

## MBC course notes

### Four Foundations of Mindfulness

#### The Satipatthana Sutta

In the Satipatthana Sutta the Buddha says the only way for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destruction of suffering, for reaching Nibbana, is the practice of the four foundations of mindfulness. The practitioner -

'lives contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having overcome, in this world, covetousness and grief; he lives contemplating feelings in feelings, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having overcome, in this world, covetousness and grief; he lives contemplating mental objects in mental objects, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having overcome, in this world, covetousness and grief.'

#### Satipatthana

*Sati* means awareness or mindfulness, and *upatthana* means 'to place near'. A satipatthana then is something we *place our awareness near*. More specifically it is a satipatthana *during the times* we place our attention near (whatever the object is). At all other times it is a *satipatthana in potential*. So when my awareness is there with my bodily experience, body is a satipatthana, I am seeing from the frame of reference (another phrase for satipatthana) of the body. A satipatthana is a perspective *from* a particular place. We have then *to be in a particular place* to see it.

The Satipatthana Sutta is divided into four sections, one for each satipatthana. Beginning with body, the Buddha takes the practitioner through how to be aware of that satipatthana. He uses a recurring phrase with each -

'The monk lives contemplating the body in the body (or sometimes the body in and of itself)', *bhikkhu kāye kāyānupassī viharati*. Then -

'The monk lives contemplating the feelings in the feelings', *bhikkhu vedana vedanānupassī viharati*. Then -

'The monk lives contemplating the consciousness in the consciousness', *bhikkhu citta cittānupassī viharati*. Then -

'The monk lives contemplating the mental objects in the mental objects', *bhikkhu dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati*.

Notice the repetition of the object of contemplation. 'The monk - *bhikkhu*, lives, inhabits - *viharati*, (a *vihara* is a dwelling place), seeing - *-passī*, the body - *kāye*, along with it, in accordance with it being - *-ānu-*, a body - *kāya*.

Contemplation is a common rendition of seeing-along-with, or seeing-in-accordance-with, *ānupassī*. So the phrase can be translated as 'The monk inhabits the body seeing it in accordance with it being a body'. - likewise with feelings: 'seeing feelings in accordance with them being feelings' and so on. We bring our awareness close to something (for it to be a satipatthana) but that awareness has a certain quality that *is in accordance with what we are looking at*.

We aren't observing the satipatthanas from just one perspective. With the four satipatthanas there are four perspectives: a body perspective, a feeling perspective, a perspective of consciousness, and a perspective of assessment. These independent working perspectives are summarised in Fig.1.

It is like seeing an image through a coloured filter. When we look at a multi-coloured image through a red filter, the filter extracts the red part of the light coming from the object and we only see that. The other colours are stopped. When we look from the body's frame of reference at experience, we extract the bodily part of our experience and just see that.

When we look at our experience from the feeling frame of reference, we filter everything out except what we feel (a different colour filter to the bodily one, say blue). The third satipatthana filters everything but our state of mind. The fourth everything but our assessments of things. Or, we might think of the satipatthanas as 'eyes' that are constructed differently, to see different things. The body 'eye' sees just the bodily, the tangible. The feeling 'eye' sees just the hedonic quality of our experience, and so on. Our experience remains in full colour, but each

satipatthana selects a different colour within that. The point being it is important to know independently what is happening from each of these perspectives.

#### Experience and Response

For a start we need to know what we are experiencing or we won't know how to respond to it. We won't know *what* we are responding to. But our response we also need to know because it has consequences for our future experience.

Body is one type of experience. The sensations we experience are a given. I am seeing the body satipatthana as awareness of what is *tangible* (*touch*-able) in our experience - what is actually there over what is imagined to be there. We approach it through mindfulness of the breath *in the present moment*.

Feeling too is a given. It is about what we are actually feeling not what we want to feel. Body and feeling are vipakas (vedana is known as a one from the Wheel of Life - part of the 'result process of the present life').

Citta and dhammas are two types of response - how we respond emotionally and psychically (the shape our mind takes in response to a stimulus) and how we frame a response cognitively. The emotive and the rational.

Each of these 'facets' has a particular use, each an integral part of a person. We need to be clear what they are - what is a feeling and what is a thought for instance. To be clear which satipatthana we are dealing with at any time. To not mix them up. Otherwise we will be in the 'wrong place' to deal with it.

It is also worth noting that the satipatthanas come in a particular order in the Satipatthana Sutta no doubt for a reason. They begin with experience and end in response. Perhaps unless we are grounded first in personal experience, our response to is likely to lack empathy for personal experience (as in the Buddha's 'idealistic' ascetic phase).

#### Contemplation

The word contemplation is used in the 'satipatthana phrase', let's look at its meaning in the dictionary. It's latin root is *contemplari*, which means 'to mark out carefully a temple or place for auguries'.

Whoever builds a temple is creating a shrine to a view about what is real for them. So in contemplating the body one is implying 'the body is important, I am going to create space for it'. Or 'feelings are important, I am going to listen to them'. A temple is an extension of a principle - that what we value we adorn and give space to. The buddha suggests then we give space to these four things (four values) - the value of ones tangible experience (body), the value of ones feelings, the value of the quality of ones state of mind and the value of correct assessment of ones perceptions. Four 'temples' to give space to and contemplate. So contemplation in this sense is 'marking out a space where we can take hold of what we think is relevant and important to us'.

#### Conditions for the Future

The other theme in the definition of *contemplari* is augury (the practice of telling the future, as was done in the classical world by heeding the patterns of birds flight (there are many examples in the Odyssey). A 'good' pattern is auspicious, 'augurs well'. This is superstition. But we can have 'rational' augury as well, by looking at patterns in our own experience. When we look at what the future might be given our experience or given our mental states or views. We contemplate the future in the context of what our belief system is (whether it is providence or experience). Belief systems are always *about* the future. A belief system is about what provides our future. (eg. karma and rebirth) And being 'mindful' of it we believe will safeguard our future. In buddhism we turn that mindfulness towards our experience.

The difference between buddhist contemplation and superstition is - with superstition (like when we cross our fingers) we *hope* for the best, often out of fear. With buddhism it is more that we (at times) courageously move our awareness *into* our experience and *look* for the best. We 'honour our experience with awareness to ensure the best outcome'. The teaching of the buddha puts the future firmly into our hands. In a buddhist temple we don't wait for outside intervention, we get on with meditating and reflecting on our experience. We build up our future through that. The satipatthanas represent our future.

#### Body auspices

A good auspice when applied to the body might be a feeling of physical wellbeing (manifesting as chi). On the other hand, tension is a bad augur.

Fig.1 The Four Satipatthanas - four 'working perspectives' to maintain

<p><b>Body</b></p> <p>□ The tangible in our experience. <i>Kaya</i> is like the tangible (that which we can touch) aspect of <i>rupa</i> - 'the objective constituent of the perceptual situation'. Tangible form only exists in the present moment. In this satipatthana we stay objectively with what is tangible in our experience in the present moment (the only place the tangible can be experienced), which puts us 'on safe ground' because we are responding to the actual not the imagined situation.</p> <p>When a Zen monk in black robes walks slowly down a gravel path practicing walking meditation, he is practicing being in touch with his experience. He feels the tangible experience of his body: the rocks pressing up through his sandals, his robes fluttering around him in the breeze. He is deliberately sensing whatever is tangible to him. He moves slowly. Moving slowly helps him sense the tangible because it cuts down the amount of input coming in. He can sink into the experience of his body, and come into a closer relationship with the world around him.</p> <p>There are other ways we can contact the tangible. Anything tangible can centre or ground us. A frail elderly person may experience groundedness when around a family they have created: tangible evidence of the effect their life has had. For a buddhist the sangha are grounding, being ethical is grounding. Seeing tangible positive results of our actions helps us feel safer. We feel safe when we know we can rely on the three jewels. These bring <i>samatha</i> - calm, stability, reassurance, a firm foundation to build our lives upon. The words <i>touch</i> and <i>body</i> have other meanings: <i>body</i> of knowledge, we feel <i>touched</i> when given kind attention, perhaps because we know someone is sensitive to the <i>reality of how we are</i>, are <i>in touch</i> with how we are feeling.</p> <p>By setting up an object of mindfulness in front of us (eg. the breath) we are able to stay in the present moment, and because we are focussed on the detail in the object, our awareness has to be broad and relaxed towards whatever else is in our experience (the other satipatthanas). It stops us honing into them in too narrow a way.</p> <p>Associated Spiritual Faculty: Concentration</p>	<p><b>Feeling</b></p> <p>□ Sensitivity / sensibility. Living beings are <i>sensible</i> to feeling. They are <i>capable of being affected</i>. They are <i>sentient</i>.</p> <p>We feel because we have sensitivity, and no doubt we have that for a reason. Without it we wouldn't feel anything. The word <i>sensible</i> is interesting because it has two meanings that are closely linked. It means <i>capable of being affected</i>. It also means <i>capable of being perceived by the senses or mind</i>, also delicate, intelligent, marked by sense, cognisant, aware, appreciable, and sensitive. We use it as in <i>sensibility</i>, which is <i>capacity of feeling, actual feeling, or susceptibility</i>. The visual artist's sensibility manifests in their being sensitive to combinations of shape, colour and texture, and emotions arising on the back of those. They are <i>sens-ible</i> to feelings arising via the visual sense. The other use of <i>sensible</i> is more about intelligence (but still related to feeling). For a child, riding their bike on the pavement might not be the most sensible thing to do, because there is a chance someone might get hurt (which they will feel through their <i>senses</i>). <i>Sensible</i> in both cases relates to pleasure and pain, to sensitivity in receiving it, or to causing it.</p> <p>If <i>sensibility</i> is the capacity to be sensitive to pleasure and pain, it is the <i>sentient</i> that feel it (they '<i>have the faculty of perception and sensation</i>'). As a sentient being we can be sensitive to three types of feeling. All sentient beings are sensitive to physical pleasure and pain (<i>kayika vedana</i>). If we are sensitive to that in them (which is an ethical sensitivity - 'spiritual' feeling or <i>niramisa vedana</i>) we would not want to cause them suffering. If we are not sensitive and instead motivated by greed, hatred or delusion, we act on the 'worldly' feelings (<i>samisa vedana</i>) that come up - like the pain of unmet desires, or the pleasure of inflicting pain (on your enemy). We are in that case sensitive to and act on those. The third set of feelings are those we experience as mood (mental feelings - <i>cetasika vedana</i>). They come because we are sensitive to 'how things are going', and we experience them to the extent we are not enlightened. The enlightened don't have a preference as to how things should go (their views are conditioned by the <i>apranihita samadhi</i> - the 'unbiased') so they don't have moods as such. But we do, because our experiences are out of line with our expectations.</p>	<p><b>Heart / State of Mind/ Attitude</b></p> <p>□ The ethical and psychic response to experience. Essentially ones karmic response.</p> <p>Guenther translates <i>citta</i> as attitude, which is good in that it points to the response we bring to any situation - eg. a positive attitude / an attitude of boredom, etc. The word attitude is related to those of disposition and posture. Ones attitude one could see it as the posture one 'psychically strikes' (the 'general shape' of ones psyche) in response to a situation (or ones state of mind towards life in general). Ones disposition. The PTS dictionary gives the meaning as heart -</p> <p>"The meaning of <i>citta</i> is best understood when explaining it with expressions familiar to us, as: with all my heart; heart and soul... all which emphasize the emotional and conative side of "thought" more than its mental and rational side (for which see <i>manas</i> and <i>vinnana</i> )"</p> <p>I think <i>citta</i> has two dimensions: an '<i>attitudinal</i>' dimension (heart / emotion / disposition) and a '<i>consciousness</i>' dimension (eg. whether one is concentrated or unconcentrated ), which perhaps <i>excludes the contents</i> of cognition (which belong to <i>manas</i> - the mind sense, and are <i>dharmas</i> - mental objects). One can have a friendly attitude ('<i>attitudinal</i>') that covers a greater or lesser sphere of concern ('<i>consciousness</i>') - eg. one can be friendly to ones neighbour (lesser) but also to the whole world (greater). These two dimensions can be distilled down to loving kindness (<i>metta</i>) and consciousness or awareness (<i>sati</i>), with their opposites, and at a higher level there the third dimension, of insight, that is the <i>bodhicitta</i>.</p> <p>Associated Spiritual Faculty: Faith</p> <p>So we need to try to minimise <i>kayika vedana</i> in sentient beings, if we can. We need to be sensitive to <i>niramisa vedana</i> because it guides us into skilful action, we need to acknowledge <i>samisa vedana</i> but not act on it, and we need to loosen up our expectations (ie. gain insight) to gradually eliminate <i>cetasika vedana</i>. For sentient beings, feeling is a given they cannot escape. It is the capacity to feel that distinguishes living beings from inert matter, so we have to deal with it.</p>	<p><b>Mental objects / Mental concomitants</b></p> <p>□ How the mind sense (<i>Manas</i>) 'grasps' the world. Conceptual and symbolic (including images) assessments of meaning.</p> <p>Mrs Rhys Davids (Buddhist Psychology p19) remarks how 'the commentators connect <i>mano</i> with <i>minati</i> (<i>ma</i>), to measure'. It seems <i>Manas</i> measures, assesses. It takes phenomena perceived (in the senses) by <i>vinnana</i> and sees them as mental objects (<i>dharmas</i>). Raw sensory data in <i>vinnana</i> becomes in <i>Manas</i> the abstract concept, as in 'chair'. It also forms ideas about the whole, about reality itself. These may be held in the form of images and symbols. <i>Manas</i> basically forms views about phenomena (<i>dharmas</i>) and these views are more or less correct. The practitioner in the Satipatthana Sutta contemplates mental objects (in mental objects).</p> <p><i>'bhikkhu dhammesu dhammanupassin viharati'</i></p> <p>- they reflect on the truth (<i>dhamma</i>) of those views / concepts / images. Mental objects may be reflected on in a mundane way - 'Shall I have cornflakes this morning?', or more profoundly - "What is the meaning of life?" And views need not necessarily be active conscious choices. They can be, and most often are, unconscious and so unconsidered. We may never think about something which may also be a view about it (that it is not important). Often our reflections constellate around ourselves - 'I am a (____) person)', 'the world is (____)'. This interpretation resonates with Bhante's Mindfulness of Reality. We could translate the above as -</p> <p>'the monk dwells contemplating the truth (<i>dhamma</i>) in his views concerning mental objects (<i>dharmas</i>)'</p> <p>... and it becomes a reflection on the nature of reality.</p> <p>Associated Spiritual Faculty: Wisdom</p> <p><i>Niramisa vedana</i> is probably the 'fuel' behind <i>viria</i>, as feeling is the great motivator and <i>viria</i> the great motivation.</p> <p>Associated Spiritual Faculty: Energy in Pursuit of the Good</p>
--	--	--	--