

# The Satipatthana Sutta

A Translation by Mahabodhi

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*This is an attempt at translating the Satipatthana Sutta, but with a difference. Because the original text is quite condensed and in places not completely clear as a practice, I have experimented with inserting additional material taken from elsewhere in the Pali Canon or from my experience of practice. I hope this helps the dharma be revealed. There is a precedent. Bhante did something similar creating his 'Levels of Awareness.' An example of something 'missing' in the Sutta that I have included is mental feeling which in the Sutta of the Dart is the second dart and in the Questions of King Milinda is what the arahant doesn't experience. My insertions, that are not a direct translation, are underlined.*

## The Satipatthana Sutta

The Buddha at one time was staying in the region of the Kurus at a market town named Kammassadhamma. While there he gave the following discourse to his followers:

'There is a comprehensive and complete path that leads directly to the realisation of Nirvana. It is called the four foundations of mindfulness. By following it humankind is led to a state of purification where there is no more sorrow, distress, pain or sadness.'

'On this path a practitioner applies mindfulness with passion and precision to four things. With mindfulness they passionately and correctly contemplate body, feelings, emotional and mental states, and objects present in the mind. In this way they leave behind their neurotic infatuations with the world <sup>1</sup>.'

### Mindfulness of Body <sup>2</sup>

#### Breathing

'In order to mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplate body, they set up mindfulness before them, of their body and physical environment. They select a suitable place within that environment for meditation, in a forest or at the root of a tree, an empty place, and there they set

up their meditation posture, sitting cross-legged and holding the body erect <sup>3</sup>.'

'With mindfulness of body and environment established, they choose to place their attention on the detail of their breathing, on whether they are breathing in or out.

They mindfully, passionately and correctly observe when they are breathing in, and likewise when they are breathing out.'

'The direction of their breath being established, they choose to place their attention on the greater detail of the length of each breath.'

'They mindfully, passionately and correctly observe when they are breathing a long breath, and likewise when they are breathing a short breath.'

'The length of their breath being established, they access their bodily experience in the present moment, in the time-frame in which it exists, enveloping their whole body with mindfulness <sup>4</sup>.'

'Conscious of breathing in or breathing out, they are conscious of all of their body experience, and the state it is in, in the present moment.'

'The state of their body being established, they consciously act where necessary to change their bodily experience, and just as relaxation is like the

unfurling of a fist, they apply the conditions that calm their bodily processes.'

'Conscious of breathing in or breathing out, they calm their bodily processes <sup>5</sup>. Like a skilled craftsman attending closely to detail, they know how to craft their body to be a vehicle supportive of mindfulness <sup>6</sup>.'

'They proceed, mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplating body. They are mindful of that body which is internal <sup>7</sup> in the sense of being under their control, and of that body which is external in the sense of not being under their control, and they correctly contemplate the relationship between the two through the knowledge of which they can navigate a calm body through the world. They proceed, correctly determining the factors that support mindfulness of the body, and correctly determining the factors that work against mindfulness of the body, and the combined effect of every factor on mindfulness of the body <sup>8</sup>. Alternatively they proceed, weighing their attention to mindfulness of the body with their attention to mindfulness of other conditions, so that it is supportive of overall knowledge and awareness <sup>9</sup>. In this way the practitioner leaves behind their neurotic infatuations with the world.'

#### commentary:

- 1 By practicing the four foundations of mindfulness they cease to be reliant on the world 'suits them' but instead, as this is a meditation practice, they 'suit themselves to the world.'
- 2 What is 'body'? The commentaries indicate that 'body' is 'affected by the weather' and so on. In other words it is experiential. But the text also talks about 'contemplating body internally and externally'. So I don't think 'body' just means 'the physical body'. It is obvious we also need to take the physical environment into account. We do this when we choose a place to meditate, but also when we take care how we look after our body as we go about in the world. It is fair to assume then that 'body' includes our physical body but also our tactile environment.
- 3 And applying everything else they know about meditation posture as well.
- 4 If body exists in the present moment there needs to be a way to help access it. When you 'know that you know' the detail of the breath you at least know your

- attention is in the present moment, and that is necessary before you can experience the body there.
- 5 They establish samattha. I am assuming that 'calming' includes generating vitality along with relaxation in the context of postural integrity.
- 6 Although in the Sutta the analogy is used between the skilled turner of a lathe knowing which 'turn' he is making and the practitioner knowing what the length of their breath is, each is also making something. The practitioner is 'making' a calm body that is a vehicle for *samattha* in the mind.
- 7 This is the 'internal, external, internal and external' part of the satipatthana refrain - see footnote 2. The original text has 'the practitioner contemplates the body internally, externally and both internally and externally.' I propose there needs to be a solid reason why this phrase is repeated as part of a 'summing up' in each section. With each foundation there are necessary distinctions to be made and these I think can satisfactorily account for the section that includes 'internal and external'. For instance to work on calming ones body it is necessary to distinguish

between the aspect of bodily experience that is ones body (which one has direct control over) and the aspect that is the external world (which one hasn't direct control over but has to work within). Similarly with feelings, one has influence over certain feelings (e.g. one has influence over how one thinks about life which influences ones mood). Those feelings need to be distinguished from other types of feeling over which one hasn't much direct influence (e.g. physical pain due to an injury). It makes sense to see the first type as 'feelings that are contemplated internally' and the second type as 'feelings that are contemplated externally.' Likewise with mental states it is necessary to know those mental states it is appropriate to take responsibility for (namely ones own, which should be seen as 'internal') and those it is not appropriate to take responsibility for (such as other peoples', which should be seen as 'external'). In every satipatthana valuable information is gained by working mindfully at the boundary between these 'internal' and 'external' aspects (e.g. with mindfully changing any physical discomfort that you can change but also accepting

- 8 what you cannot change.)
- 8 Such as interest, clarity, positivity and their opposites - the other satipatthanas.
- 9 The original text has: 'Or else, mindfulness that "there is body" is present in them just to the extent necessary for knowledge and awareness.' One applies mindfulness of body *just to the extent* necessary for knowledge and awareness. This implies it is possible to 'overdo' mindfulness of body. How does this fit in with Bhante's comment that with mindfulness (as the fifth spiritual faculty) there is 'no danger of getting caught up in an unbalanced enthusiasm for it' (Wisdom beyond Words p156.) I think mindfulness the spiritual faculty corresponds to 'knowledge and awareness', which we could call overall mindfulness as opposed to mindfulness of individual foundations such as body or feeling. These may be 'overdone' or neglected in relation to each other. As for instance when we are in a state of anxiety and are very aware of our feelings but find it hard to cope because we are not grounded in our body.

## Bodily Position <sup>10</sup>

'When the practitioner is not meditating on the breath but is moving about in the world, they maintain mindfulness of the body by attending to the detail of their bodily position as experienced in the present moment. When they are walking, they clearly know they are walking. When they are standing, they clearly know they are standing. When they are sitting, they clearly know they are sitting. When they are lying down, they clearly know they are lying down. Likewise they proceed in this way when in any bodily position. And as in sitting meditation they continue to bring mindfulness to their whole body in the present moment, and as relaxation can be seen as the simple unfurling of a fist, they look for and apply conditions in the present moment that calm the body down <sup>11</sup>.'

'They proceed in this way, mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplating body. They are mindful of that body which is internal in the sense of being under their control, and of that body which is external in the sense of not being under their control, and they correctly contemplate the relationship between the two through the knowledge of which they can navigate a calm body through the world. They proceed, correctly determining the factors that support mindfulness of the body, and correctly determining the factors that work against mindfulness of the body, and the combined effect of every factor on mindfulness of the body. Alternatively they proceed, weighing their attention to mindfulness of the body with their attention to mindfulness of other conditions, so that it is supportive of overall knowledge and awareness. In this way the practitioner leaves behind their neurotic infatuations with the world.'

## Full Attention to the Body

'In the same way, when they are engaged in a range of activities, they consciously and correctly discern what they are doing. Whether they are moving forward, moving backward, looking forward, looking backward, bending, stretching, carrying objects, eating, drinking, chewing, savouring, going to the toilet, walking, standing still, falling asleep, waking up, speaking or staying silent, they consciously and correctly discern what they are doing. And as in sitting meditation they continue to bring mindfulness to their whole body in the present moment, and as relaxation can be seen as the simple unfurling of a fist, they look for and apply conditions in the present moment that calm the body down.'

'They proceed in this way, mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplating body. They are mindful of that body which is internal in the sense of being under their control, and of that body which is external in the sense of not being under their control, and they correctly contemplate the relationship between the two through the knowledge of which they can navigate a calm body through the world. They proceed, correctly determining the factors that support mindfulness of the body, and correctly determining the factors that work against mindfulness of the body, and the combined effect of every factor on mindfulness of the body. Alternatively they proceed, weighing their attention to mindfulness of the body with their attention to mindfulness of other conditions, so that it is supportive of overall knowledge and awareness. In this way the practitioner leaves behind their neurotic infatuations with the world.'

## Attention to Bodily Parts

'In the same way, the practitioner reviews all the parts of their body from the crown of their head to the soles of their feet along with its manifold

impurities. They mindfully observe "Here are head-hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bone, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, mesentery, bowels, stomach, excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, tallow, saliva, snot, synovial fluid, urine" just as if they were a person with good eyesight looking into a bag full of various kinds of grains and correctly identifying "Here is hill-rice, paddy, green gram, kidney beans, sesame, husked rice" And as in sitting meditation they continue to bring mindfulness to the whole body in the present moment, and as relaxation can be seen as the simple unfurling of a fist, they look for and apply conditions in the present moment that calm the body down.'

'They proceed in this way, mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplating body. They are mindful of that body which is internal in the sense of being under their control, and of that body which is external in the sense of not being under their control, and they correctly contemplate the relationship between the two through the knowledge of which they can navigate a calm body through the world. They proceed, correctly determining the factors that support mindfulness of the body, and correctly determining the factors that work against mindfulness of the body, and the combined effect of every factor on mindfulness of the body. Alternatively they proceed, weighing their attention to mindfulness of the body with their attention to mindfulness of other conditions, so that it is supportive of overall knowledge and awareness. In this way the practitioner leaves behind their neurotic infatuations with the world.'

## Attention to Material Elements

'In the same way, the practitioner reviews their body, however it may be disposed, in terms of the elemental qualities, earth, water, fire and air. As if

they were a skilled butcher who had just slaughtered a cow and was sitting at a crossroads with the carcass divided into portions, the practitioner reviews their body in terms of the elements, earth, water, fire and air: "This body is composed of the earth element, the water element, the fire element and the air element." And as in sitting meditation they continue to bring mindfulness to their whole body in the present moment, and as relaxation can be seen as the simple unfurling of a fist, they look for and apply conditions in the present moment that calm the body down.'

'They proceed in this way mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplating body. They are mindful of that body which is internal in the sense of being under their control, and of that body which is external in the sense of not being under their control, and they correctly contemplate the relationship between the two through the knowledge of which they can navigate a calm body through the world. They proceed, correctly determining the factors that support mindfulness of the body, and correctly determining the factors that work against mindfulness of the body, and the combined effect of every factor on mindfulness of the body. Alternatively they proceed, weighing their attention to mindfulness of the body with their attention to mindfulness of other conditions, so that it is supportive of overall knowledge and awareness. In this way the practitioner leaves behind their neurotic infatuations with the world.'

## Corpse Meditations

'In the same way, the practitioner, if they were to see a human corpse thrown on the ground, left out in the open for a few days, which was bloated, discoloured and festering, looking at their own body they would correctly determine "My body will become like that. It is not exempt from that fate." And as in sitting meditation they continue to bring mindfulness to their whole body in the present moment, and as relaxation can be seen as the simple unfurling of a fist, they look for and apply conditions in the present moment that calm the body down.'

'They proceed in this way mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplating body. They are mindful of that body which is internal in the sense of being under their control, and of that body which is external in the sense of not being under their control, and they correctly contemplate the relationship between the two through the

## commentary cont:

<sup>10</sup> The practice of mindfulness of breathing while sitting in meditation posture is the least complex situation in which to generate mindfulness of body. It is therefore the best conditions in which to set about establishing it. From that basis we can then move on to more and more complex situations while trying to maintain mindfulness of body. I think the successive sections of the 'body' section of the Sutta: bodily position, full attention to the body, and so on, successively represent increasingly complex situations in which to maintain mindfulness of body.

For instance with 'attention to bodily parts' it is likely that uncomfortable feelings such as revulsion may become involved and we will have to try to ground our awareness while these are going on. And in the final section, when we see or imagine a pile of dust where a person we have known has been, we are least likely to stay calm. These six sections of mindfulness of body I suggest represent the development and maintenance of samatha under increasing strong conditions for vipassana. They represent the systematic cultivation of *samatha*: to practice being calm under all circumstances,

beginning with the simplest situation and extending to the most complex and challenging.

<sup>11</sup> I have added this insert at the end of each of the 'body' sections even though it is not there in the text. It seems reasonable that if one concentrates on calming ones bodily processes while doing the mindfulness of breathing then one extends that into all 'bodily' activity. In any of the six sections it is possible to get distracted from bodily awareness into thoughts and feelings, possibly worry, but it is then always possible and indeed necessary to keep coming back to the body, physically let go and calm the body.

knowledge of which they can navigate a calm body through the world. In this way the practitioner leaves behind their neurotic infatuations with the world.'

'In the same way, the practitioner, if they were to see a human corpse thrown on the ground, left out in the open, which had been eaten by crows, hawks, vultures, or by dogs or jackals or various other creatures, looking at their own body they would correctly determine "My body will become like that. It is not exempt from that fate." And as in sitting meditation they continue to bring mindfulness to their whole body in the present moment, and as relaxation can be seen as the simple unfurling of a fist, they look for and apply conditions in the present moment that calm the body down.'

'They proceed in this way mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplating body. They are mindful of that body which is internal in the sense of being under their control, and of that body which is external in the sense of not being under their control, and they correctly contemplate the relationship between the two through the knowledge of which they can navigate a calm body through the world. In this way the practitioner leaves behind their neurotic infatuations with the world.'

'In the same way, the practitioner, if they were to see thrown on the ground, left out in the open, a skeleton connected by sinews with flesh and blood on it, or a fleshless skeleton still connected by sinews and smeared with blood, or a skeleton with no flesh or blood left on it, or a random collection of bones lying on the ground, a hand bone here, a

spine there, looking at their own body they would correctly determine "My body will become like that. It is not exempt from that fate." And as in sitting meditation they continue to bring mindfulness to their whole body in the present moment, and as relaxation can be seen as the simple unfurling of a fist, they look for and apply conditions in the present moment that calm the body down.'

'They proceed in this way mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplating body. They are mindful of that body which is internal in the sense of being under their control, and of that body which is external in the sense of not being under their control, and they correctly contemplate the relationship between the two through the knowledge of which they can navigate a calm body through the world. In this way the practitioner leaves behind their neurotic infatuations with the world.'

'In the same way, the practitioner, if they were to see thrown on the ground, left out in the open, whitened human bones, looking like shells, year-old bones piled up, bones rotting away to powder, looking at their own body they would correctly determine "My body will become like that. It is not exempt from that fate." And as in sitting meditation they continue to bring mindfulness to their whole body in the present moment, and as relaxation can be seen as the simple unfurling of a fist, they look for and apply conditions in the present moment that calm the body down.'

'They proceed in this way mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplating body. They are mindful of that body which is internal in the sense of being under their control, and of that body which

is external in the sense of not being under their control, and they correctly contemplate the relationship between the two through the knowledge of which they can navigate a calm body through the world. They proceed, correctly determining the factors that support mindfulness of the body, and correctly determining the factors that work against mindfulness of the body, and the combined effect of every factor on mindfulness of the body. Alternatively they proceed, weighing their attention to mindfulness of the body with their attention to mindfulness of other conditions, so that it is supportive of overall knowledge and awareness. In this way the practitioner leaves behind their neurotic infatuations with the world. This is how they proceed mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplating body.'

### Mindfulness of Feeling

'And how does a practitioner mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplate feelings? They are aware, whenever they experience any kind of feeling, what kind of feeling it is<sup>12</sup>. They know when they are experiencing a pleasant feeling that it is a pleasant feeling. They know when they are experiencing a painful feeling that it is a painful feeling. They know when they are experiencing a neutral feeling that it is a neutral feeling. They also know apart from its tone, what the source of the feeling is. They know when a feeling is sensation arising in the body. They know when a feeling is a mood growing out of the way they are thinking about life; from objects present in their mind. They know when a feeling is conditioned by a state of mind that is oriented towards infatuation with the world<sup>13</sup>, and they know when a feeling is conditioned by a state of

mind that is oriented other than towards infatuation with the world<sup>14</sup>.'

'They proceed in this way mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplating feelings. They are mindful of feelings that are internal<sup>15</sup> in the sense of potentially being under their control, and of feelings that are external in the sense of not being under their control, and they correctly contemplate the relationship between the two through the knowledge of which they can intelligently navigate the world of feeling. They proceed, correctly determining the factors that support mindfulness of feeling, and correctly determining the factors that work against mindfulness of feeling, and the combined effect of every factor on mindfulness of feeling<sup>16</sup>. Alternatively they proceed, weighing their attention to mindfulness of feelings with their attention to mindfulness of other conditions, so that it is supportive of overall knowledge and awareness<sup>17</sup>. In this way the practitioner leaves behind their neurotic infatuations with the world. This is how they proceed mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplating feelings.'

### Mindfulness of Emotional and Mental States<sup>18</sup>

'And how does a practitioner mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplate emotional and mental states? They are aware, whatever emotional or mental state they are in, that they are in that state. They know when they are motivated by craving, hatred or delusion and when these are absent. They know whether their awareness is shrunken or whether it is wandering in distraction. They know when their mind is full of good qualities, such as loving kindness, compassion, or equanimity and when those qualities are less

#### commentary cont:

12 A search of every aspect of 'feeling' mentioned in the Pali Canon brings two basic categories. Feeling has both a tone - pleasureable, painful or neutral, and it has a source. Hence 'pleasureable worldly feeling'. Its sources are body - bodily feeling (sensation) or *kayika vedana*; heart-mind (*citta*), in a skilful state - spiritual feeling or *niramisa vedana*, or in an unskilful state - worldly feeling or *samisa vedana*; and objects present in the mind (*dhammas*) - mental feeling (mood) or *cetasika vedana*.

13 worldly feeling

14 spiritual feeling

15 Whether one has control over a feeling or not depends on its source. If one potentially

has control over the source one potentially has control over the feeling. Because one has potential control over ones state of mind one can potentially choose whether one ends up cultivating worldly feeling or spiritual feeling, and because one has potential control over the objects present in ones mind, one has influence over ones mood. These types of feeling we should consider to be in the category 'internal'. But we cannot at will change our bodily experience, so sensation we should consider to be in the category 'external.'

16 Such as groundedness, clarity, positivity and their opposites - the other *satipatthanas*.

17 Again, we need not get too obsessed with awareness of feeling at the expense of overall awareness of

other things. But instead to develop awareness of them in the context of awareness of bodily experience, emotional and mental responses and a perspective that includes views. If we were to associate the spiritual faculty *viriyā* with mindfulness of feeling and the spiritual faculty *samadhi* with mindfulness of body, which I think we can, overall mindfulness would balance these out.

The area of 'Mind Creative, Mind Reactive.' *Citta* is Mind as in *Heart and Mind*, hence 'emotional and mental states.' Going on the list of states mentioned in the Sutta, *citta* obviously covers emotion (hatred), consciousness (shrunken), awareness (distracted), and insight (enlightened). I think the list can in theory be extended to cover every possible mental or

emotional state (think in terms of the 51 mental events). It certainly must include metta, compassion and so on. Emotional states differ from feelings in being *responses* rather than fruits (*vipaka*) of one or another *niyama*. Within the 'dimension' of emotion for instance, faced with the pain of seeing someone we think of as our enemy (and therefore experiencing painful worldly feeling) we have the choice between a reactive emotional response such as hatred or a creative emotional response such as *metta*. Or, taking up the 'dimension' of conscious awareness, when faced with painful sensation, we can either react - by shrinking from it or distracting ourselves - or we have the choice to creatively open up to it - to towards it with awareness and acceptance.

developed. They know when their emotional and mental qualities cannot be bettered, and they know when they can. They know when their mind is in a state of concentration and when it is not concentrated, and they know when their mind is enlightened, and when it is yet to attain enlightenment.'

'They proceed in this way mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplating emotional and mental states. They are mindful of those emotional and mental states that are internal<sup>19</sup> in the sense of effectively being under their control, and of those emotional and mental states that are external in the sense of not being under their control, such as the mental states of other people, and they correctly contemplate the relationship between the two through the knowledge of which they can intelligently navigate the world of emotional and mental states. They proceed, correctly determining the factors that support mindfulness of emotional and mental states, and correctly determining the factors that work against mindfulness of emotional and mental states, and the combined effect of every factor on mindfulness of emotional and mental states<sup>20</sup>. Alternatively they proceed, weighing their attention to mindfulness of emotional and mental states with their attention to mindfulness of other conditions, so that it is supportive of overall knowledge and awareness<sup>21</sup>. In this way the practitioner leaves behind their neurotic infatuations with the world. This is how they proceed mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplating emotional and mental states.'

**Mindfulness of Objects Present in the Mind**<sup>22</sup>  
'And how does a practitioner mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplate objects present in the mind?'

#### The Five Hindrances

'They mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplate objects present in the mind in terms of the five hindrances to meditation.'

'When sensual desire is present in the mind they represent it by an appropriate mind-object, either by the name or concept "sensual desire" or by an image that represents for them sensual desire. They also represent their mind by an appropriate mind-object, either by the name or concept "my mind" or by an image. And in their minds they have a perspective where these two mind-objects are closely associated. In this way they correctly register that sensual desire is present in their mind. When sensual desire is not present in the mind they do not make this association.'

With regards to sensual desire, the practitioner brings forth a dharmic perspective on sensual desire. They see it as a hindrance to meditation. They clearly understand the conditions through which it comes about, they understand the conditions that support its removal, and they understand the conditions that prevent it re-arising in the future.'

'The practitioner proceeds in this way with each hindrance to meditation: with ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and anxiety, and doubt and indecision. They clearly know when they are present in the mind, know them *as hindrances to*

*meditation*, and know the conditions for their eradication and future prevention.'

'In this way they mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplate objects present in the mind in terms of the five hindrances to meditation. They are mindful of the extent to which they have internalised<sup>23</sup> a dharmic perspective they are consciously living, in terms of those mind-objects, and they are mindful of the extent to which they have not internalised a dharmic perspective they are consciously living, in terms of those mind-objects, and they contemplate how they can intelligently bring such a dharmic perspective more consciously into their lives. They correctly determine the factors that support a dharmic perspective with reference to the five hindrances to meditation, and correctly determine the factors that work against a dharmic perspective with reference to the five hindrances to meditation, and correctly determine the combined effect of all these factors on a dharmic perspective with reference to the five hindrances to meditation<sup>24</sup>. Alternatively they proceed, weighing their attention to a dharmic perspective with reference to the five hindrances to meditation with their attention to mindfulness of other conditions, in a way that is supportive of overall knowledge and awareness<sup>25</sup>. In this way the practitioner leaves behind their neurotic infatuations with the world. This is how they mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplate objects present in the mind in terms of the five hindrances to meditation.'

#### The Five Skandhas

<sup>26</sup>

'The practitioner mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplates objects present in the mind in terms of the five skandhas.'

'When experiencing 'form', they correctly represent it by an appropriate mind-object, either the name or concept, "form" or by an image that represents 'form'. With regards to 'form', they construct a dharmic perspective around it by clearly understanding the conditions through which 'form' comes about, and clearly understanding the conditions whereby it ceases. The practitioner proceeds in the same way with each of the skandhas: 'feelings', 'perceptions', 'volitions' and 'consciousness.'

'In this way they mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplate objects present in the mind in terms of the five skandhas. They are mindful of the extent to which they have internalised a dharmic perspective they are consciously living, in terms of those mind-objects, and they are mindful of the extent to which they have not internalised a dharmic perspective they are consciously living in terms of those mind-objects, and they contemplate how they can intelligently bring such a dharmic perspective more consciously into their lives. They correctly determine the factors that support a dharmic perspective on the five skandhas, and correctly determine the factors that work against a dharmic perspective on the five skandhas, and correctly determine the combined effect of all these factors on a dharmic perspective on the five skandhas. Alternatively they proceed, weighing their attention to a dharmic perspective with reference to the five skandhas with their attention to mindfulness of other conditions, in a way that is supportive of overall knowledge and awareness. In this way the practitioner leaves behind their neurotic infatuations with the world. This is how they mindfully, passionately and correctly

#### commentary cont:

- <sup>19</sup> A boundary concerning emotional and mental states it is obvious we need to be aware of is which of them are our responsibility, which we should see as 'internal', and which are not our responsibility, which we should see as 'external'. With a keen sense of proper ownership and responsibility we can move more easily through the world of mental states.
- <sup>20</sup> Such as groundedness, clarity, interest and their opposites - the other satipatthanas.
- <sup>21</sup> An example of our not weighing things correctly is when, perhaps out of a rather forced idealism (as with the story of Sona and the strings of the lute), we are keen to better our mental states, and rather than taking them into account we over-ride our body and feelings. This is not mindfulness.

- <sup>22</sup> Humans have the capacity to make assessments about the world they live in. They notice their experience and give it names or represent it by images. They form concepts and have abstract ideas about their experience. These are mind-objects. Over time they learn to arrange all of these mind-objects into some sort of perspective that comes to be their belief system. In different belief systems different ideas or images are prominent. The ideas or images that dominate our minds really tell us what we believe in and dictate our behaviour, no matter what we might think we believe in! But we can influence what we believe in by dwelling on particular ideas or images, as we do say in sadhana, or by reflecting on the validity of our perspective, say through study or reflection. This is essentially what 'contemplating

mind-objects in mind-objects' is about. We are looking to bring to consciousness the actual objects present in our minds, what effectively we are dwelling on, and then to site them in more true context by reflecting on our perspective. The five sections in this part of the Sutta are reflections that encourage us to reflect on different aspects of experience from a perspective in which the idea of conditionality is in the foreground, i.e. a dharmic perspective. We attempt to contextualise our experience within a dharmic perspective. 'Mind-objects' is a translation of 'dhammas' and so 'contemplating the dhammas in the dhammas' can be translated as 'seeing phenomena as they are represented in the mind from the perspective of buddhist truth.'

- <sup>23</sup> I am taking 'contemplates mind-objects internally,

externally and both internally and externally' to mean a person owning and examining their views in the light of the dharma.

- <sup>24</sup> Such as groundedness, interest, positivity and their opposites - the other satipatthanas.
- <sup>25</sup> Like with the other satipatthanas it is possible to overdo attention to reflection and for that to get in the way of overall mindfulness, for instance having a clear dharmic perspective but not putting it into practice as one might.
- <sup>26</sup> The five sections (hindrances, skandhas, etc.) represent dharmic reflections on different aspects of experience. It is noticeable that both the 'body' and 'mind-objects' sections of the Sutta are long and have multiple parts whereas the 'feeling' and 'emotional and mental states'

contemplate objects present in the mind in terms of the five skandhas.'

#### The Six Internal and External Sense Bases

'The practitioner mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplates objects present in the mind in terms of the six internal and external sense bases.'

'When experiencing the sense base 'eye', they correctly represent it by an appropriate mind-object, either by the name or concept 'eye' or by an image that represents for them 'eye'. When experiencing those sense objects that are 'visual forms', they correctly represent them by the appropriate mind-objects, either by names or concepts that correctly represent those "visual forms" or by images that correctly represent them. When experiencing those fetters that arise in dependence on the sense base 'eye' and on the sense objects that are 'visual forms', they correctly represent those fetters by appropriate mind-objects, either by names or concepts that correctly represent those "fetters" or by images that correctly represent them. With regards to these fetters, they construct a dharmic perspective around them by understanding the conditions through which they come about, understanding the conditions that support their removal, and the conditions that prevent them re-arising in the future.'

'The practitioner proceeds in the same way with the fetters that arise in dependence on the sense base 'ear' and on auditory sense objects, on the sense base 'nose' and on olfactory sense objects, on the sense base 'tongue' and on gustatory sense objects, on the sense base 'body' and on tactile sense objects, and on the sense base 'mind' and on mental objects.'

'In this way they mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplate objects present in the mind in terms of the six internal and external sense bases. They are mindful of the extent to which they have internalised a dharmic perspective they are consciously living, in terms of those mind-objects. and they are mindful of the extent to which they have not internalised a dharmic perspective they are consciously living, in terms of those mind-objects, and they contemplate how they can intelligently bring such a dharmic perspective more consciously into their lives. They correctly determine the factors that support a dharmic perspective on the six internal and external sense bases, and correctly determine the factors that work against a dharmic perspective on the six internal and external sense bases, and correctly determine the combined effect of all these factors on a dharmic perspective on the six internal and external sense bases. Alternatively they proceed, weighing their attention to a dharmic perspective with reference to the six internal and external sense bases with their attention to mindfulness of other conditions, in a way that is supportive of overall knowledge and awareness. In this way the practitioner leaves behind their neurotic infatuations with the world. This is how they mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplate objects present in the mind in terms of the six internal and external sense bases.'

#### The Seven Factors of Enlightenment

'The practitioner mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplates objects present in the mind in terms of the seven factors of enlightenment.'

'When enlightenment factor of mindfulness is present in the mind they represent it by an appropriate mind-object, either by the name or concept "mindfulness" or by an image that represents for them mindfulness. They represent

their mind by by an appropriate mind-object, either by the name or concept "my mind" or by an image that represents their mind. In their mind these two mind-objects are closely associated, therefore they correctly know that mindfulness is present in them. When mindfulness is not present in the mind they correctly do not associate the mind-object 'mindfulness' with the mind-object 'my mind', therefore they correctly know that mindfulness is not present in them. With regards to mindfulness, they construct a dharmic perspective around it by clearly seeing it as an enlightenment factor, by clearly understanding the conditions by which it comes about, and by clearly understanding the conditions by which it is completely developed.'

'The practitioner proceeds in the same way with the enlightenment factors 'investigation of mental states', 'energy in pursuit of the good', 'rapture', 'tranquility', 'concentration' and 'equanimity.'

'In this way they mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplate objects present in the mind in terms of the seven factors of enlightenment. They are mindful of the extent to which they have internalised a dharmic perspective they are consciously living, in terms of those mind-objects. and they are mindful of the extent to which they have not internalised a dharmic perspective they are consciously living, in terms of those mind-objects, and they contemplate how they can intelligently bring such a dharmic perspective more consciously into their lives. They correctly determine the factors that support a dharmic perspective on the seven factors of enlightenment, and correctly determine the factors that work against a dharmic perspective on the seven factors of enlightenment, and correctly determine the combined effect of all these factors on a dharmic perspective on the seven factors of enlightenment. Alternatively they proceed, weighing their attention to a dharmic perspective with reference to the seven factors of enlightenment with their attention to mindfulness of other conditions, in a way that is supportive of overall knowledge and awareness. In this way the practitioner leaves behind their neurotic infatuations with the world. This is how they mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplate objects present in the mind in terms of the seven factors of enlightenment.'

#### The Four Noble Truths

'The practitioner mindfully, passionately and

correctly contemplates objects present in the mind in terms of the four noble truths.'

'They cultivate a correct perspective among the objects present in their mind concerning the four noble truths, namely "This is suffering", "This is the origin of suffering", "This is the cessation of suffering", "This is the way of practice leading to the cessation of suffering." 27'

'In this way they mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplate objects present in the mind in terms of the four noble truths. They are mindful of the extent to which they have internalised a dharmic perspective they are consciously living, in terms of those mind-objects. and they are mindful of the extent to which they have not internalised a dharmic perspective they are consciously living, in terms of those mind-objects, and they contemplate how they can intelligently bring such a dharmic perspective more consciously into their lives. They correctly determine the factors that support a dharmic perspective on the four noble truths, and correctly determine the factors that work against a dharmic perspective on the four noble truths, and correctly determine the combined effect of all these factors on a dharmic perspective on the four noble truths. Alternatively they proceed, weighing their attention to a dharmic perspective with reference to the four noble truths with their attention to mindfulness of other conditions, in a way that is supportive of overall knowledge and awareness. In this way the practitioner leaves behind their neurotic infatuations with the world. This is how they mindfully, passionately and correctly contemplate objects present in the mind in terms of the four noble truths.'

'Whosoever practises these four foundations of mindfulness for a period of time up to seven years but in some cases 28 for as little as a week should expect the fruit of highest knowledge, nirvana in the here and now, or if there is some attachment remaining, the state of Non-returning. And because of this I was able to say: 'This is the comprehensive and complete path that leads directly to the realisation of Nirvana, called the four foundations of mindfulness. By following it humankind is led to a state of purification where there is no more sorrow, distress, pain or sadness" '

And hearing this the Buddha's followers rejoiced in his words.

#### commentary cont:

sections of the Sutta are short single sections. Perhaps there is a particular reason for this. If the text of the 'body' satipatthana illustrates how one should maintain samattha under increasingly strong levels of vipassana, the 'mind-objects' satipatthana might have a similar sequential process going on. Its sequence might be that of cultivating and maintaining vipassana in more and more universal circumstances. Its sequence begins by identifying unhelpful mental states - hindrances to meditation - and generating a dharmic perspective on them. That perspective then broadens out more and more with

each section until the four noble truths involve insight into all of conditioned existence.

- 27 An incorrect perspective on suffering - the hedonist's version - might be something like 'Life is not necessarily suffering', 'A lack **commentary cont:** of certain things or experiences is the origin of suffering', 'I really will be happy when I have got those things and experiences'. 'There is a way leading to that - spending my time and energy pursuing them'

- 28 The Buddha is possibly referring to people with different capabilities.

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