, padhānā*).<sup>7</sup>

the four paths to spiritual power (*iddhi,pādā*).<sup>8</sup>

the five spiritual faculties (*pañc’indriyāni*).<sup>9</sup>

the five spiritual powers (*pañca,balāni*).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See eg Gethin 2001:235. For a comprehensive survey, see 2001:1-25, 229-354. Gethin’s book is a monograph on the limbs of awakening.

<sup>3</sup> See SD 9. 10d below & Gethin 2001:232-240 for a useful discussion.

<sup>4</sup> D 16.3.50/2:119 f.

<sup>5</sup> On this *māṭikā* (matrix) of the seven sets, see **SD 9.10bc**.

<sup>6</sup> See D 1:56, 339, 2:83, 290-315, 3:101; S 3:96, 153; A 2:218, 3:12.

<sup>7</sup> See V 1:22; D 2:120; M 3:296, 2:96; A 2:74, 15 f. See SD 10.2.

<sup>8</sup> See D 2:213, 221; M 1:103 = 2:11; A 1:39, 297, 2:256, 3:82; Vbh 213. See SD 10.3.

<sup>9</sup> See M 1:295; S 3:46, 225, 4:168; A 2:151. See foll n & SD 10.4.

<sup>10</sup> See D 2:120, 239; M 2:12, 3:296; S 3:96, 153, 4:366; A 3:10, 12; Vbh 342. See SD 10.5.

the seven awakening factors (*satta bojjhaṅgā*).<sup>11</sup>  
the noble eightfold path (*ariyo aṭṭh'aṅgiko maggo*).<sup>12</sup>

These, monks, are the teachings that have been shown to you by me through direct knowledge, you should learn them well, associate with them, cultivate them, develop them, so that the holy life will last long, so that it will stand long, for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare and happiness of gods and humans.”<sup>13</sup> (D 16.3.50/2:119 f)

**1.2 THE SEVEN SETS IN THE MAHĀPARINIRVĀṆA SŪTRAS.** The Mahāparinibbāna Sutta and its Sanskrit versions, including its Chinese and Tibetan translations,<sup>14</sup> “apparently include a version of the present incident, namely, a summary of the Buddha’s teaching based on the seven sets and given by the Buddha in the context of the announcement of his imminent *parinirvāṇa*” (Gethin 2001:231). Gethin goes on to set out the Mūlasarvāstivādin version to show both a basic correspondence with the Pali version as well as interesting variations in details:

Then the Blessed One went to the meeting hall. Having reached there, he sat down on the prepared seat before the order of monks. Seated thus, the Blessed One addressed the monks:

“Impermanent are all formations [conditions], monks, they are unstable, uncertain, their nature is to change. To that extent, monks, enough with the forming of all formations, one should let go (of them). Therefore, monks, those dharmas which conduce to good and happiness here and now, to good and happiness in the future—having grasped and mastered them, monks should thus preserve them, give instruction in them, teach them, so that the holy life might endure long; this will be for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, good and happiness of devas and humans. And what are those dharmas...? Just these, **the four establishments of mindfulness, the four right efforts [abandonings?], the four bases of success, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of awakening, the noble eightfold path.**”<sup>15</sup>

Gethin notes that the opening formula of this Mūlasarvāstivādin version “seems to parallel in spirit what comes at the close of the Pāli passage” (2001:232).<sup>16</sup> The above Mūlasarvāstivādin excerpt is also found in another context, namely, that of the Buddha’s first illness and his remarking about the closed first of the teacher [2.23-25]. Gethin mentions that the lacuna in the Sanskrit manuscript here and quotes Snellgrove’s translation from the Tibetan to fill this gap:

Ānanda, I do not have the idea that the order of monks is mine, that I must cleave to the order and lead it, so how should I have a last exhortation, even a slight one, with which to instruct

<sup>11</sup> See D 2:79, 83, 120, 302, 3:101, 128, 251, 282; M 1:11, 2:12; S 1:54, 5:83; A 1:14, 4:23; Vbh 277. See SD 10.15.

<sup>12</sup> See D 1:256 f, 165, 312; M 1:61, 118, 3:251; It 18; Sn 1130; Vbh 235.

<sup>13</sup> On the central importance of these 7 sets, see Intro (10c) above.

<sup>14</sup> André Bareau [5 above] has given a detailed analysis of the various Parinirvana traditions.

<sup>15</sup> *Māhā Parinirvāṇa Sūtra* (ed Waldschmidt) 222-224: *atha bhagavān yenopasthāna-sālā tenopasaṁkrāntaḥ. upasaṁkramya purastād bhikṣu-saṁghasya prajñapta ev’āsane nyasīdat. niṣadya bhagavān bhikṣūn āmantrayate sma. anityā bhikṣavaḥ sarva-saṁskārā adhruvā anāśvāsikā vipariṇāma-dharmaṇo yāvad alam eva bhikṣavaḥ sarva-saṁskārān saṁskārituṁ alam virantum. tasmāt tarhi bhikṣavo ye te dharmā drṣṭa-dharma-hitāya saṁvartante drṣṭa-dharma-sukhāya samparāya-hitāya samparāya-sukhāya te bhikṣubhir udgrhya paryavāpya tathā tathā dhārayitavyā grāhayitavyā vācayitavyā yathēdam brahmacaryam cira-sthitikam syāt tad bhaviṣyati bahu-jana-hitāya bahu-jana-sukhāya lokānukampārthāya hitāya sukhāya deva-manuṣyānām. katame te dharmā drṣṭa-dharma-hitāya saṁvartante...tadyathā catvāri smṛty-upasthānāni catvāri samyak prahāṇāni catvāri rddhi-pādāḥ pañcendriyāni pañca bālāni sapta bodhy-aṅgāny āryāṣṭāṅgo mārgaḥ. Cf Divy 207 f.*

<sup>16</sup> He also notes that two other sections of this excerpt are found to parallel two passages in other parts of the Pali Canon. He notes that this is rare. (Gethin 2002:232)

the order? Whatever teachings I have had which were relevant to the order of monks, I have already taught them as the principles which must be practised, namely, [**the four establishments of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four bases of success, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of awakening, the noble eightfold path**]. As Buddha I do not have the closed-fistedness of a teacher who thinks he must conceal things as unsuitable to others. (Snellgrove, BSOAS 36, 1973:401)

**1.3 THE SEVEN SETS AND THE GREAT REFERENCES.** As a tool for settling doctrinal disputes and preserving the Teaching, the seven sets are at the heart of the “great references” (*mahāpadesā*).<sup>17</sup> The oldest set of the great references serving as quality control in the transmission of the Dharma is evidently that found in **the Pāsādika Sutta** (D 3:128) of the Dīgha Nikāya. The Sutta opens immediately after the death of “Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta,” when quarrels and disagreement split the Jain community. In this connection, the Buddha exhorts Cunda Samaṇ’uddesa<sup>18</sup> thus:

Cunda, one would be speaking rightly to say thus of this [life and Dharma]:<sup>19</sup> “The holy life is well proclaimed—accomplished and complete in every respect, without deficiency, without excess, well taught, whole and complete.”

Therefore, Cunda, all of you to whom I have taught these truths that I have directly known should gather together and recite them, comparing meaning with meaning, comparing text with text [comparing spirit with spirit, letter with letter], without dissension [without quarrelling], so that this holy life might endure and stand for a long time for the profit of the many, the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, and for the benefit, profit and happiness of devas and humans.

And what are the things that you should recite together? They are [the 37 factors leading to awakening], namely, [the seven sets]:<sup>20</sup>

the four focusses of mindfulness	( <i>cattāro satipaṭṭhānā</i> ).
the four right efforts	( <i>samma-p, padhānā</i> ).
the four paths to spiritual power	( <i>iddhi, pādā</i> ).
the five spiritual faculties	( <i>pañc’indriyāni</i> ).
the five spiritual powers	( <i>pañca, balāni</i> ).
the seven awakening factors	( <i>satta bojjhaṅgā</i> ).
the noble eightfold path	( <i>ariyo aṭṭh’āṅgiko maggo</i> ).

(D 29.16-18/3:127 f).

The emphasis here is on avoiding dispute and reaching clear agreement: the monks should not quarrel, and should not allow the teaching to be distorted.<sup>21</sup> Paralleling the four great references, the procedure laid out by **the Pāsādika Sutta** is as follows:

<sup>22</sup>And, Cunda, having assembled in harmony and without dissension, you should train yourselves thus—

<sup>17</sup> See **Mahāparinibbāna S** (D 16) = SD 9.11b.

<sup>18</sup> The younger brother of Sāriputta.

<sup>19</sup> Amplification following DA 3:911.

<sup>20</sup> These seven sets are given in full in **Sakul’udāyī S** (M 77.15-21/2:11 f) = SD 6.18 (2004) and as practised by various monks, in **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118.13/3:81) = SD 7.13.

<sup>21</sup> See Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, 2001:232 f.

<sup>22</sup> *Tesaṅ ca vo Cunda samaggānaṃ sammomadānānaṃ avivadamānāṃ sikkhitabbaṃ, aññataro sabrahma-cārī saṅghe dhammaṃ bhāseyya. Tatra ce tumhākaṃ evaṃ assa—1. atthaṅ c’eva micchā gaṇhāti, vyañjanāni ca micchā ropetī ti...; 2. atthaṃ hi kho micchā gaṇhāti, vyañjanāni sammā ropetī ti...; 3. atthaṃ hi kho sammā*

1. If, Cunda, some other colleague in the holy life were to speak Dharma in the assembly, if you should think that he has both grasped the sense wrongly and worded it wrongly,<sup>23</sup>...
2. ...he has grasped the sense wrongly but has worded it rightly,...
3. ...he has grasped the sense rightly but has worded it wrongly,—  
you should neither approve of it nor reject it, but should say to him:  
“**Regarding this sense, friend, this word or that is more appropriate?**  
**Regarding this wording, this sense or that sense is more appropriate?**”  
If he replies: “This sense is surely better worded like this than like that,” or “Of this wording, this sense is surely better than that,” then his words should be neither be praised nor dismissed, but **you should explain the correct meaning and wording to him carefully**.
4. ...but if you think that he has both grasped the sense rightly and worded it rightly, you should approve of his word, rejoice in it, saying, “Sadhu! [Excellent!]”  
Having approved of his word, having rejoiced in it, you should applaud and rejoice in him, saying,  
“It is a fortune for us, friend, a great fortune for us, friend, that we see<sup>24</sup> such a venerable companion in the holy life who is well versed in both the spirit and the letter!”  
(D 29.18-21/3:129; abridged)

**1.4 THE SEVEN SETS IN THE SĀMAGĀMA SUTTA.** The *Sāmagāma Sutta* (M 104)<sup>25</sup> is a sort of Majjhima Nikāya version of the Pāsādika Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya. Both Suttas open with mentioning the Buddha dwelling among the Sakyas, immediately after the death of the Jain leader, Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta (or Mahāvīra), when quarrels and disagreement split the Jain community. In both Suttas, both Cunda and Ānanda mention the incident to the Buddha. In the *Sāmagāma Sutta*, however, Ānanda concludes with a more specific point, and the Buddha responds:

[Ānanda:] “This occurs to me, venerable sir: Let not a dispute arise in the Sangha after the passing away of the Blessed One. Such a dispute would be to the detriment of the many, the unhappiness of the many, the loss, detriment and suffering of devas and humans.”

[The Buddha:] “What do you think, Ānanda? Those things that I have directly known and taught you, namely, the four focusses of mindfulness...the noble eightfold path—Ānanda, do you see any two monks who have differing opinions regarding them?” (M 104.4/2:245)

Ānanda replies no but suggests that after the Buddha’s passing those who live taking him as their refuge might become involved in dispute “in connection with livelihood” (*ajjh’ājīva*) and “in connection with the code of discipline” (*adhipātimokkha*),<sup>26</sup> and that this would be to the disadvantage of the many. The Buddha, however, replies:

“Ānanda, a dispute about livelihood or about the Pātimokkha would be trifling. But, Ānanda, should there arise in the Sangha a dispute about the path or the way, such a dispute would be to the detriment of the many, the unhappiness of the many, the loss, detriment and suffering of devas and humans!”  
(M 104.5/2:245)

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*gaṇhāti, vyañjanāni micchā ropetī ti—tassa n’eva abhinanditabbaṃ na paṭikkositabbaṃ. Anabhinanditvā appaṭikkositvā so evaṃ assa vacanīyo; 4. atthañ ñ’eva sammā gaṇhāti, vyañjanāni sammā ropetī ti.*

<sup>23</sup> “Worded,” *vyañjanāni... ropetī*, lit “propagated the phrase.” This n applies to this whole section.

<sup>24</sup> “(We) see,” *passāma*. On the significance on “seeing,” see SD 19.7e.

<sup>25</sup> M 104/2:243-251.

<sup>26</sup> *Ajjh’ājīva* and *adhipātimokkha*, see CPD which qu MA 4:38.

**1.5 THE SEVEN SETS IN THE KIN'TI SUTTA.** Similarly, **the Kin,ti Sutta** (M 103/2:238-243), focussing on the centrality of the seven sets forming the 37 “factors leading to awakening,” teaches ways of overcoming any disagreement regarding the spirit and the letter of the Dharma. The Sutta opens with the Buddha declaring:

Monks, what do you think of me? That the recluse Gotama teaches Dharma for the sake of robes? Or, that the recluse Gotama teaches Dharma for the sake of almsfood? Or, that the recluse Gotama teaches Dharma for the sake of lodgings? Or, that the recluse Gotama teaches Dharma for the sake of this or that existence [different states of being]? (M 103.2/2:238)

The monks reply that the Buddha “is compassionate, one seeks after our good; he teaches the Dharma out of compassion.”

“Therefore, monks, those things that I have directly known and taught you, namely, the four focusses of mindfulness...the noble eightfold path—in these things you should all train yourself in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing.

While you are training yourselves in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, let not any two monks differ in opinions regarding the Dharma (*abhidhamme*).”

(M 103.3-4/2:239)

The Buddha then shows how to deal with possible areas of discord: where there is disagreement about the meaning (*attha*) and the wording (*vyañjana*), that is, both together and each separately; where a monk commits some offence (*āpatti*) or transgression (*vītikkama*); where argument and ill feeling exist between groups (M 103.5-7/2:239-243).

As the 37 “actors leading to awakening,” the seven sets constitute the “path cultivation” (*magga,-bhāvanā*) (V 3:93, 4:126), a fact also reflected in **the Abhidharma,kośa Bhāṣya**.<sup>27</sup> It is clear, therefore, as Gethin wisely observes (referring to “the Dharma Mirror”),<sup>28</sup> that the appeal to the seven sets of teachings,

is not an appeal to *dhammas* as “teachings” or “doctrines”—at least not in the limited sense of a body of teachings or doctrines that can exist apart from the actual path and way. The nature of the appeal to the seven sets is a matter of appeal to practice and experience rather than an appeal to theory and scripture. The appeal ultimately rests on the fact that the seven sets embrace *dhammas* that the *bhikkhu* [or practitioner] can gain personal direct knowledge of, they constitute *dhamma* that is “to be known by the wise each one for himself” (*paccattam veditabbo viññūhi*). (Gethin 2001:236)

Gethin follows with an instructive discussion on the seven sets which should be fully read (2001:236-263).

This important list of dharmas forms the matrix (*māṭikā/māṭṛkā*), defined thus in the *Dictionary of Buddhism*:

a rubric or tabulated summary of contents used in the philosophical sections of the books of the Abhidharma Piṭaka. Originally a Vinaya term, used in the singular (Pāli, *māṭikā*), it meant a keyword. Used in the plural (also *māṭikā*), it means the keywords for a topic, and hence a list.

In other words, they are the living essence of the Buddha’s Teaching. The Abhidharma,kośa Bhāṣya refers these dharmas as that aspect of the True Teaching (*saddharma*) pertaining to realization (*adhi-gama*). The teachings of the Sūtra, the Vinaya and the Abhidharma, on the other hand are the “tradi-

<sup>27</sup> AbhkB tr Pruden 1988:1022 f.

<sup>28</sup> D 16.2.9/ 2:93; also Nm 1:132.

tions” (*āgama*) (AbhkB:P 1281).<sup>29</sup> It is through the 37 factors leading to awakening that the holy life (*brahma, cariya*) is able to endure and stand long (*addhaniya cira-t, thitika*, D 3:27).

#### Summary of the suttas in connection with the 7 sets\*

**Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta:** “You should learn them well, associate with them, cultivate them, develop them.” (D 16.3.50/2:119 f)

**Pāsādika Sutta:** “You should gather together and recite them [the 7 sets], comparing meaning with meaning, comparing text with text [comparing spirit with spirit, letter with letter], without dissension [without quarrelling]” (D 29.18/3:128).

**Sāmagāma Sutta:** “A dispute about livelihood or about the Pātimokkha would be trifling. But, Ānanda, should there arise in the Sangha a dispute about the path or the way, such a dispute would be to the detriment of the many...” (M 104.5/2:245)

**Kin,ti Sutta:** “You should all train yourself in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing... let not any two monks differ in opinions regarding the Dharma” (M 103.4/2:239)

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\*The first three suttas here are the oldest references to the method of authentication of the Buddha’s Teaching; the second stage in this development is found in the **Peṭakōpadesa** and the **Nettipakaraṇa** [10c]; the third stage is found in the **Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** [4.7-11] and the **Commentaries**.

## 2 The 37 limbs of awakening<sup>30</sup>

**2.1 THE “LIMBS” IN THE PĀLI CANON.** The Pali term *bodhi, pakkhiya, dhammā* literally means “states on the side of awakening,” that is, they are conducive to spiritual development and help one to gain awakening. Although the phrase is very rare in the Suttas, it is a common term for the 37 factors, which is a comprehensive list of the Buddha’s teaching in terms of doctrine, found in a number of early Sūtras and Vinaya texts.<sup>31</sup> These factors are sometimes translated as “requisites of awakening” because they conduce to the attainment of awakening, that is, the knowledge of the four supramundane paths (stream-winning, once-return, non-return, arhathood). These 37 factors are divided into 7 sets, which we will look at in this study.

**The 37 limbs of awakening (*satta, timsa bodhi, pakkhiyā dhammā*)** are mentioned as a set some 74 times in the Vinaya Piṭaka and the Nikāyas, representing some 27 distinct occasions when these 7 sets of teachings are cited.<sup>32</sup> In the **Mahā Sakul’udāyī Sutta** (M 77), five reasons are given why the Buddha’s disciples esteem and rely on him (M 77.10/2:9). The fifth of these reasons is that the Buddha explains to his disciples the various spiritual paths.<sup>33</sup> The first 7 sections [§§15-21] of this teaching deal with wholesome states that are as a set is known as “the limbs of awakening,” but not so mention-

<sup>29</sup> See Gethin 2001:56 f & K Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, Kelaniya, 2002:7 f.

<sup>30</sup> The section onwards is a rev ed of Intro to **Mahā Sakul’udāyī S** (M 77.15-21) = SD 6.18 Introd.

<sup>31</sup> V 2:240, 3:93, 4:26; D 16/2:120, 28/3:102, 29/3:127 f; M 77/2:11 f, 103/2:238 f; S 22.81/3:96, 22.101/-3:153 f, 45.155/5:49 f; A 7.67.1/4:125-127, 8.19.17/4:203, 10.90/5:175 f, U 56; MĀ T476c20-25, T753c6-7; T7 (Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra tr), 193a2-3; SĀ T67a28-c1, T87c2-5; cf EĀ T763b1 f.

<sup>32</sup> Gethin (2001:229) gives the following references: V 2:236-241 = A 4:197-294 = 204-208 = U 51-64 (4 “times”; 1 “occasion”). V 3:93, 94, 95, 97 (4 “times,” 1 “occasion”). D 2:120; 3:102, 127 (3 “times”; 3 “occasions”). M 2:11, 238, 245; 3:81; 289, 196 (6 “times”; 6 “occasions”); S 3:96, 153 f; 4:359-373 (34 “times”); 5 49 f, \*54 (3 times), \*135 f, \*138, \*191, \*240, \*242, \*246, \*250, \*252, \*291, \*308 f (50 “times”; 11 “occasions”). A 1:39 f, 295-297; 4:125-127; 5:175 (4 “times”; 4 “occasions”). An asterisk before a reference indicates that the occurrence is lost in the abbreviation of the text.

<sup>33</sup> M 77.15-37/211-22. See Gethin 2001:266 f.

ed there. These limbs are explained in the Visuddhi,magga as comprising the following seven sets of dharmas [1].<sup>34</sup>

**2.2 IMPORTANCE OF THE “7 SETS” FORMULA.** As mentioned earlier, the list of the 7 sets are found in a number of early Buddhist Sūtras and Vinaya texts [1.1]. These 7 sets in fact form the Buddha’s teaching in a nutshell, his central teachings common to all the early schools.<sup>35</sup> Johannes Bronkhorst goes on to note that

It seems clear that this is an early, perhaps the earliest, list of the type that came to be called *mātrkā*/P *māṭikā* and formed the basis for the later Abhidharma works. The connexion between this list and Abhidharma seems confirmed by a passage in the *Kinti Sutta* (M 2:239) which speaks of monks who have been trained in the items of this list and then disagree about Abhidharma.<sup>36</sup> (Bronkhorst, “Dharma and Abhidharma,” 1985:305)

**The Kinti Sutta** (M 103) records that the Buddha, after listing the 7 sets, declares to the monks (and all practioners) that

in these things you should all train in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing.

While you are training in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, two monks might make different assertions with regard to the Dharma (*abhidhamme*)...

(M 103.3-4/2:239 f)

The Buddha goes on to point out how the monks should settle any differences regarding the spirit [meaning] (*attha*) or the letter [phrasing] (*vyāñjana*) of the teaching by amicably reasoning them out. The Majjhima Commentary glosses *abhidhamme* as referring to the 7 sets (MA 4:29). This important passage<sup>37</sup> on the resolution of doctrinal problems is a good example of early Buddhist hermeneutics is found in a slightly expanded version in **the Pāsādika Sutta** (D 29).<sup>38</sup>

## THE SEVEN SETS: A SUMMARY

### 3 Satipaṭṭhāna

*Satipaṭṭhāna* is properly resolved as *sati* (mindfulness) + *upaṭṭhāna* (application), although *paṭṭhāna* (setting up, foundation), too, gives it a similar sense. In practical terms, the word “focus” best describes both the actions and the results when *satipaṭṭhāna* is applied. The four focusses of mindfulness are:

1. the contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*);
2. the contemplation of feeling (*vedanā’nupassanā*);
3. the contemplation of mind (*cittānupassanā*) and
4. the contemplation of phenomena (*dhammānupassana*).

The four focusses of mindfulness form a complete system of mindfulness (“meditation”) practice for the development of calm and insight. The method is given at length in **the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna**

<sup>34</sup> Vism 22.33-43/678-682. For a study of these sets, see SD 10. The mnemonic for memorizing this set of 7 is “Triple 4, double 5, 7-8”.

<sup>35</sup> See J Bronkhorst, “Dharma and Abhidharma,” 1982:305.

<sup>36</sup> “Perhaps *abhi-dhamme* in this passage must be understood as two words, ‘as regards the *dhamma*’; cf CPD sv *abhidhamma*.” (Bronkhorst’s fn)

<sup>37</sup> M 103.5-8/2:239-241.

<sup>38</sup> D 29.18-21/3:128 f. Another famous early hermetical tool are the four “great references” (*mahāpadesa*), of which there are two, the **Vinaya** version (V 1:250, 2:118) and the Sutta version (D 16.4.7-11/2:123 f; A 4.180/ 2:167-170). See **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16) = SD 9 Intro (11).

Sutta (D 22) and the **Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10), and mentioned in a collection of short suttas forming the **Satipaṭṭhāna Saṃyutta** (S 47).<sup>39</sup>

#### 4 Padhāna

*Padhāna* is a synonym of *vāyāma*, both meaning “effort” (*virīya*).<sup>40</sup> While the former, as *samma-p, padhāna*, is used for the four right (or “supreme”) efforts as an independent set (as in the Mahā Sakul’udāyī Sutta, M 77), the latter, *sammā, vāyāma* is applied only as a subset (the sixth factor) of the noble eightfold path. It is actually only one mental factor, effort (*virīya*), but performs four functions. The four right efforts or endeavours are:

- [5] 1. the effort to prevent unarisen evil states from arising (*saṃvara padhāna*);
- [6] 2. the effort to abandon arisen evil states (*pahāna padhāna*);
- [7] 3. the effort to cultivate unarisen wholesome states (*bhāvanā padhāna*); and
- [8] 4. the effort to maintain the arisen wholesome states (*anurakkhanā padhāna*).

The commentarial listing inverts the first two efforts.<sup>41</sup>

The 4 right endeavours are explained in the **Samma-p, padhāna Vibhaṅga**<sup>42</sup> and fully commented on in its Commentary.<sup>43</sup> See also the Commentaries to the **Mahā Sakul’udāyī Sutta**<sup>44</sup> and the **Padhāna Sutta**.<sup>45</sup>

#### 5 Iddhi, pāda

The word *iddhi* here signifies all spiritual and supramundane states that one needs to master in the practice of the Buddha’s teaching. The main method of mastering the Buddha’s teaching is called the bases of spiritual success (*iddhi, pāda*), also variously translated as “the means of accomplishment” and “the path to spiritual power.”<sup>46</sup> The four bases of spiritual success are:

- [9] 1. the desire to act (*chanda*);
- [10] 2. effort (*virīya*);
- [11] 3. mind or consciousness (*citta*); and
- [12] 4. investigation (ie wisdom) (*vīmaṃsā*).

In post-canonical Buddhist psychology, they are also called “the four predominants” (*cattāro adhipatī*), that is, factors that dominate their conascent states (that arise together) in undertaking and accomplishing difficult or important tasks. A predominant has total control of the whole *citta* (mind-moment), while a faculty (*indriya*) [5] controls only in its respective sphere. As such, several faculties may be present in a single *citta*, but only one predominant can be present at any time.<sup>47</sup>

The *iddhi, pādā* exists on both mundane and supramundane states.<sup>48</sup> On a more worldly level, the *iddhi, pādā* are the “steps to success.” First step to success is a proactive attitude, the desire to act. This

<sup>39</sup> See SD 13. For the sutta and its comys, see Soma Thera, *The Way of Mindfulness*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1981. An easy modern approach is found in Nyanaponika, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, London: Rider, 1962, & U Silananda, *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, Boston: Wisdom Books, 1990.

<sup>40</sup> This dharma is discussed further in SD 10.2.

<sup>41</sup> Eg Abhs 7.6 = Abhs:SR 179 = Abhs:BRS 279. For the Pāli, see §16n below.

<sup>42</sup> Vbh ch 8/208-215.

<sup>43</sup> VbhA 288-302.

<sup>44</sup> MA 3:243 ff.

<sup>45</sup> A 2.1/1:47-49; AA 2:93.

<sup>46</sup> This dharma is discussed further in SD 10.3.

<sup>47</sup> The four predominants (*adhipatī*) are the mental concomitants (*cetasika*) desire (*chanda*, the desire to act), effort (*virīya*), consciousness (*citta*), and investigation (*vīmaṃsā*, ie wisdom). See *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma* (Abhs:BRS) 274 f for other details.

<sup>48</sup> Narada Thera, in his *A Manual of Abhidhamma* (tr of Abhs), 4<sup>th</sup> rev ed 1979:344, errs in saying that “only when these four are present in the supramundane consciousness are they termed Iddhipāda.” See Ledi Sayadaw, *The Requisites of Enlightenment* (Wheel 171-174, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1971) & Abhs:BRS 280 & 374 n4.

should be followed up with the proper effort, and the perseverance of a mind fixed on the goal. As the effort progress, one should examine one's progress and adjust one strategy and energy according to the investigation.

The 4 bases of spiritual success are explained in the **Iddhi,pāda Vibhaṅga**<sup>49</sup> and its Commentary (VbhA 303-308), and briefly commented on in the Commentary to **the Ceto,khila Sutta** (M 16; MA 2:69).

## 6 Indriya

The faculties (*indriya*)<sup>50</sup> and the powers (*bala*)<sup>51</sup> comprise the same five factors, but they function differently:

- [13] 1. faith (*saddh'indriya*),
- [14] 2. effort (*viriy'indriya*),
- [15] 3. mindfulness (*sat'indriya*),
- [16] 4. concentration (*samādh'indriya*), and
- [17] 5. wisdom (*paññ'indriya*).

While the “faculties” *control their respective sphere*, the same “powers” are *unshakable by their opposites*. As such, the five faculties exercise control in their respective spheres of resolution (*adhi-mokkha*), exertion (*paggaha*), awareness (*upaṭṭhāna*), non-distraction (*avikkhepa*) and discernment [vision] (*dassana*), which help to overcome their respective opposites of indecision, laziness, heedlessness, agitation and delusion.

In the cultivation of the faculties, that is, in spiritual practice, faith and wisdom are to be balanced so as to avoid blind belief and mere intellectual cleverness; effort and concentration are to be balanced to avoid mental restlessness and sluggishness. Mindfulness is the key factor that keeps all the other factors in balance and harmony.

The 5 spiritual faculties often appear in the Canon but are not explained in detail in the Nikāyas<sup>52</sup> or the Abhidhamma Commentaries and only briefly explained in **the Visuddhi,magga** (Vism 22.35, 37/679).

## 7 Bala

The 5 spiritual powers,<sup>53</sup> like the spiritual faculties,<sup>54</sup> are not dealt with in detail in the Nikāyas or the Abhidhamma Commentaries, and only briefly explained in **the Visuddhi,magga**.<sup>55</sup> Although there is no detailed mention of the spiritual faculties and the spiritual powers in the Vinaya and Nikāyas, they actually constitute some of the most basic Buddhist doctrines as evident from the table in the Introduction above.<sup>56</sup> While a faculty (*indriya*) is essentially active but a power (*bala*) passive, the latter is “unshakable and unassailable by its opposite” (Gethin 2001:145)<sup>57</sup> The five powers are:

<sup>49</sup> Vbh ch 9/216-276.

<sup>50</sup> This dharma is discussed further in SD 10.4.

<sup>51</sup> This dharma is discussed further in SD 10.5.

<sup>52</sup> Gethin 2001:355 f (App) gives the occurrences of the spiritual faculties (3/4/5 etc) thus: V 1:294; D 3:239, 278, 284; M 1:19 f, 164, 479; S 5:193-204, 219-243; A 1:42-44, 118 f, 2:141, 149-152, 3:277 f, 281 f, 4:225, 264-266, 5:56; Tha 352, 437, 595, 672, 1114; Thī 170 f. Nm 115, 233; Pm 1-34. Dhs passim; Vbh 122-34; Kvu 589-592; Yam: Indriya,yamaka; Paṭ passim; Peṭk 37, 41, [48, 51 f, 69,] 71 f, 88, 97 f, 128 f, 171, 183, 185 f; Nett 7, 19, 28, 100 f; Miln 33 ff, 43. Corrections and additions are given within square brackets.

<sup>53</sup> See SD 10.5. Gethin 2001:356 (App) gives the occurrences of the spiritual powers (2/4/5/7 etc) thus: V 1:294; D 3:213, 229, 253; S 5:249-253; A 2:141, 3:10-12, 245, 277 f, 281 f, 4:3 f. Tha 352, 437, 494, 672, 1114; [Thī] 170 f.; Nm 14, 151; Pm 2:166-176; Peṭk 37, 79, 179, 189; Nett 100 f. Corrections and additions are given within square brackets.

<sup>54</sup> This dharma is discussed further in SD 10.4.

<sup>55</sup> Vism 22.36 f/679.

<sup>56</sup> On the ubiquity of the spiritual faculties, see Gethin 2001:138-140.

<sup>57</sup> See Gethin 2001:140-145.

- |      |                  |                              |
|------|------------------|------------------------------|
| [18] | 1. faith         | ( <i>saddhā bala</i> ),      |
| [19] | 2. effort        | ( <i>virīya bala</i> ),      |
| [20] | 3. mindfulness   | ( <i>sati bala</i> ),        |
| [21] | 4. concentration | ( <i>samādhi bala</i> ), and |
| [22] | 5. wisdom        | ( <i>paññā bala</i> ).       |

## 8 Bojjhaṅga

The 7 awakening factors<sup>58</sup> are

- |      |                            |   |
|------|----------------------------|---|
| [23] | 1. mindfulness             | ( <i>sati sambojjhaṅga</i> );           |
| [24] | 2. investigation of states | ( <i>dhamma, vicaya sambojjhaṅga</i> ); |
| [25] | 3. effort                  | ( <i>virīya sambojjhaṅga</i> );         |
| [26] | 4. zest (joyful interest)  | ( <i>pīti sambojjhaṅga</i> );           |
| [27] | 5. tranquillity            | ( <i>passaddhi sambojjhaṅga</i> );      |
| [28] | 6. concentration           | ( <i>samādhi sambojjhaṅga</i> ); and    |
| [29] | 7. equanimity              | ( <i>upekkhā sambojjhaṅga</i> ).        |

They are explained in the Commentary to **the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta** (MA 1:82-84). Of the seven factors, “investigation of states” (*dhamma, vicaya*), that is, insight into material and mental states as they really are, is a designation for wisdom (*paññā*). “Tranquillity” (*passaddhi*) means calm both of consciousness (*citta, passaddhi*) and of the mental body (*kāya, passaddhi*).<sup>59</sup> Equanimity (*upekkhā*) here means equipoise or mental neutrality (*tatra, majjhataṭṭā*), one of the universal beautiful (*sobhana*) *cetasikas*, and not worldly neutral feeling.

The three factors of investigation (*dhamma, vicaya*), effort (*virīya*) and zest (*pīti*) counteract torpor. The three factors of tranquillity (*passaddhi*), concentration (*samādhi*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*) counteract mental agitation. Mindfulness (*sati*) keeps the two sets of factors in a harmonious balance.

## 9 Magga

The noble eightfold path comprises the following factors:

- |      |                        |                            |
|------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| [30] | 1. right view          | ( <i>sammā diṭṭhi</i> );   |
| [31] | 2. right thought       | ( <i>sammā saṅkappa</i> ); |
| [32] | 3. right speech        | ( <i>sammā vācā</i> );     |
| [33] | 4. right action        | ( <i>sammā kammantā</i> ); |
| [34] | 5. right livelihood    | ( <i>sammā ājīva</i> );    |
| [35] | 6. right effort        | ( <i>sammā vāyāma</i> );   |
| [36] | 7. right mindfulness   | ( <i>sammā sati</i> ); and |
| [37] | 8. right concentration | ( <i>sammā samādhi</i> ).  |

The **Mahā Cattārisaka S** (M 117) says that right view (*sammā, diṭṭhi*) comes first because it underlies each and every other factor, without which, the factor cannot be “right” (*sammā*), that is, contributive to the going up the path to liberation.<sup>60</sup> Right view is also the *cetasika* of wisdom effecting the proper understanding of the four noble truths. Right thought (or intention) (*sammā, saṅkappa*) is the *cetasika* of initial application (*vitakka*) directed toward renunciation, lovingkindness and non-violence.

Path factors (3)-(5) are identical with the three abstinences (*virati*), that is,

- (1) Natural abstinence (*sampatta, virati*). This is the abstinence from evil when the opportunity arises to do so, in terms of one social position, age, educational level, etc. For example, one refrains from theft out of the concern that one’s reputation would be hurt if one is caught.

<sup>58</sup> See Gethin 2001:146-189 (ch 5).

<sup>59</sup> See Abhs:BRS 85-88, 281.

<sup>60</sup> See SD 6.10 (2004).

- (2) Abstinence by undertaking (*samādāna,virati*). This is the abstinence from evil when one has undertaken the precepts, such as the five precepts of abstaining against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech and intoxication.
- (3) Abstinence by eradication (*samuccheda,virati*). This is the abstinence associated with the supramundane path consciousness that arises destroying the disposition towards evil. While the previous two are mundane, this is supramundane.

Each level of abstinence are effected in three ways, that is, by right speech (*sammā,vācā*), right action (*sammā kammantā*), and right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*).

Right effort (*sammā vāyāma*) is the same as the four endeavours (*padhāna*) [3], also called the four endeavours (*samma-p, padhāna*). Right mindfulness (*sammā sati*) is the same as the four focusses of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) [2]. Right concentration (*sammā samādi*) is defined in terms of the four dhyanas (*jhāna*) (eg D 22/2:313).

The noble eightfold path is commented on in **the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta** Commentary (MA 1:105) and very briefly explained from a different angle in **the Magga Vibhaṅga** Commentary (VbhA 319).

An authoritative monograph on the limbs of awakening is *The Buddhist Path to Awakening* by Rupert Gethin (2001 esp chs 7-9).

## 10 The 5 spiritual faculties and the factors of the 7 sets

Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, in *The Wings of Awakening*, presents a table of references for **the 7 sets classed under the 5 spiritual faculties** (1996:xii), the names of which have been standardized following those used in this series:

### Faith (*saddhā*)

Right speech	(Noble eightfold path)
Right action	(Noble eightfold path)
Right livelihood	(Noble eightfold path)
Zeal (desire or will-power)	(Base of spiritual power)

### Effort (*virīya*)

Right effort	(Noble eightfold path)
Four right endeavours	(The four endeavours)
Effort	(Base of spiritual power)
Effort	(Awakening factor)

### Mindfulness (*sati*)

The 4 focusses of mindfulness	
Right mindfulness	(Noble eightfold path)
Mind (consciousness)	(Base of spiritual power)

### Concentration (*samādhi*)

The 4 bases of spiritual power	
Right concentration	(Noble eightfold path)
Zest	(Awakening factor)
Tranquillity	(Awakening factor)
Concentration	(Awakening factor)
Equanimity	(Awakening factor)

### Wisdom (*paññā*)

Right view	(Noble eightfold path)
Right thought (intention)	(Noble eightfold path)

Investigation of states <sup>61</sup>	(Awakening factor)
Investigation	(Base of spiritual success)
Equanimity	(Awakening factor)

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[See also SD 9 Bibliography.]

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<sup>61</sup> "Investigation of states," or "Dharma-analysis." "Dharma" here refers to physical and mental states.