



# Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta

Essential Teachings for the Practice

**Venerable Panadure Chandaratana Thero**

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## **Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta**

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Venerable Pānadure Chandaratana Thero

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## Author's Preface

As a result of the encouragement received from my teacher Most Venerable UdaEriyagama Dhammajiva Maha Thero, I commenced a [Sutta Teaching session](#) in July 2020. There were many *suttas* discussed and the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* was discussed over 18 sermons.

The sermons were oriented more towards the practice and questions were discussed at the end of each session. Many who listened to the sermons requested that the *Satipaṭṭhāna* teachings be published as a book and the teachings were transcribed by several practitioners. Later those transcriptions were edited and compiled as a book. What you have in your hand is the result of this effort.

I like to thank all the practitioners who volunteered to make this task possible. Additionally, Mrs Maya Kalansooriya bore the printing cost of this first iteration of the book and Quality Printers undertook the task to publish it beautifully. My good friend, Amil prepared a beautiful cover page which added value to the book.

Since the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is the heart of Buddhist Meditation, it is my wish that these teachings will serve as an aid to many practitioners to commence the practice and serve as a practice guide to advanced *yogis* as well.



May the merit accrued by this collective effort help us all to practice the Buddha's teaching to the best of our ability.

May all beings be free from suffering.

Venerable Panadure Chandaratana  
Mitirigala Nissarana Vanaya Forest Monastery  
2022-04-27

## **Anumodanā**

It is a rare and auspicious occasion to communicate the Buddha's invaluable teachings on the Satipatthāna Sutta to the world through these lucid and penetrative teachings of Most Venerable Panadure Chandarathana Thero. The first edition of these invaluable teachings has been made available in printed form through the generous donation of Mrs Maya Kalansuriya, resident in Melbourne on the occasion of her birthday to transfer merit to her mother, late Mrs Dona Pema Kalansuriya who passed away three years ago and to also impart merit to her late father and brother. May the merit accumulated through this act contribute towards their pursuit of the Dhamma and attainment of final liberation.



# PART 1

## *Kāyānupassanā* *Contemplation on the Body*

### Chapter 1 – The Breath

*Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna sutta* forms the skeleton and foundation of our practice.

*Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* is available in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (middle length discourses) and in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, (longer discourses), which considers a longer version of the *sacca pabba*. Numerous *suttas* related to the *satipaṭṭhāna* are also included in the *Samyutta Nikāya* (connected discourses), commonly known as *satipaṭṭhāna samyutta*.

*Satipaṭṭhāna* is a common thread in the *Dhamma* teachings, often considered as the core of the Buddha's teachings, commonly cited by monks, discussing the teachings in praise of the *sutta*.

The Buddha taught the *satipaṭṭhāna sutta* whilst resident in a city called *Kammāsadamma* of the Kuru region. The *satipaṭṭhāna sutta* is not unique to Gotama Buddha. Even the previous Buddhas have taught the same *satipaṭṭhāna*

discourse. When the Buddha decided to teach the *satipaṭṭhāna sutta*, a Brahma called *Sahampati* appeared before the Buddha, praising the Buddha for taking the correct path, the direct path, noting that it was taught by previous Buddhas who understood that purification of beings is possible by the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice.<sup>1</sup>

### *Benefits of the satipaṭṭhāna practice*

The Buddha commences the teaching by asking the monks to pay attention, outlining the benefits of the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice as a preamble to the *sutta*:

*“ekāyano ayaṃ, bhikkhave, maggo sattānaṃ visuddhiyā, sokaparidevānaṃ samatikkamāya, dukkhadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamāya, ñāyassa adhigamāya, nibbānassa sacchikiriyāya, yadidaṃ cattāro satipaṭṭhānā.”*

The Buddha exclaims: *ekāyana magga*. *“ekāyano ayaṃ, bhikkhave, maggo sattānaṃ visuddhiyā* - monks, there is a direct path to purification of beings; *sokaparidevānaṃ samatikkamāya* - to overcome sorrow and lamentation; *dukkhadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamāya* - to eradicate suffering and mental despair; *ñāyassa adhigamāya* - to know the correct path, the direct path which leads to complete liberation; to realise *nibbāna* (*nibbānassa sacchikiriyāya*). These are valuable benefits of the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice.

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1 Brahma sutta (SN 47.18).

As *yogis*, our goal is to realise *nibbāna*, to realise the correct path, to overcome suffering, lamentation, and sorrow.

*Ekāyano maggo* means the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice is the direct path to attain *nibbāna*. To say it is the only path to *nibbāna* is a slight exaggeration as the Buddha taught several other methods and strategies. For anyone steeped in the pursuit of *nibbāna*, the best method is the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice. There are various other approaches, methods, or techniques if one's aspiration is to be reborn in the heavenly realm. The *satipaṭṭhāna* practice directly points towards *nibbāna*.

*Sattānaṃ visuddhiyā* means purification of beings. One may ask why it is necessary for beings to be purified? This is not our first birth. We have travelled through *samsāra* for a long time, been born in the hell realm, human realm, celestial realm as well as the brahma realm.

Ignorance (*avijjā*) and craving (*taṇhā*) have been the main cause(s) for our wandering in this long and arduous journey of *samsāra* and we are unable to free ourselves as our minds are polluted and conditioned in states of ignorance and craving.

Many self-purification practices have been established due to wrong view. In India, during the earlier times, people tried to destroy defilements by positioning themselves under the midday sun. Some went to the river Ganges, to swim in the water to purify themselves. Unknowingly, many used these methods to purify the mind. The Buddha denied all these ascetic practices and outlined the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice is the direct path to purification.

*Sattānaṃ visuddhiyā* means purification of the mind, not the body. A person with a purified mind is a noble person, free from sorrow (*soka*) and lamentation, (*paridevānaṃ*). Sorrow and lamentation can be overcome by practising *satipaṭṭhāna*. We lament and experience sorrow for various reasons. By practising *satipaṭṭhāna*, a lessening of sorrow and lamentation can be experienced. These are verifiable benefits of the practice.

To experience these benefits, the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice must be undertaken genuinely, without limiting ourselves to theory. This is not blind faith but, faith gleaned from verifiable results and a personal experience of lessening sorrow and lamentation in our daily lives. This is possible when the practice is undertaken honestly and diligently.

*Dukkhadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamāya* means a lessening of suffering. *Dukkha* is in various forms and includes mental reactions such as resentment, aversion, resistance, and anger, which can be reduced by practising *satipaṭṭhāna*.

Undertaking the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice for a considerable time, one can verifiably observe how calmness, serenity and equanimity is maintained in difficult circumstances when compared to previous times. Compared to earlier times, a calm disposition can be maintained in adversity.

A further benefit of the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice is that one understands the proper path - *ñāyassa adhigamāya* – the noble eightfold path is the correct path, the only path leading to an attainment of *nibbāna*. This understanding is possible

through one's practice, not through books or by listening to the *dhamma*.

Anyone undertaking the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice honestly and diligently can understand the noble eightfold path, know there is a path to be followed, a way of living to realise *nibbāna* (*nibbānassa sacchikiriyāya*). One comes to realise the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice as the direct path leading to a complete cessation, to gain a complete understanding - enlightenment.

The Buddha has enumerated these benefits of the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice.

### ***Essential qualities for the satipaṭṭhāna practice***

Four pre-requisites - background qualities must be harnessed for the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice: *ātāpī, sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ*.

*Ātāpī* requires a *yogi* to have ardent (relentless) effort because our minds are constantly distracted towards past incidents, memories, thinking about the future or planning. Due to mental restlessness, the path may not immediately provide results and one may not immediately succeed when one tries to retain one's attention in the present moment. One must be patient; and this requires ardent effort.

Effort must be maintained for a long term, not for one week or ten days, but, for several years. With ardent effort all obstacles met during the practice can be overcome with endurance.



It is necessary to balance effort to an appropriate proportion as the practice progresses.

A sapling cannot be expected to grow quickly once it is planted - it will grow at its own pace and might take years to bear fruit. In the same way, the mind needs time to progress naturally.

Perseverance is needed to cultivate the practice so that all obstacles can be met with determination and courage. If the mind collapses, we raise it again, energise it and continue to strive. The quality of *ātāpī* is essential for a *yogi*.

*Sampajāno* is clear knowing, to clearly know the primary object, its detail and behaviour. Establishing mindfulness alone is insufficient. One's attention must be directed to clearly know what is happening. With investigative awareness, one must observe the various processes and phenomena. This experiment requires an investigative attitude.

*Satimā* is to have continuous mindfulness. At the beginning, one's mindfulness may be vague, waver, but gather in momentum with continued practice, there may be lapses, but most of the time one continues to be mindful.

A *yogi* must feel the quality of mindfulness. The quality of mindfulness is not discerned through theoretical knowledge or information received by someone else. It is to be developed by oneself, knowing the experience of being mindful (*satimā*).

*Vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassam* indicates that a *yogi* must have a mind free from covetousness and anger and this requires an attitude of equanimity.

These four qualities are necessary tools to take on the task. It is like having an accurate microscope to do a specific task – a faulty or unsuitable apparatus can compromise the results. The Buddha reminds us of these pre-requisites to undertake this noble experiment, being the necessary background and approach to continue and maintain the practice.

One must have the requisite effort (*ātāpī*), an attitude bent towards investigation (*sampajāno*), be curious and examine what unfolds, maintain mindfulness from one moment to the next (*satimā*) and retain the mind in a state of equanimity (*vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassam*).

With this frame of mind, one can direct the mind's attention to the body, to observe bodily activities with focused attention.

### *The four foundations of mindfulness*

The Buddha introduces the practice as follows: “*idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu kāye kāyānupassī viharati*” - in this *sāsana*, in this very life, a monk, a *yogi* takes one's body for contemplation (*kāye kāyānupassī*), to directly observe it by utilising several techniques.

It is not by reference to a book on anatomy, a documentary, a video, by inferential knowledge or someone else's guidance, rather, through an observation of one's body,

direct experience. It is immediate, direct, and not a borrowed experience. By paying attention to the body and observing its functions, one gains a direct understanding of the body.

Next, the Buddha introduces a contemplation of feelings (*vedanāsu vedanānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassam*) – to observe the feelings arising within the body and the mind. By directly confronting feelings, their nature can be understood.

The necessary qualities for contemplating the body (*kāyanupassanā*) such as *ātāpī, sampajāno, satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassam* are equally applicable when contemplating feelings.

A balanced attitude, an equanimous mindset, which does not attach to pleasurable feelings or reject painful feelings is required.

This practice is not for just one day, two days, several months, but, several years. Sustained effort and clear comprehension are essential - the quality of *sampajāno* is to know feelings from one moment to the next. Our attention must be sustained on the object, to carefully observe with continuous mindfulness (*satimā*). These qualities must be harnessed and serve as a backdrop to undertaking a contemplation of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*).

The third foundation of mindfulness, *cittānupassanā* introduced by the Buddha requires a *yogi* to observe the mind from one moment to the next, to gain a direct understanding of the mind.

Inferential knowledge about the mind can be gained by referring to a book about the mind, meeting with a psychologist, or a teacher. To understand the mind experientially, it must be observed from one moment to the next.

Observing the mind from one moment to the next, one is aware of thoughts arising in the mind - whenever a defilement or a thought arises, one knows whether it is wholesome or unwholesome, immediately becoming aware of it.

The fourth foundation of mindfulness enumerated by the Buddha is to observe phenomena (*dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassam*) directly from one moment to the next.

The *satipatthāna* practice comprises of the four foundations of mindfulness - investigations (*ānupassanā*): the first foundation being *kāyānupassanā*, has fourteen methods of practice, *vedanānupassanā* and *cittānupassanā* have one method and *dhammānupassanā* has five methods of practice.

## ***Practising Ānāpānasati***

The first technique is *ānāpānasati*. Breathing is a natural and involuntary process available from birth until death. The breath naturally occurs in the body, so it is not necessary to breathe, purposely. This involuntary process is used to improve mindfulness.

The *ānapānasati* practice is explained in the *Ānapānasati sutta* (MN 118) and *Kāyagatāsati sutta* (MN 119) as well. The *kāyānupassanā* practice is broader, where establishing mindfulness is the first step, followed by refining mindfulness to understand the nature of phenomena by examining what is under investigation from one moment to the next. Merely establishing mindfulness on the breath is insufficient. The breath, its' nature, manner, and qualities must be examined to closely understand the breath. Owing to the results of the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, various insights arise. When the mind is cleansed of defilements, one becomes wiser and develops an eagerness to maintain mental clarity and purity.

A change in lifestyle and a strategy are necessary to sustain insights and one must cultivate the path and adopt a methodology (*satipaṭṭhāna bhāvanā gāminiñca paṭipadam*).

These three components are necessary for complete mindfulness. The latter two are rarely mentioned in western mindfulness, where the emphasis is placed on establishing mindfulness. This is important, although, the complete picture must consider the three components or stages of the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice: to establish mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*); understand the nature of phenomena (*satipaṭṭhāna bhāvanā*), allow various insights to arise and to internalize the insights. To do this, one must have a strategy, a path - a complete way of practice (*satipaṭṭhāna bhāvanā gāmini paṭipadā*).<sup>2</sup>

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2 Vibhaṅga sutta (SN 47.40).

## *Instructions for Ānāpānasati meditation*

The first technique in *kāyānupassanā* is the practice of *ānāpānasati*. The Buddha commences the instructions as follows:

*Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu araṇṇagato vā rukkhamūlagato vā suñṇāgāragato vā nisīdati, pallaṅkaṃ ābhujitvā, ujum kāyaṃ paṇidhāya, parimukhaṃ satim upatṭhapetvā.*

Find a place of seclusion, an environment of less noise, a quiet place as a suitable environment to commence the *ānāpānasati* practice – going to a forest, a root or base of a tree or an empty place (*araṇṇagato vā rukkhamūlagato vā suñṇāgāragato vā*) is much better.

*Ānāpāna* (the breath) is a refined object. A fair amount of clarity and sensitivity is essential to understand the breath and to do this, it is necessary to practise in a quiet place. Although it is possible to practise under moderate conditions as the practice progresses, in the beginning, being in a quiet, secluded place is preferred to cultivate a pleasant mental environment.

The Buddha then considers the preferred posture - *nisīdati, pallaṅkaṃ ābhujitvā ujum kāyaṃ paṇidhāya*, where one must sit cross-legged and keep the upper body erect and straight. An erect posture facilitates the breathing process. If one's posture is bent, the passage of inhalation is blocked. To avoid any blockage or obstacles, the Buddha's instructions are to have an erect posture to commence the practice.

Sit on a chair if it is difficult to sit cross-legged. Maintaining a straight posture is necessary for the breathing to naturally unfold. Close your eyes in a very gentle manner and retain your attention at the nostrils (*parimukhaṃ satim upatthapetvā*) or closer to the upper lip.

Don't follow the breath inside or outside with each inhalation or exhalation and retain your attention at the nostrils. The Buddha uses the simile of a gatekeeper to explain mindfulness (*sati*). *Sati dovāriko, bhikkhave, ariyasāvako*<sup>3</sup> - the noble person, *yogi*, must utilise mindfulness as a gate keeper. The gatekeeper's job stops at the gate. A visitor's identity is checked on arrival and if appropriate, they are allowed in or their entry is denied. The gatekeeper's role does not extend beyond the gate. The gatekeeper facilitates a departure but does not follow the person outside. The gatekeeper remains vigilant at the gate.

The next step is to establish mindfulness on the breath, to clearly know the breath with each inhalation (*satova assa sati*) and exhalation (*satova passa sati*) with repeated observation. It is not enough to observe one or two breaths or to pay attention to the breath for just a few days. It is necessary to have repeated application and a daily schedule to practise and establish mindfulness on the breath.

The breath is a refined object and requires focused attention to recognize it. It is natural for the mind to wander at the beginning, to engage in past events or to look to the future. The mind doesn't like to stay with such a neutral object as it

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3 Nagaropama sutta (AN 7.67).

appears boring - one might start to fall asleep or think about the past or the future.

The *yogi's* task is to bring the mind's attention back to the object each time it wanders. At times, the attention may drift to the future, one may fantasize or daydream. When this happens, a *yogi* must be aware of the distraction and bring the mind's attention back to the object.

You may have to repeatedly observe the breath many times to train the mind to be with the breath. Repeated application is necessary as the breath is not an exciting object, it is refined and neutral in its nature. Gradually, the mind may adjust to being with the refined (neutral) breath. Effort must be exerted at the beginning, to not give up and to strive. Relentless effort (*ātāpī*) is needed to clearly know the breath (*sampajāno*).

The technique itself is simple and its simplicity must be maintained. At the beginning labelling or counting can be used to bring the mind to the present moment. Once the practice aligns, the labelling or counting can be dropped and the attention maintained on a series of breaths.

One needs to carefully observe, to know from which nostril the inhalation is occurring and from which nostril the exhalation occurs. Is the inhalation or exhalation long or short? Is it warm? or is it cool? Is it long or is it short? In this way, the investigation begins, and one clearly becomes aware of the features and characteristics of the breath.



*dīghaṃ vā assasanto 'dīghaṃ assasāmī'ti pajānāti, dīghaṃ vā passasanto 'dīghaṃ passasāmī'ti pajānāti, rassaṃ vā assasanto 'rassaṃ assasāmī'ti pajānāti, rassaṃ vā passasanto 'rassaṃ passasāmī'ti pajānāti,*

One must discern the characteristics of the breath and observe the experience of a long inhalation and a short inhalation. A useful simile is of a carpenter cutting a log with a saw. When he takes a long bow to draw a saw blade, he knows he is drawing a long bow. When he takes a short bow to draw the saw blade, he knows he is taking a short bow. His attention is where the log is being cut and he is aware when he takes a longer or shorter bow.

Likewise, the Buddha recommends that we keep our attention at the nostril, know how the breath is experienced, whether it is a long or short inhalation or exhalation. Don't purposely make the breath longer or shorter, just allow the breath to naturally occur at its own pace and know whether it is long or short, as it happens. When the breath can be clearly discerned it indicates that one's attention (mindfulness) is improved; and that one can concentrate the mind.

The Buddha's invitation is to refine it further, to become aware of the various stages of the breath. An inhalation doesn't happen immediately and is a gradual process. It begins softly, very gently and reaches a peak, a threshold and then calms down, fades away to ultimately disappear. There is a gap just before the exhalation begins. The exhalation begins gradually and reaches the middle and

fades away, to completely disappear. Before the next inhalation, there is a small gap. After that gap, the next inhalation begins. The Buddha requests us to observe the complete cycle (*sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī assasissāmi'ti sikkhati*).

When the complete breath and gaps between an inhalation and an exhalation are observed, one's attention is firmly established on the object and a fair amount of restraint is required.

Effort must be balanced to avoid any controlling of the process and instead, one must carefully take a back seat to observe what unfolds. A fair amount of restraint is needed to carefully observe the breath (*sikkhati*) without wavering, doubting, falling asleep or allowing the mind to go to the past, to the future or to change the posture.

Aim to establish mindfulness on the phases of the breath. It is very much like a bell curve, there is a beginning, a middle and an end. Then, there is a gap; and again, a beginning, a middle and an end. This cycle becomes evident if the practice is properly undertaken.

Gradually, the breath calms down and fades away from one's awareness. At times one struggles to believe it as the expectation is for the breath to be vivid when more and more detail can be observed. But when the breath calms down, its characteristics can no longer be discerned.

The characteristics previously observed become blurred and it is difficult to discern an in-breath from an out-breath. The features distinguishing an in-breath from an out-breath,

disappear. Only a refined sensation is felt, an awareness that one is living. At this stage, there is a calming down of the breath (*passambhayaṃ kāyasaṅkhāraṃ assasissāmi'ti sikkhati*).

Developing continuous mindfulness on the primary object and cultivating this process, one begins to observe the breath's nature - there is a beginning and an end in each inhalation and exhalation. When the breath is closely observed, one can see that it is not a single inhalation or exhalation, but a series of inhalations and exhalations occurring from one moment to the next, each inhalation or exhalation has a beginning and an end. Their nature is to arise and to pass away, to appear and disappear. These qualities can be understood with close observation because we are keeping our mind very quiet, calm and in a state of equanimity. (*samudayadhammānupassī vā kāyasmim̐ viharati, vāyadhammānupassī vā kāyasmim̐ viharati, samudaya-vāyadhammānupassī vā kāyasmim̐ viharati*).

Gradually, the breath is transformed to a very refined sensation. Even in this refined state, the common characteristic of arising and passing can be observed. The more one practices, the more one sees how the arising and passing nature is common to the whole body. It is not confined to the breath - the whole body has the characteristic of arising and passing. Inferentially, one can discern the arising and passing characteristic is common to others, that anyone breathing, experiences the same nature.

The bodily processes of others are similar (*ajjhataṃ vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati, bahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati*) and

if one does enough practice, the insights gained about one's body could be applied externally, to others. Arising and passing is common to everyone. There is a conditioning of physical process and one begins to understand the cause-and-effect relationship. There are many other insights that one can experience.

With continued practice, one's observation transcends external parameters; and the mind becomes clear and simplified. When the mind is refined, one begins to understand there is nothing but bodily processes.

One has a strong self-identity when the practice is commenced "I am a man, I am a woman, I am a mother, I am a father, I am in this country", and there are many perceptions, signage and conditioning associated with the self.

With continuous practice, one begins to see the causal bodily processes. Using bodily processes to further enhance mindfulness, one develops wisdom (*'atthi kāyo'ti vā panassa sati paccupaṭṭhitā hoti. yāvadeva ñāṇamattāya paṭissatimattāya*) and continues to further enhance mindfulness. With wisdom arising, there is a freeing of the mind – the mind may even relinquish the subtle sensation of the breath and be completely free without any clinging.

Then the first glimpse of freedom is experienced although, it is momentary (*anissito ca viharati, na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*). With repeated practice, when one reaches a certain stage and the practice gathers in momentum, the mind feels free. At

that point, the mind does not attach to anything and this freedom must be prolonged and cultivated.

To prolong it, to enhance it, to internalize this freedom, to experience it in every session of walking and sitting meditation and in daily activities, a complete methodology, a strategy - the noble eight-fold path is necessary. The term *viharati* refers to abiding by the noble eightfold path. Freedom is gradually available as one cultivates a lifestyle, a way of life, so these insights become one's own.

It is a complete change in one's life and one is transformed to a different person.

Even in the first technique of *ānāpānasati*, there is broad scope. Although the *satipaṭṭhāna sutta* refers to *ānāpānasati* in *kāyānupassanā*, it can be developed to understand *vedanānupassanā*, *cittānupassanā* and *dhammānupassanā*. In the *Ānāpānasati sutta*, the Buddha says, this single mediation object (*kammaṭṭhāna*) can be used to develop *kāyānupassanā*, *vedanānupassanā*, *cittānupassanā* and *dhammānupassanā*.<sup>4</sup>

*Ānāpānasati* is a strong meditation technique with many benefits and yields profound insights.

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4 *Ānāpānasati sutta* (MN 118).

## Chapter 2 – The Four Postures

This chapter considers the Buddha's teaching on the *iriyāpatha pabba*, an observation of the four postures. Our daily postures are gross when compared to the refined breath and for that reason, some *yogis* find it easier to commence the practice by focusing on the postures.

When sitting, become aware of the sitting, how the body is comfortable, the legs are bent, the upper body is kept erect, the hands are placed on the lap. Seated like this, maintain the posture like a pyramid, like an ants' hill and the body appears very stable. Awareness can also be shed on lying down and standing. Paying attention on bodily postures, they become a tool to establish mindfulness. As you wait for a bus, become aware of the standing, pay attention to the whole body – the standing posture and how the weight is concentrated at the feet, soles, heels, and the resting of calf muscles. Direct the attention to the body while scanning the standing posture.

Walking is a posture that we use daily, although we are not mindful about it in daily affairs. As we walk, we might plan what can be done when we reach the destination or be immersed in what has happened in the past. Without reminiscing about the past and the future, maintain attention in the present moment, the walking, become aware of the walking, so the physical process and mental attention (or the mental process) are in harmony. Both processes must be synchronised. In our daily lives, we walk while the mind

is distracted from the activity and remain in a different world, daydreaming or fantasizing. Here we are trying to break that habit.

The Buddha specifically mentions about walking meditation, describing its' benefits. Walking meditation is one of the oldest techniques practised by many *yogis*, although insufficient attention is given to it. In some traditions, walking meditation has completely disappeared.

### ***Benefits of walking meditation***

In the *Caṅkamanānisaṃsa sutta* (AN 5.29) of the *Anguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha discusses five benefits of walking meditation.

Firstly, by practising walking meditation, one develops the ability to travel a long distance (*addhānakkhamo hoti*). In the older times, there were no vehicles or other methods of transportation and one had to rely on walking to reach a destination. *Addhānakkhamo hoti* refers to one's skill or ability to travel long distances.

The second benefit is that it helps one to have an enduring practice (*padhānakkhamo hoti*). Endurance and effort are needed to have a good practice. Walking meditation is a process developed in a challenging environment. Ardent effort and skills developed in walking meditation can be extended to various other activities. In challenging daily activities, one can overcome obstacles if one is trained in walking meditation. Ardent effort is necessary to attain

liberation; and this can be developed through walking meditation.

Next the Buddha refers to one's ability to be free from illness, become healthy because walking meditation is good physical exercise (*appābādhō hoti*). Walking meditation improves digestion (*asitaṃ pītaṃ khāyitaṃ sāyitaṃ sammā pariṇāmaṃ gacchati*) and the body becomes healthy, flexible, active and many ailments disappear.

Lastly, one develops durable concentration through walking meditation (*caṅkamādhigato samādhi ciratṭhitiko hoti*). Concentration (*samādhi*) developed through a sitting session can be easily interrupted if someone talks to you, or, if there is background noise or disturbance. As a result, the concentration developed in sitting meditation can be fragile. On the other hand, a fair amount of durable concentration can be developed through the practice of walking.

### *The practice of walking meditation*

Find a suitable place for the practice by preparing the house, a corridor, or a separate walking path. Start the practice with relaxed walking from one end to the other and after walking for about five minutes, become familiar with the walking path so the attention can be retained on the touch sensation of the foot.

Take each step intentionally, keep the eyes open without moving the hands, keeping the hands at the front or at the back. Maintain focus of the eyes at the front without focusing



on a particular place. Try to keep the attention on the foot. Each time the foot is lifted, moved, and placed, mindfully observe the complete process. By developing the practice of walking, mindfulness can be developed in a way that attention is retained immediately where it is necessary.

There are other postures like sitting, where the attention is kept on the body. When you are aware of the postures - sitting, walking, standing, and lying down, continuous mindfulness throughout the day is possible. It can be noted as 'I am walking - I am sitting', and if the "I" is kept out, there is nothing but a series of postures.

The Buddha says, 'one knows when one is walking (*gacchanto vā 'gacchāmī'ti pajānāti*), 'one knows when one is standing' (*ṭhito vā 'ṭhitomhī'ti pajānāti*); 'one knows when one is sitting' (*nisinno vā 'nisinnomhī'ti pajānāti*); 'one knows when one is lying down' (*sayāno vā 'sayānomhī'ti pajānāti*). In this way, the postures can be a tool for developing mindfulness. Whenever there is a switch in posture, from sitting to standing, standing to walking or lying down to sitting, one knows there is continuity of mindfulness.

The standing posture has a beginning and an end. The end might be the beginning of the sitting posture. There is a beginning and end of the sitting posture - the end of the sitting posture might be lying down and the beginning of lying down. After lying down, one may get up to sit and there is an ending of the lying down posture and a beginning of the sitting.

The Buddha also refers to other minor postures (*yathā yathā vā pañassa kāyo pañihito hoti tathā tathā naṃ pajānāti*) and invites us to observe the minor (sub-postures) with awareness. We can refine our mindfulness by observing the four main postures and sub-postures.

The rising and falling of the abdomen can also be observed in this way. Being seated, become aware of the sitting posture and when mindfulness is refined, recognise the subtle processes in the body such as breathing, rising and falling of the abdomen or vibration of the heart. There are many other subtle bodily processes available for our observation.

As you breathe in, the abdomen comes forward, there is a rising. As you breathe out, the abdomen falls back, there is falling. Every rising and falling contributes to developing mindfulness. Rising and falling is a popular method because certain people find *Ānāpānasati* – mindfulness on breathing, difficult.

Rising and falling is a general technique, an easy technique - the sensation is gross; and mindfulness can be easily established on the rising and falling with attention retained close to the abdomen. With an in-breath, one observes the abdomen rising and coming forward, being aware of the rising process. With an out-breath, the abdomen falls back; and one becomes aware of the falling. If mindfulness is not established, labelling can be incorporated so that when the abdomen rises, the rising is known and labelled as 'rising';

with an exhalation, when the abdomen falls, the falling is known and labelled as 'falling'.

Labelling (*manasikāra*) helps to calm the mind, improves our attention and concentration. Labelling is unnecessary when awareness improves and the mind can be kept quiet and refined, retaining silent attention on every rising and falling. It is not a single rising, but a series of risings - not a single falling, but a series of fallings. Practising like this, clear comprehension (*sampajañña*) improves.

The Buddha reminds us that establishing mindfulness is the first step. Once mindfulness is established, our mindfulness and clear comprehension are refined when the primary object, its subtle behaviour is closely observed. For example, one observes how each rising has a beginning, an end; then, a small gap; and each falling has a beginning, an end; then, a small gap before the next rising occurs.

If one can recognize a series of minute risings within a single rising, then, the arising and passing, the beginning and ending of the minute risings can be recognised.

Suppose there were ten risings – in each rising, there is a beginning and an end. Then, a gap - a silent period, which has a beginning, an end and then, a series of fallings. With each minute falling, there is a beginning and an end.

In the *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice, one pays careful attention by developing mindfulness. The mind retains its attention on the rising and falling continuously, maintaining effort, without giving up, overcoming various hindrances to clearly

know the whole process and maintaining an equanimous mind as much as possible. Without attaching to the process or having any resentment towards it, maintain a neutral attitude, a suitable background or a conducive environment and closely observe the rising and falling process.

Observe the many minute posture differences / junctions and changes. Become mindful of the minute postures to develop clear comprehension (*sampajañña*).

The full process and behaviour of the primary object is understood when mindfulness is well established. It enables one to develop insight and understand ‘there is a common arising and passing nature to all bodily phenomena’ - the main postures; sub postures; posture junctions and minute levels of other postural changes (*samudayadhammānupassī vā kāyasmim viharati, vāyadhammānupassī vā kāyasmim viharati, samudayavāyadhammānupassī vā kāyasmim viharati*). Each bodily process has a beginning and an end; and one clearly comprehends it, observing it as a direct experience. It is not through a book or teaching, rather, by direct and verifiable observation. With direct observation, there is no forceful conditioning of the mind through someone else’s borrowed knowledge. Rather, a fresh, equanimous and knowing mind, a beginner’s mind is maintained as one remains attentive.

It is like educating a child. A child has a fresh mind, a beginner’s mind, and as much as possible we try to restrain the child, to teach the child. To do this, the teaching process must be effective. Our mind is like a child. We keep the teaching process gentle, attentive, without much distraction.

The mind learns from these processes as it is exposed to their real nature.

Patiently, observe the behaviour of processes, how they arise and pass away; and their real nature becomes evident. Through this, the mind has a deeper understanding, a realization, 'there is a body, there is no person, no individual - no "I", a being, but just bodily processes and various insights are possible (*atthi kayo ti vā panassa sati paccupaṭṭhitā hoti*).

At this stage of the practice, one observes the transience, impermanence, and the causes of the conditioning processes; how there is an absence of control over processes. The causal - dependent arising', the impermanent, unsatisfactory and non-governable nature of phenomena is understood. There is no inner essence to the process - no inner core or inner soul. The non-self-nature that underpins phenomena can be understood. One deeply understands and recognizes the three universal characteristics; *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anatta* that leads to disenchantment (*nibbidā*) and one experiences dispassion (*virāga*).

One simply allows things to happen rather than trying to grasp and experiences detachment and complete relinquishment. The mind becomes disassociated, without attachment to the world, temporarily liberated from grasping to anything in the world (*anissito ca viharati, na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*). Gaining this insight can be eye-opening. So far, the mind has been burdened by defilements. Now at least for a short period, the mind experiences freedom.

## *Path and methodology for freedom*

A path and methodology are needed to develop and enhance this freedom.

The path is the noble eightfold path. It is a matter of continuous maintenance of mindfulness and improving one's *sīla*. Without maintaining morality – bodily and verbal restraint, a healthy mind cannot be maintained. One's peace of mind depends on how one interacts with others and maintains *sīla*.

With the presence of this understanding, one maintains *sīla*, recognizing the benefits of *sīla*. Someone else does not have to force you to maintain restraint (*sīla*), you maintain restraint, knowing the benefits of *sīla*. As much as possible, maintain good words, good communication and a correct livelihood. When *sīla* improves, one maintains mindfulness, the necessary amount of concentration and attentively knows what is going on with clarity of mind.

There is correct-view and an unentangled mind free from burden, stress, clutter, or defilements. Wisdom (*paññā*) is necessary to have such a peaceful, clear and unentangled mind. One must live a life that cultivates such conditions, maintaining morality which supports concentration. Concentration supports wisdom and wisdom supports morality. These three components are interdependent, inter-related and help one another.

The *iriyāpatha pabba* is short, although, the Buddha very clearly shows how to practise *Satipaṭṭhāna*, to improve

mindfulness by retaining awareness on the postures and keeping the mind clear and purified.

## Chapter 3 – Daily Activities and Clear Comprehension

The third technique for establishing mindfulness is to become mindful of daily activities (*sampajāñña pabbam*) – being present to unfolding phenomena, leaving aside the past and the future, without giving importance to memories, daydreaming or fantasizing.

This practice can be commenced with *ānāpānasati*, aiming to retain attention on the breath to establish mindfulness. Mindfulness can be established on the breath, the present moment to know every breath as it occurs, the characteristics of each breath, one after the other.

The Buddha extends the attention to bodily activities, instructing us to become mindful when we go forward and come back (*abhikkante paṭikkante sampajānakārī hoti*). In our daily lives we are immersed in thoughts about the past and the future as we walk, and the mind is not synchronized with bodily activities.

### *Becoming mindful of ordinary activities*

To some extent, this is a repetition of mindfulness of postures (*iriyāpatha pabbam*) as the attention falls on the main postures - walking, sitting, standing, and lying down and the sub-postures (*yathā yathā vā panassa kāyo pañihito hoti tathā tathā nam pajānāti*). One can say the daily activities and clear comprehension (*sampajāñña pabbam*) is a more enhanced



version of mindfulness of the postures, where one aims to incorporate mindfulness in daily activities. Since it is difficult to invest time continuously for sitting sessions or doing walking meditation, mindfulness must be incorporated in daily activities. It is not neglecting daily activities by giving prominence to meditation. Rather, mindfulness is incorporated to daily activities, to have continuity of mindfulness.

Walking forward and back is a very ordinary daily activity that is done many times. Are we able to introduce mindfulness to ordinary activities? While walking, can we establish mindfulness? While coming back, can we establish mindfulness? In this way, we aim to bring back our attention to the body without allowing the mind to wander and daydream.

The Buddha instructs us to be mindful when we see something in front, to be mindful as we look around (*ālokite vilokite sampajānakārī hoti*). To become mindful as we bend our limbs, hands, or legs, as we stretch the body (*samiñjite pasārite sampajānakārī hoti*), to carefully navigate our attention to subtle bodily activities.

These activities typically happen in auto-pilot mode and we tend to ignore them, thinking there are more important activities and fail to pay attention to walking, sitting, standing, lying down, stretching and the bending of limbs.

We need to slow down to bring our attention to ordinary bodily movement and activities and mindfully attend to other activities we thought to be important. For example, if

you are tasked with writing a letter, you might consider it more important than paying attention to stretching or bending limbs, walking forward or sideways. Feeling these are ordinary activities, one neglects them, consider writing a letter as more important and pay attention to that task.

By paying attention and being mindful about ordinary activities, we bring our attention to writing a letter more effectively. The mindfulness developed in attending to ordinary activities enables us to attend to other activities more attentively. The Buddha instructs a monk to be mindful when wearing the robe and carrying the alms bowl (*saṅghāṭīpattacīvaradhāraṇe sampajānakārī hoti*).

The Buddha's instructions are for us to pay attention to ordinary activities - be mindful as we eat, drink something, chew on food (*asite pīte khāyite sāyite sampajānakārī hoti*), when defecating or urinating (*uccārapassāvakamme sampajānakārī hoti*), walking, standing, sitting, lying down, sleeping (or not sleeping), in conversation or in silence (*gate ṭhite nisinne sutte jāgarite bhāsīte tuṅhībhāve sampajānakārī hoti*). The list is long; and no activities omitted.

Paying attention to daily activities, for repeated contemplation (*anupassanā*), a fair amount of effort is required (*ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ*). Routinely, we forget to be mindful, although we understand it is important. We must adopt various strategies to remind ourselves to be mindful.

In my early days of practice, I continuously forgot to be mindful. To remind myself, I pasted a label on the door

saying, “be mindful”, on my table, I had a label - “be mindful”. I pasted a label on my watch to “be mindful”. We can adopt various prompts and strategies to remind ourselves to be mindful. Otherwise, we forget.

The mind’s nature is to hanker after the past, recollecting what happened and shift to the future to plan events and various activities. It is just habit, and we need to escape from it by adopting various ways and means to establish mindfulness, to earth ourselves again and again.

With continuous mindfulness, we see how we engage in many activities from one moment to the next, from the time we are awake to when we fall asleep. For example, we wake up, lift-up from bed to stand up. When getting up is complete, standing begins. We walk to the restroom. Standing is complete and walking has commenced. In the restroom, walking ends and washing begins. With the brushing of teeth, the brushing commences and ends. Likewise, we begin to see a series of activities, the beginning and ending, throughout the day.

### *Seeing the detail with clear comprehension*

With close attention, we start to see the sub-activities in each activity. For example, there are many processes in eating – preparing to eat and serving various vegetables, curries and rice; mixing it and with each morsel of food, tasting the different textures of the vegetables, curries or rice, which are different. One might mix it again, make a lump and bring another morsel of food to the mouth and begin to chew,

tasting it, swallowing each morsel and place the hand on the plate, mix the food and take in one morsel of food after the other, mixing it again and again.

Walking is also the same. The sub-activities in walking can be easily discerned. Observe how you stand at the end of the walking path, looking ahead, keeping the hands bound and start walking, the lifting of the leg, moving and placing it, how the weight transfers from one leg to another. With closer observation, see the minor activities of walking - lifting is a series of liftings, moving is a series of movements and placing is a series placings and the hardness, softness, roughness, smoothness, coolness can be felt when the sole touches the ground.

Clear comprehension (*sampajañña*) improves with continuity of mindfulness and we become aware of the more subtle activities and recognise that every activity has a beginning and an end (*samudaya dhammānupassī vā kāyasmim viharati, vāya dhammānupassī vā kāyasmim viharati*). In the beginning, we give a label to activities - eating, drinking, walking, standing, lying down or brushing teeth. When we drill down to the detail with established mindfulness, the context and labels given are lost and our attention closely directs to refined characteristics.

The practice is commenced by establishing mindfulness on ordinary postures or daily activities and drills down to the elements with refined mindfulness. With refined attention, we progress to the fundamental level where the mind becomes subtle, refined, and concentrated. The conceptual

information, signs or marks are lost; and the mind establishes concentration on a very refined characteristic and attention is directed to the elements (*dhātumanasikāra*).

*Satipatṭhāna* techniques are inter-related. We can start with a very ordinary activity and progress to refined characteristics. At all levels, we see the beginning and the end. The more we look at the processes available within ourselves, the more we can apply the same knowledge to others. There is no difference.

In ordinary description, one may say, “I am walking”, “I am standing”, “I am having my meal”, although, when the “I” is kept aside, the underlying process, the series of activities; series of elemental characteristics can be seen. The external activities are the same. Others experience the same when involved in these activities – the activities begin, end, another begins and ends.

We are not thinking of activities, we are aware of them. At the beginning, we had to remind ourselves about the activity. For example, when eating, if the mind is constantly distracted, labelling and noting can be incorporated. When mixing food on a plate of served vegetables, rice and curries, although the body is involved, one can verbalise it mentally, noting it as ‘mixing, mixing’. When the morsel of food is brought to the mouth, verbalise it and say ‘taking, taking’ or ‘lifting, lifting’, or when placing the food in the mouth, note it as ‘eating, eating’ or ‘tasting, tasting’, ‘chewing, chewing,’ ‘swallowing, swallowing’.

Each activity can be noted and when the mind is tamed, not distracted, hankering after the past or longing for the future, one can stop the labelling and noting to maintain a quiet mind. Vigilantly, observe each activity, or minor aspects of each process with a silent mind. Undertaking this process and being mindful, various insights are possible.

The Buddha explains how one initially becomes aware of the individual activity - “I am eating, I am drinking, I am walking, I am driving”, but, later, when the awareness is refined, personality view dilutes and one begins to realise there is nothing, but mental and bodily processes involved (*atthi kāyo’ti vā panassa sati paccupaṭṭhitā hoti*).

Now mindfulness is well established on bodily processes and there are very few distractions. Even if the mind shifts to the past or the future, there isn’t much proliferation, and the mind quickly returns to the primary object. With repeated attention, the mind is trained to stay with bodily processes. The mind is restrained, and attention is retained on the body. It is now a matter of refining one’s attention and paying close attention to improve clear comprehension.

With improved clear comprehension, more characteristics of phenomena become visible; there is continuity of mindfulness and from time to time, insights arise. One prepares the necessary foundation for insights to arise with closer observation and continuity of mindfulness, maintaining a silent, equanimous mind, remaining with clear knowing without giving into lust or hatred. These are the pre-requisites for insights to arise. Insights are possible

when we see how quickly phenomena arise and pass away. With repeated observation, deeper understanding about impermanence develops, the transience in all processes and the absence of a fixed thing is seen. There is a presence of processes and activities - it is like a huge factory of many activities, arising and passing away, one after another.

Continuously attending to this task, disenchantment towards the body sets in. Any attachment to the body, or conceit, thinking “I am beautiful”, “I am powerful” - such wrong ideas and illusions dissipate. One becomes grounded when the transient, vulnerable, and impermanent nature of phenomena is understood. When disenchantment sets in, the body can be seen in a more neutral way, as if it is observed as a third person, an outsider. Various bodily processes unfold, and one remains disengaged from bodily processes, observing the body with dispassion.

### ***Temporary Freedom***

The experience is as if we are watching someone else walking, someone else eating. The body is involved in numerous activities and we observe as an outsider. At one point, the mind completely gives up and becomes completely independent from the whole process (*anissito ca viharati*). The mind becomes empty of any object and there is no attachment. It completely gives up, understanding that there is nothing worthy of attachment, clinging or grasping. It can happen instantly; and with repeated practice, the experience becomes lasting. The mind’s independence can

be experienced for two minutes, three minutes, five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes, where there is no attachment, grasping. There is temporary freedom.

One can distinctly recognise this change and vividly recognise that a big mental shift has happened. When one walks, the mind remains detached and independent. There is seclusion from the activity. Similarly, activities such as eating, drinking, walking, and brushing one's teeth can occur and one may closely observe the activity, but the mind remains disinterested and independent, maintaining freedom from attachment. One can become an island within oneself. This island is free from defilements, stress, and any form of grasping. There is peace.

Although the mind becomes secluded from defilements, defilements pop up again and again, causing disturbance. A proper path to practice, the noble eight-fold path is necessary so the mind can become completely free and pure to maintain this peace.

We must maintain a fair amount of morality and concentration so that when the mind is calm and collected, defilements can be recognised as soon as they arise. To have this clarity, we must empower the mind with the necessary concentration. When such clarity of mind is present, we readily see how foolishly we attach to worldly phenomena, become entangled, unnecessarily involved and begin to see shortcomings within ourselves.

We must be honest and well-grounded to genuinely recognise defilements and shortcomings. Defilements must



be recognised - we don't approve them or feed them but leave them aside, let them go so that the habits and latent tendencies are weakened.

Developing the practice, we live a life of morality (*sīla*), maintain a fair amount of clarity and concentration (*samādhi*), recognise various defilements, shortcomings, entanglements in the mind due to past habits and purify the mind to have long term peace and clarity of mind. Freedom of mind is available and can be realised by traversing the noble eightfold path.

## Chapter 4 – Thirty-Two Parts of the Body

The *satipatthāna* practice is a gradual process. The practice can be commenced with *kāyānupassanā* (contemplation of the body) to progress towards the contemplation of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*), the mind and mind objects (*cittānupassanā*) and unfolding phenomena (*dhammānupassanā*). *Anupassanā* is repeated application of mindfulness to an object.

The practice must commence with the body as it is difficult to manage the mind straight away. In the *Ānāpānasati sutta* (MN 118), the Buddha cautions against attempting the *cittānupassanā* practice when one's mindfulness is weak as the mind can become distracted by various defilements. When mindfulness is not established, one can become absorbed in a story, get carried away or caught up. For this reason, the practice must commence with *kāyānupassanā* and then, *vedanānupassanā*, to gradually progress towards *cittānupassanā*.

The term *kāyānupassanā* means contemplation of the body, looking at the body directly. One can learn about the body through books, an anatomy class, or other methods, although such knowledge is superficial and stays in the mind at a surface level. In the practice, one tries to directly experience the body.

Direct experience is prominent and visible throughout the *satipatthāna* practice.

There are many ways to acquire knowledge, it can be through faith (*saddha*), a teaching or by deductive knowledge. The Buddha cautions that knowledge gained through such means is partial as it lacks direct personal experience, emphasising direct touch (experience).

We see this throughout the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*.

### ***Internal focus on the body***

*Kāyānupassanā* has several methods of training to retain the mind's attention on the body. The mind typically strays, thinking about the past, the future and various people. The mind is habitually extroverted. The practice is internally focused and takes the attention back to the body. The approach is a step-by-step, gradual progress towards liberation.

In the *kāyānupassanā* practice, the Buddha takes the mind's attention to the body, to directly observe it, repeatedly, to understand the body (*kāye kāyānupassī viharati*). The effort must be towards repeated practice, so the mind's attention is habitually retained on the body.

The previous chapters considered various techniques to retain the mind's attention on the body, commencing with *ānāpānasati* - mindfulness on breathing. Breathing is an involuntary process that happens from birth to death, and one must continuously retain one's attention on the breathing, the present moment, to develop mindfulness.

The focus is then to retain one's attention on the four main postures: sitting, lying down, standing, walking and the sub-postures. We fail to be attentive when we change postures, maintaining our attention elsewhere. As we walk, we may look around, think of something else, plan future events and fail to be aware of the walking. As a result, our mindfulness during the day is weak, so we must establish mindfulness and become aware of the bodily postures.

The focus is then expanded to establishing mindfulness in daily activities (*sampajāna pabbam*). We are possessed with the quality of mindfulness, but our attention span is insufficient to liberate the mind, to enlighten the mind. By maintaining mindfulness in daily activities, we can become mindful throughout the day, as much as possible.

This can be difficult at the beginning as we are distracted and absorbed in various tasks. For example, when reading a newspaper, we might feel excitement or agony based on the news story, generating mental proliferation, getting lost in the content, fantasize, and lose the present moment. While reading the news article, the mind wanders, thinking about children, office work or something else and become completely distracted.

On the other hand, we can maintain some balance, know that we are seated, holding a newspaper, that the article is written by someone, we are reading it and be aware of the reading. Then, we are mindful of the activity and can maintain mindfulness throughout the day.

## *Contemplating on the thirty-two bodily parts*

Another aspect of *satipaṭṭhāna* is looking at the body as loathsome (*paṭikūlamanasikāra pabbam*), where one tries to understand the body through a different lens. The mind can experience lust, see someone in a magazine and be overborne with lust. In such instances, developing *ānāpānasati* or any other type of meditation can be difficult as the mind continues to be agitated in a burning state of lust. By developing *paṭikūlamanasikāra*, one gains an understanding of the loathsome state of the body.

Typically, we perceive the body to be beautiful, fair, and tall and to have many other positive attributes. We try to keep the body clean and beautiful, apply adornments like lipstick and cutex and wear designer clothes to make our appearance more beautiful.

We feel concerned about our appearance. Yet, if we look deeply and penetrate the skin, we can only see impurity. Focusing on the outer appearance, we remain in lust and delusion, retaining the mind in a fantasy world, forgetting the inner layers of impurity. Such behaviour can lead to various sexual and sensual desires, sexual fantasies with consequences and our mind can become utterly bewildered and polluted because of the various lustful thoughts.

The Buddha's recommendation is for us to observe the body as constituent parts. Although we consider the body as a single unit, it consists of various parts which are loathsome

and impure. The Buddha instructs us to look at these parts, beginning with hair in the head, hair in the body, and to direct our attention to the nails, teeth, and skin. As we continue to focus, the Buddha's instructions are to observe and understand their impure nature.

When each bodily part is taken individually, we see that they are not nice, not beautiful - rather, they are impure. Suppose we were to extract a tooth and it was held in front of us, then, we wouldn't consider our teeth to be beautiful and it would appear loathsome. If all bodily parts were taken from the body and placed before us, we can see their impure and loathsome nature.

Together with the brain, the body has thirty-two constituent parts. Of these, the first twenty body parts are solid and the last twelve are in liquid form. We must try to retain our attention on the bodily parts. Once we familiarise ourselves with the first five parts, we can penetrate deeper and observe the flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow and kidneys.

Penetrating the skin, we observe its shape, appearance, how it is mixed with blood, impure in appearance and is loathsome. The same with kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, and stomach content. Mesentery is a continuous set of tissues in the abdomen attaching the intestines to the wall of the abdomen, holding them in place. Then, we can see faeces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints and urine. None of them appear beautiful, only, loathsome.

We get carried away with external appearance and forget that our bodies are composed of these loathsome parts. If we can penetrate the skin, bodily content appears ugly and loathsome. A beautiful verse is uttered by *Sumedhā Theri* in the *Theri Gāthā*, where she says that if we were to turn the body inside out, even our mother may not stay close to us because of the smell and its repulsive nature.<sup>5</sup>

### *Maintaining a mental balance*

The Buddha provides a beautiful simile of a bag with openings at both ends. There is an opening at the bottom and the upper end and if the bottom opening closes and one fills the bag with various grains like red rice, white rice, beans, peas and millet, a person with good eyesight, taking some grains to the hand can properly recognise red rice, white rice, millet, beans, peas and individually recognise each grain. Because their eyesight is good, each grain can be discerned. Similarly, the body has two openings. Commencing the practice with the outer parts, we penetrate the more subtle parts whilst maintaining a mental balance.

Some form of mental balance is necessary to progress in the mindfulness practice. During the Buddha's time, a group of monks contemplated on the thirty-two bodily parts (*paṭikūlamanasikārapabbam*) and gained an understanding

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5 "yo naṃ vinibbhujitoā - abbhantaramassa bāhiraṃ kayirā.  
gandhassa asahamānā - sakāpi mātā jiguccheyya."  
- Sumedhā therīgāthā (KN 9.73).

about the body's loathsome nature and felt depressed, wanting to rid themselves of the body and committed suicide.

The Buddha reiterates the need to maintain a balance. The practice should not direct us to feel depressed or develop aversion towards the body or commit suicide, but to overcome lust. For example, at the beginning, we may experience burning lust because of delusion, but if we look at the bodily parts and see the loathsome nature, the lust that has arisen may disappear. When the mind reaches a neutral state, it may not be necessary to continue with this meditation technique as it can lead to the mind feeling depressed and developing aversion towards the body. This is not preferable when the expected result is to overcome lust, to retain the mind in the middle and to have equanimity.

This is what is represented in the Buddha's simile. When we see various types of grains, there is an absence of lust or aversion and there is neutral feeling. We must reach a neutral mental state / mindset when contemplating the thirty- two parts of the body. At the beginning, the mind might experience lust, but after commencing the practice, the mind becomes neutral when the bodily parts are observed and there is equanimity. It is then no longer necessary to contemplate on the thirty-two parts of the body.



## ***Breaking up the perception of compactness***

The same practice can be used to overcome compactness. Typically, we consider the body as a unit, that it belongs to a person, to “me”; that it is 'something', a compact. A useful analogy is a vehicle. Say you have a car, its' brand is Toyota, and you disassemble parts of the car, one by one, the seats, steering wheel, wheels, rims, engine, the body of the car and various constituent parts. Once it is disassembled, the appearance of a car is not available. We are so attached to brands, but there is not even a car that is available, just parts. Once the parts are assembled, we call it a car, assign a name, but it is not real, just a fabrication.

Ultimately what happens is that we become lost in these imposed (conventional) names. If we can penetrate and know what is available is not a Toyota, not a Corolla, not even a car, but various parts, we can disassemble the various parts. There are various nationals - American, Sri Lankan, European and the classification of male, female and everyone has a name. There are so many varieties, information and conventions and we get lost in it. We need to penetrate the body in the same way as a car, understand it is made up of many components, many bodily parts, and when assembled can be called a man or a woman.

By unpacking the thirty-two parts, we break up the perception of a compact, a unit (*ghana saññā*). We have a neutral point of view when we become aware of the hair, nails, teeth, head and so forth. It is like a doctor performing

a surgery on the stomach. The doctor will not see it as loathsome and open-up the stomach, the intestines and continue with the surgery.

By undertaking this practice, we see the body as constituent parts, understand the body is comprised of many parts (*rāsi saññā*) - is a combination of many parts. There is no 'man' or woman', no one that is Chinese, Japanese, Sri Lankan, American. They are just imposed, conventional labels.

Delusion is to be lost in the labels. Wisdom arises when we pay attention to the constituent parts and understand how the body is a composition, a combination and transcend the view of a compact, a unit. By contemplating on the thirty-two parts of the body, we overcome desire and lust and are equipped with the wisdom that there is no single unit (*ghana saññā*), only constituent parts and we overcome conceit.

Conceit is nourished with the perception that one is rich, educated, beautiful, strong and it can be harmful as one ends up with an elevated sense of self, neglects others or may even look down on others. By contemplating on the thirty-two parts of the body, the body can be understood as an accumulation of many parts put together and it is uncertain at which point a body part may be damaged or become ill. We have no control over the body being afflicted by ailment and degeneration of the constituent parts. We might try to maintain good health by having nutritious food and exercising, but, have no control about when we become sick.

COVID is an example of human vulnerability, frailty, and weakness.

Defilements like lust and conceit can be overcome by undertaking the practice, and the mind can be made neutral as the mind's attention is retained on the body. The mind is not distracted when reflecting on bodily parts. Anyone undertaking a contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*) can retain the mind's focus with the body. Such restrained attention facilitates experiential examination of the body. With refined mindfulness, one begins to understand rising and falling, the various sensations, breathing and bodily processes.

Penetrating further, we can recognise that sensations are impermanent, their nature is to arise, persist and to pass away. Breathing is the same, there is an arising and passing, its' nature is to arise, persist and to pass away. Bodily feelings are the same, they arise and pass away.

Although the body appears as a unit, it is a series of processes constantly changing and is subject to change. As we penetrate the body, we understand it is like a factory that constantly works and never stops. If it stops, we become sick and may even die. Once we begin to understand the nature of the body, dispassion arises; and the mind becomes detached from the body. When mindfulness is retained on the body, and is refined, the arising and passing away nature is evident. With sharpened mindfulness, the mind remains in focus, concentrated, and comprehends the characteristics

of the elements, how feelings are transient and impermanent.

Previously the mind was attached to the body and there was conceit. Now it is detached and there is disenchantment towards the body. There is dispassion towards the body. There is a disengaged observation. Continuing the practice, dispassion sets in and the mind ultimately becomes free (*anissito ca viharati, na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*).

When we understand that attachment is pointless, the mind becomes free, there is nothing to grasp, and it is a matter of letting go. Now the mind is free, it has found its own island, a safe place to rest. This freedom must be developed.

The mind may wander again and grasp due to habit. With correct understanding and insight, we maintain this freedom, enhance it, and maximize it. A suitable lifestyle conducive to freedom is necessary to sustain the practice in this way.

Progressing in the practice, we understand the necessity of *sīla* – morality, the importance of living a moral life to maintain a purified mind. If our bodily actions or speech is impure, it is symptomatic of the mind becoming impure and polluted. When the mind is impure, our speech is coarse and improper, and we can engage in bad deeds. It is necessary for the mind to be pure so that bodily and verbal actions are pure.

Clarity of mind is essential for the practice as we may otherwise fail to recognise various defilements and feel deluded. Collectedness of mind (concentration) helps overcome defilements and for wisdom (*paññā*) to arise.

We must practice, *silā*, *samādhi*, *paññā* (morality, concentration, and wisdom) - morality helps develop concentration, concentration helps develop wisdom; and wisdom helps develop morality, to strengthen concentration. These three trainings (*sikkhā*) are mutually aligned, interconnected and interdependent.

Practising in this way, the noble eightfold path becomes our way of life and practice.

## Chapter 5 – The Elements

The *Satipatthāna* practice is not for a day or for a week, it is a life's journey and must become a way of life. When we become familiar with the practice, it becomes part of everyday and relevant to ourselves and it is easy to continue the practice without much effort.

Effort is required in the beginning as the mind is conditioned with defilements. A fair amount of energy is needed to overcome hindrances. Even when the path is difficult, one must continue to strive with endurance and perseverance. Too much energy can become a hindrance to maintaining concentration, so energy must be balanced throughout the practice.

Then Buddha says '*vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassam*' - it is necessary to maintain equanimity to have an unbiased observation. If one's attention is distracted by beautiful things, then it is difficult to maintain a balance. Similarly, if one experiences sorrow or despair while undertaking the practice, it indicates one has failed to maintain a balance. Maintaining equanimity is important as it facilitates clear comprehension and wisdom.

In the *Satipatthānā* practice, emphasis is placed on direct observation. One establishes mindfulness by maintaining a focus on bodily processes. The practice assures a deep and profound understanding of oneself as well as the external surroundings and phenomena.

In the *Ānāpānasati* practice, the Buddha instructs us to develop mindfulness on the breath, the in-breath, and the out-breath (*so satova assasati, sato passasati*). Once mindfulness is established, the Buddha's instructions are to penetrate the breath, to examine and recognise subtle aspects of the breath. Whether it is long, short, warm, or cool, from which nostril it goes in and from which nostril it goes out. When mindfulness is established on the breath and close attention is given, these subtle aspects are visible.

The Buddha instructs us to establish mindfulness on the four main postures (sitting, standing, walking, or lying down), the sub-postures and daily activities (*sampajañña pabba*). To become mindful when eating, when walking, wearing clothes or stretching one's limbs. By establishing mindfulness on daily activities, one's mindfulness extends from morning to night, throughout the day, in as many activities as possible. One can be mindful when driving a vehicle, talking to another, listening. Becoming aware of the body, mindfulness is internalised on the breath, rising and falling of the abdomen, the heartbeat and other subtle processes.

### ***Four elements and their characteristics***

The Buddha has categorised the physical world into four types of elements:

Earth element – *pathavī dhātu* - represents the most solid aspect.

Water element – *āpo dhātu* - represents the liquid aspect.

Heat element – *tejo dhātu* - represents the heat aspect or temperature.

Air element – *vāyo dhātū* - represents the movement, the air.

One must establish mindfulness on the elements to understand their behaviour and facilitate insights, to cultivate a way of life to completely free oneself by uprooting defilements to experience lasting freedom.

The world can be understood through a different perspective by contemplating on the four elements (*dhātumanasikāra*). We can become lost in concepts and conventional ideas. By contemplating on the four elements, one can transcend the conventional world to understand the depth, the basics.

The characteristics of the elements must be known and recognised. Once, Most Venerable Matara Srī Ñāṇārāma Mahā Thero very beautifully mentioned that ‘a *yogi* should know the language of the elements’ and this is understood by their characteristics.

The earth element has six characteristics - hardness, softness, heaviness, lightness, roughness, and smoothness. Whenever hardness, heaviness, roughness is available, one knows the earth element is present. Similarly, the presence of softness, lightness or smoothness indicates the earth element is present.



The water element has two characteristics - watery or flowing aspect and cohesiveness. The nature of water is to flow; it constantly flows from an elevation to a lower height. The flowing nature is a key characteristic of the water element. It can also be cohesive. When water is sprinkled on dust particles, they bind together as a lump. Cohesion is an important aspect of the water element. Due to cohesivity, other elements come together to appear like one unit. Without the water element, everything falls apart and nothing appears to be solid.

The air element has two characteristics: movement/vibration and maintenance of shape. Hands and legs can be moved; we can walk, jump about, and run because of the air element. The air element helps maintain our posture. Various pressures apply to our body when we stand. The standing posture can be maintained when the pressure is balanced. Maintaining posture and shape is possible due to the air element.

The heat element has two aspects: heat and coolness (hot and cold). Temperature is experienced because of the heat element.

The physical world is comprised of the four elements. Conventions and concepts are built on the foundation of elements, but we have lost ourselves in given names and added colours.

## *Observing the four elements during meditation*

The four elements can be observed during a session of sitting or walking meditation. At the beginning, during walking meditation, one may consider 'I am walking.' Select a walking path and commence walking, keeping one's attention on the feet, lifting, moving, and placing the foot. When placing the foot on the ground, one may experience hardness, softness, roughness, smoothness, heaviness, and lightness. The attention needs to be refined to observe the characteristics of the elements.

Mindfully, pay attention to the walking, leaving behind the past and the future and establish mindfulness in the present moment. With continuous attention on the lifting and placing of each foot, we can observe the walking process and characteristics of the elements become evident - the hardness, roughness, softness, and smoothness. Observe the heaviness as the foot is lifted, how the weight transfers from one foot to the other. At times, lightness is experienced. The foot may experience heat and coolness along the walking path. All experiences are a manifestation of the elements. The characteristics of the elements can be observed with continued attention on walking.

Next, one can bring the established mindfulness to a sitting session. Begin by paying attention to the postures, making a soft mental note, 'now I am sitting, my head is straight, neck is straight, my upper half of the body is straight; and the legs are bent.' Start to observe the rising and falling of the abdomen.

At the beginning, observe it with a soft mental note as 'rising' and 'falling'. Continued noting is not necessary as the practice progresses. The rising begins gently, reaches a threshold, and disappears. After a small gap, the falling cycle begins. Then it reaches a threshold and disappears. After a small gap, the next rising begins.

With refined attention, it can be seen how a single rising appears as a series of risings. A single falling appears as a series of fallings. You can understand how the rising and falling are subtle movements. A movement can be recognised in their entirety as a series of movements.

The various vibrations of the body can be seen. If the palms are kept together, one on top of another, the warmth in between (heat element) can be experienced. The weight of the upper hand can be felt on the lower hand. This is the heaviness, the earth element. By paying attention to the vibration of the heart, the vibration of the air element can be observed. Movement of the air element is evident in each inhalation and exhalation. The heat element can be observed when the in-breath feels cool; and the out-breath feels warm. The characteristics of the elements can be observed with refined attention and one begins to see how the human body is comprised of just elements, enabling deep insights to arise.

Our observation of the external - of others, is the same. Others are also comprised of the four elements. The whole physical world is the four elements. This is a profound insight that one develops, when the four elements are uncovered. Nourishing this understanding, one can unveil

conventions, concepts and reach the core of physicality, realising it is just the four elements. With this understanding, dispassion sets in.

The Buddha provides the simile of a butcher to explain *dhātumanasikāra* in the *Satipaṭṭhānā sutta*. A butcher kills a cow with the perception 'I am killing a cow', divides the carcass into pieces and takes it to a selling place where people are asking for meat. The butcher's perception of a cow is replaced with the perception of meat. The Buddha says that a *yogi* may commence the practice with the perception of a 'being', and later, as the practice progresses, the perception changes and is replaced with the perception of elements. This is a radical change experienced by a *yogi* when observing the elements in the practice (*dhātumanasikāra*).

As one sees the elements manifest in their awareness, the incorrect view of a person, an individual is changed to an understanding of just the elements. Dispassion develops with this understanding. Typically, we place much value on the body, it is seen as beautiful or handsome compared to another person. Comparing like this, conceit sets in and we develop a wrong attitude. Engaging in such comparison is foolish when the body is seen as a composition of the elements. When everything is reduced to elements, the conceptual boundaries are blurred. It is not possible to separate a male from a female, Sinhalese to English, Buddhist to Muslim – everything reduces to elements and it can be seen how we unnecessarily get lost in convention.

We quarrel with one another, kill one another because we forget this fundamental reality and conceptualise, introducing so many conventions, names, and ultimately, get lost in them. We forget the fundamentals. We continue to struggle in fabricated conventions, fighting and defending to protect what is conditioned. This practice makes us grounded, helps us to establish in the fundamentals and realise that both the internal and external physical world are just elements. With such an understanding, we gradually lose interest and conceit.

### *Common characteristics of elements*

The behaviour of elements can be seen, how they are not real particles and just energies. Each element is an activity. The earth element is not a particle, but an activity. The water, air and heat elements are not particles, but waves or energies. Elements experienced as hardness have a beginning and disappears. Softness also begins and disappears. Heaviness begins and disappears. Lightness begins and disappears. Roughness begins and disappears. Softness begins and disappears. Movement has a beginning and an end. Heat, the temperature has a beginning and an end. Vibration arises and passes away. It can be seen how elements have their own nature, have a common characteristic of arising and passing away.

With closer observation, a deeper understanding of the physical world is possible. Typically, our attention is not penetrative and remains on the surface. As the practice

deepens, a *yogi* understands the elements are unstable, vulnerable, and fragile, rapidly arising and passing away, transient and impermanent.

In the *Satipaṭṭhānā* practice, mindfulness is established on the elements, to distinctly recognise their characteristics. Their common nature, to arise and pass away can be seen with continuous observation (*samudayadhammānupassī vā kāyasmim viharati, vāyadhammānupassī vā kāyasmim viharati, samudayavāyadhammānupassī vā kāyasmim viharati*).

Lasting happiness cannot be expected from such behaviour, when things are constantly changing, and the unsatisfactory nature of the physical world can be understood. In one moment, it may give satisfaction, and in another, change, to give rise to suffering. The unsatisfactory nature of transience is readily apparent to a *yogi* when the rapid arising and passing of elements can be seen.

The behaviour of elements is beyond our control, we cannot predict which element will take prominence at a given moment. Habitually, we consider the body to belong to us. With penetrative understanding of the arising and passing nature of elements, the absence of control and incapacity to govern the body can be understood.

Dispassion sets in as one begins to understand the true nature of the body and how it is beyond one's control. With dispassion, attachment to one's body or someone else's body decreases. The physical world begins to appear like particles, or waves, constantly arising and passing. Such deep insights into the nature of physical phenomena

radically changes one's perspective. What was previously considered attractive, owned with attachment is no longer beautiful or valuable. Rather, it is seen through the lens of arising and passing of elements, nothing worth holding or grasping. Only their transient, non-governable and impermanent nature is evident.

An understanding of the rapid arising and passing nature of elements, physical phenomena can occur in any posture. One's mindfulness becomes established on an observation of the rapid arising and passing of elements as one continues to use the body to strengthen this understanding. It is an eye-opening insight when such a penetrative understanding is available. Delusion is gradually removed as the perception of an individual is dismantled to elements and there is clarity of mind.

With grasping, there are many perceptions and signs that make the mind heavy and cluttered. When the observation is simplified, one's perspective of the world is clear and light. Everywhere, there is nothing but the four elements. One has clarity of mind due to progress of the practice. This clarity contributes towards developing wisdom.

What was previously observed as a unit is now comprised of millions of particles. At a deeper level, only waves, energies are available; and a view of a compact, a unit is no longer available. The boundaries have blurred. The internal body and external surroundings appear like dots, as if everything is bursting, there is just arising and passing.

Even greater disenchantment is experienced at this stage and the mind does not grasp while wisdom continues to develop. At one point, it may assist to completely let go of grasping to mental and physical phenomena. The mind becomes completely free from any physical or mental aspect. There is freedom from material aggregates (*rūpa khandha*). If one can be free from attachment to feelings (*vedanā khandha*), mental formations (*saṅkhāra khandha*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa khandha*), the mind becomes completely free. The mind no longer associates with anything (*anissito ca viharati*) and does not grasp to anything in the world (*na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*).

The freedom experienced might be momentary, but with repeated practice, these insights will continue to appear. One can observe how the mind, at one moment, can release, not grasp, or associate with anything. The experience is strong and can be readily seen; and one may feel as if one is in a different domain. With continued practice, it can be enhanced, and the freedom can be prolonged from one minute to two minutes, ten minutes or a couple of hours and maintain that unbounded, unattached, non-grasping mind for some time.

The mind cannot be freed permanently as it remains conditioned and subject to defilements. To completely uproot defilements and release from hindrances, it is necessary to find a path. Lasting freedom is possible by progressing on the noble eight-fold path.



Morality must be maintained to have clarity of mind, to recognise various defilements and to develop concentration so that insights can arise, paving the way to enhance wisdom. In this way, *sīla*, *samādhi*, *pañña* become key practices to develop.

## Chapter 6 – Nine Stages of a Human Corpse

The *kayānupassanā* techniques considered so far were about establishing mindfulness in the present moment and it helps one to be grounded, always arriving in the present moment, not to be in a dream world. Clear comprehension (*sampajañña*) helps to enhance that quality. By contemplating on the thirty-two parts of the body, observing the loathsome aspects of the body, one experiences a lessening of lust and conceit. To observe the elements, the mind must be in a state of equanimity, where it is free from lust. When the practice is further refined, the characteristics of the elements can be understood.

Another technique is contemplation of the nine stages of a corpse (*navasīvathika*). Human lives are transient and there is limited time available. Our lives are very short. Human life spans can be 50 years, 60 years, 70 years, or 80 years and rarely does one live over a hundred years. Most of life's quarrels end when life is considered in this angle – life is very short, temporary and all possessions must be left behind.

Unfortunately, people fail to look at life in this way, remaining obsessed with attractive things, and wishing to have more and more, quarrelling with others who want the same thing.

There is much competition for resources, sensual attractions, and pleasures. As a result, the world is in a big competition.

Seeing the body through the lens of death and transience will guide us to observe it in a very different domain.

### *Contemplating the nine stages of a human corpse*

The Buddha requests us to consider the body after it dies in the *navasīvathika* practice. The first stage is discolouration and swelling. Then, liquids ooze out and it becomes loathsome. There are bad smells, various birds and animals come to eat the flesh and internal parts come out as the body is opened. It is no longer beautiful, the internal parts are visible, there is swelling and oozing of liquids. It is extremely unattractive and loathsome.

After some time, there is further decay and different pieces appear in different places. One can see the skeleton, the body discoloured and wrapped with tendons. With time, it is no longer possible to recognise the skeleton, the bones are broken and scattered here and there.

Ultimately, the bones decay, convert to dust particles and become absorbed to the earth. This is the destiny of a human body. This process of decay is inevitable and common to everyone. Nowadays it is difficult to observe this process as people try to hide the reality, covering the corpse with beautiful cloth and burning incense to avoid bad smell at funerals. There are funeral directors to beautify dead bodies. The reality is hidden from us. In the older days, in India, when a person dies, there was no beautification, rather, the body was taken and thrown to the cemetery and the process of decay was readily visible.

Anyone wishing to remove lust can go in search of a corpse and reflect on the decaying corpse. There are few benefits to this practice: to understand the loathsome aspects of the body, to remove lust by knowing its true nature; and understanding death. One can reflect on how a person lived for 70 years, had a husband, a wife, a family, an education (maybe went to university), had a job, children, parents, a career, and a reputation, but is now just a dead body.

It can be realised that death is inevitable when life is understood through this angle. By reflecting on death, the uncertainty of life can be understood; and it helps us to see life through a lens where conceit is removed. It seems foolish to have conceit over one's education, wealth and compare oneself superior to another. Reflecting through this lens, one becomes humble and grounded when the transience of the human body is understood, that its' fate, is to die. Inevitable death becomes another aspect of the practice.

### ***Loathsome overcomes lust and conceit***

With the practice, the loathsome (*asubha*) nature of the body (*paṭikkūlamānasikāra*) and the inevitability of death can be understood (*maraṇasati*). Lust is overcome and one can progress in the practice of mindfulness on breathing (*ānāpānasati*) or meditation on the elements (*dhātu mānasikāra*).

The Buddha used certain dead bodies to communicate a strong teaching to others. There was a popular prostitute called Sirimā during the Buddha's time, she was very

beautiful and even a monk became attracted to her. Many had lustful thoughts about Sirimā. After some time, she passed away. The Buddha asked the King not to bury her body, to preserve the corpse for some time without allowing animals to come. After some time, the body became bloated, discoloured, and swollen. The Buddha requested everyone to come close and observe Sirimā's dead body. Following the King's orders, many people gathered around the corpse, including the monk who was thinking about Sirimā.

The Buddha was also present amongst the huge gathering. The Buddha asked everyone, 'who wants to have her for 1000 (in today's terms we would say 1000 dollars). Nobody came forward. Then the Buddha reduced the price. Who wants to have her for 500 dollars? Nobody came forward. Say about 200 dollars? Nobody. One hundred dollars? Nobody. 50 dollars? Nobody came forward. Maybe 1 dollar? Even for a dollar, there was nobody. How about having her for free? Still, no one came forward.

When she was alive, many rich people, even Kings spent thousands of dollars on her (I am using today's terminology) just for one night. But now, nobody came forward, even for free. Her body was entirely bloated, discoloured, oozing liquids and appeared extremely loathsome. In this way, the Buddha used dead bodies to provide eye-opening lessons, to help others understand the reality, to teach about the fate of the human body.

Through this practice, lust and conceit can be removed and impermanence of the body can be understood. Knowing that

beauty, health and strength are temporary, anything attributed towards the body is temporary.

The Buddha's instructions are to compare one's body to a corpse (*ayampi kho kāyo evaṃdhammo evaṃbhāvī evaṃanatīto'ti*) – to visualise a dead body in front of you and recognize various decaying parts, the loathsome nature and how your body can be subject to the same process. With repeated contemplation, to reflect on the corpse, its' decay and to bring the reflection back to your body, to understand how this body of 'mine' is subject to the same fate and what I claim as 'my body' is temporary.

The preference is for a male to utilise a male body and for a female, to utilise a female body for contemplation, because in the beginning, the mind remains lustful even when contemplating on a dead body of the opposite sex. If the mind is infatuated with lust such ignorance is possible. One who is wise and developed in the practice can commence reflection on the opposite sex.

This reflection is powerful as one can see in front of them a discoloured, bloated, and oozing body with different parts, scattered, where there is nothing worthy of attraction and how one's body is subject to the same fate. This practice offers such direct insight.

One caution is that this contemplation can lead to depression, anger, and resentment towards the body. It can be helpful when the mind is lustful or extremely conceited. When the mind is calm, quiet, equanimous, the preference is to stop the contemplation.

Maintaining mental balance and equanimity is important. Otherwise, it can lead to depression or resistance towards the body and the external world, one might even begin to hate one's body and it can result in suicidal thoughts. This meditation technique must be used wisely, like taking medicine only if it is necessary, to reap the desired benefits.

Observing the thirty-two parts of the body (*paṭikkūlamānasikāra*) and the decaying corpse (*navasīvathika*) can gradually lessen and remove lust, conceit, and direct the mind to a state of equanimity. With repeated practice, mindfulness is associated with the body and mindfulness is refined to observe the elements. When the mind is lustful or gross, it is difficult to observe the characteristics of the elements. The characteristics of elements can be observed in a calm, quiet and refined state of mind. Initially, if a vibration is experienced, and when the mind's attention is focused on the vibration, mindfulness can be enhanced to retain attention on the body and observe the characteristics of the elements - hardness, roughness, smoothness, heaviness, lightness, flowing, vibrations and movement.

Progressing in the practice, the arising and passing nature of elements can be seen. The arising and passing nature of everything becomes clear. With refined attention, a state of equanimity, free from despair, attraction or lust can be maintained to understand the arising and passing nature. The body can be used to establish mindfulness and to develop wisdom, to see the body is subject to decay, death, and faces an inevitable, loathsome decaying process. There is no point in attributing lust or conceit to the body.

A change in perception happens when the body is used to improve mindfulness and wisdom, to realise that a body exists, but does not belong to oneself, is subject to various causes and conditions and an inevitable death (*atthi kāyo'ti vā panassa sati paccupaṭṭhitā hoti, yāvadeva ñāṇamattāya paṭissatimattāya*).

With repeated practice, dispassion about one's body and that of the external world sets in. The mind experiences detachment. When wisdom culminates, the mind let's go of everything without attachment (*anissitoca viharati*), maintaining attention without grasping to anything in the world (*na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*). Initially, experiencing such a state of mind might be temporary. With repeated practice, the release can be experienced for a longer time.

It is a challenge to maintain such a release for an entire lifetime due to defilements. Lasting release is possible when defilements are uprooted and that requires progressing on the noble eightfold path. One must maintain morality, restraint of speech and bodily actions. When verbal and bodily actions are restrained, there is clarity and collectedness of mind to develop and refine concentration. Defilements that arise can be removed to maintain clarity of mind and for wisdom to arise.

In this way, *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā* become one's path of purification. Morality (*sīla*) supports concentration (*samādhi*), and with the presence of concentration, there is clarity of mind to recognise defilements. With refined mindfulness, wisdom can be applied to purify the mind.



The *satipaṭṭhāna* practice is a practical recipe for the mind's purification. It is a complete practice that must become one's way of life.

# PART 2

## *Vedanānupassanā* *Contemplation on Feelings*

### Chapter 7 - Feelings

Contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*) involves establishing mindfulness on breathing (*Ānāpānasati*), the postures (*Iriyāpatha*), bodily activities, anatomical parts of the body, recognising elements and stages of a corpse to refine mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

The Buddha outlined these strategies to help direct and retain the mind in the present moment, so the mind does not wander, ruminate, or become distracted. When the mind is scattered, it is not possible to have concentration, focused attention, to understand reality.

Various pleasurable feelings can be experienced with continued attention on the breath, bodily activities, and collectedness of mind. As the mind settles, one might feel as if one is floating. These are manifestations of pleasant feelings (*sukha vedanā*). Habitually, we grasp or cling to pleasure. The Buddha encourages us to take a step back to objectively observe feelings. If the body experiences pain, without trying to immediately reject it, observe the painful

feelings objectively using the focus established through developed concentration.

When feelings are objectively observed, clear comprehension (clear knowing) improves and feelings of pain, pleasure and equanimity can be clearly known.

The three forms of feelings are pleasurable feelings (*sukha vedanā*), painful feelings (*dukkha vedanā*) and neutral feelings (*adukkhamasukha vedanā*). At any given time, the mind and the body can experience any one of the three forms of feelings. Whenever pleasure is prominent, the experience of pain and equanimity are absent. When there is pain, the experience of pleasure and equanimity are absent. When equanimity is experienced, painful, and pleasurable feelings are absent. One form of feeling arises, passes, and gives way for another to arise.

We have no control over which feelings may arise and which form of feeling might take prominence. Our role is to observe the various forms of feelings and understand their nature.

### ***Worldly and unworldly feelings***

The Buddha has categorised feelings into two groups – worldly (*sāmisa*) and unworldly (*nirāmisa*).

*Sāmisa* means worldly types of feelings. *Nirāmisa* means unworldly types of feelings. When mindfulness is established in walking, the characteristics of the elements: hardness, roughness, softness, smoothness, heaviness,

lightness, heat and cold can be observed as the feet touch the ground. After some time, with equanimity, the experience is neutral. With continued awareness and clear comprehension, one moves away from worldly types of feelings (*sāmisa*) to experience unworldly types of feelings (*nirāmisa*).

With further practice, lightness in the body can be experienced and one might feel as if the body is floating, experiencing blissful or pleasurable feelings. This blissful experience is not sensual pleasure, but an outcome of the spiritual practice (*nirāmisa sukha vedanā*). On the other hand, if one is unable to fulfill one's wishes to become an *arahant* or enter any other supramundane level, there could be a disappointment, an unpleasant feeling that is spiritual, an unworldly form of unhappiness (*nirāmisa dukkha vedanā*) could be experienced.

In this way, we can recognise three categories of unworldly feelings – unworldly pleasurable feelings (*nirāmisa sukha vedanā*), unworldly painful feelings (*nirāmisa dukkha vedanā*) and unworldly equanimous feelings (*nirāmisa upekkhā vedanā*).

On the other hand, if one experiences bodily pain – affliction due to an illness, the feeling is a worldly form of painful feeling (*sāmisa dukkha vedanā*). When partaking in delicious food, one experiences pleasure (*sāmisa sukha vedanā*). In this way, worldly forms of pleasure, pain and equanimity (*sāmisa sukha vedanā*, *sāmisa dukkha vedanā* and *sāmisa upekkhā vedanā*) can be experienced.

Our tendency is to attach to worldly forms of pleasure, to grasp and develop a latent tendency towards lust (*rāgānusaya*). One develops lust by grasping and accumulating pleasurable feelings. Going through a painful experience - weeping, hating, crying, rejecting, and cursing, one might experience mental agony and enhance a latent tendency towards hate (*patigānusaya*). If one is ignorant and careless about the experience of neutral feeling, one feels bored and might wish for some excitement, and encourage ignorance (*avijjānusaya*) to develop. Ignorance is the outcome when one is unaware of the neutral experience and tries to reject it, and cling to something pleasurable.

On the other hand, pleasure borne of unworldly action (*nirāmisa sukha*) or pain borne of unworldly action (*nirāmisa dukha vedanā*) does not contribute towards lust (*rāgānusaya*) or hate (*patigānusaya*). The experience of a neutral feeling due to a spiritual activity does not contribute towards ignorance (*avijjānusaya*). For example, someone experiencing the fourth *jhana*, experiencing equanimity or undertaking insight meditation, experiencing *upekkhā*, does not contribute towards ignorance.

Unknowingly, by promoting hate, delusion, or lust, one contributes towards latent tendencies. Caution must be exercised when handling various forms of feelings. As such, an objective contemplation of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*) is a very important practice.

## *Close contemplation of feelings*

The aim must be to harness an objective contemplation of feelings, not to treat them as my pain or pleasure, take a step back and carefully observe the experience. It is difficult to do this at the beginning as the mind tends to immediately grasp at pleasurable feelings or reject painful feelings as they arise. An objective contemplation through *kāyānupassanā* must be developed, to observe an inhalation and exhalation as it occurs. The observing mind and the phenomena observed are separate. The painful feeling and the mind observing it are separate – the same with a pleasurable and neutral feeling.

Feelings must be observed with detached observation (*vedanāsu vedanānupassī viharati*), by exerting ardent effort to patiently observe and discern feelings as soon as they arise (*ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassam*). Feelings can arise at any moment. To immediately observe feelings as they arise, one must be mindful. To carefully observe feelings in detail, unwavering mindfulness is necessary.

With closer observation, it can be seen how feelings arise as a group although the experience appears as one pleasurable, painful, or neutral feeling; each minute feeling has a short life span - a feeling arises, ceases, and another arises and ceases. The Buddha explains the nature of feelings through the simile of a rain drop, which hits the water surface, generates a bubble and immediately bursts (*vedanā bubbulūpamā*). Another raindrop hits the water surface,

generates a water bubble and bursts. With heavy rain, thousands of raindrops quickly hit the water surface generating many water bubbles, and immediately burst. The rapid arising and bursting of water bubbles can be verifiably seen. In this way, the Buddha draws an analogy between feelings and water bubbles, their transience, how they immediately arise and rapidly cease with a burst.

With close attention and continued practice, the detail in feelings can be seen. When mindfulness is refined and clear comprehension improves, the characteristics of feelings, their arising and passing nature can be seen. There isn't a single feeling of pleasure, pain, or equanimity, rather, a group of rapidly arising and passing feelings.

One comprehends the different types of feelings, and how their nature is to arise and to pass away (*samudayadhammānupassī vā vedanāsu viharati, vāyadhammānupassī vā vedanāsu viharati, samudayavāyadhammānupassī vā vedanāsu viharati*). What is experienced as a pleasurable or painful feeling is a rapid succession of arising and passing.

The unsatisfactory nature of feelings can be understood when it is seen that their nature is to continuously arise and pass away. Lasting happiness is not possible when feelings are transient.

Detached observation without grasping, rejection or resentment enables one to become aware of what unfolds in pleasurable and painful feelings. Objective discernment

becomes one's skill and feelings become one's teacher when the characteristics of feelings are observed.

It can be seen how feelings are impermanent and non-governable, they cannot be manipulated to persist to one's wishes - they continue according to their agenda. With close observation, dispassion and disenchantment arises when feelings can be seen in a state of flux.

With repeated observation of feelings, the mind develops a tendency to detach from bodily sensations or feelings. With repeated practice, temporary freedom can be experienced again and again. Due to defilements and influxes, the mind again attaches after a brief period of freedom. One must try to prolong the span of temporary freedom as much as possible.

It is necessary to be grounded in morality to continue the practice, as otherwise, the inclination is to grasp and attach. There is protection with sound morality and the refined qualities of the mind may last long.

### *Feelings arise with contact*

Feelings are a result of dependent origination (*idappaccayatā*). Feelings arise due to contact (*phassa paccayā vedanā*). Contact which is conducive to pleasure, generates a pleasant feeling. Contact which is conducive to pain generates a painful feeling. The same is true for neutral feeling. Feelings cannot arise without contact. Understanding this causal relationship, one grows in



wisdom and broadens one's understanding of cause and effect.

During walking meditation, when the left foot is lifted, there is lightness (equanimity or neutral feeling) and when the foot touches the ground, immediately, a gross sensation is felt. As the foot touches the ground, there is contact, and a feeling is experienced.

With close observation it can be seen how bodily sensations arise due to contact. Whenever there is contact, there is feeling. The Buddha provides the simile of rubbing two sticks to generate a fire, to help explain this further. During the older times, two dried sticks were used to generate heat and when rubbed against one another, heat and fire is generated. The heat generated, dissipates if one stops the rubbing. Heat is produced due to contact, which continues when the two sticks are rubbed against one another. When the rubbing ceases, there is no more heat generated. Feelings arise with contact and when contact ceases, feelings that have arisen, dissipate. Contact is the most proximate cause for feelings.

Feelings are the cause for craving (*vedanā paccayā taṇhā*). With closer observation it can be seen how the mind experiences pleasurable feelings and inclines to experience more pleasurable feelings when desire arises. The mental reaction to feelings can be seen. There is a causal relationship: due to contact, feelings arise - if the feeling is pleasurable, one wishes for more, to own and possess, to have it tomorrow and in the future, there is attachment,

holding and grasping (*upādāna*). Feelings condition a mental reaction – attraction, desire and grasping.

Feelings are easier to observe compared to contact. Feelings can be verifiably seen when they arise; and their nature and characteristics, whether they are pleasurable, painful, or neutral also can be observed. A repeated observation of feelings leads to an understanding of their impermanent, unsatisfactory, and non-self-nature.

Practising and developing one's understanding in this way, dispassion arises, and more detached observation is possible. Then the mind begins to let go of attachments, grasping; and can be freed to experience unattached and unconditioned mind states. This is the path towards *nibbāna*. One must have perseverance and patience to continue the practice.

### *Question & Answer*

To attain path and fruition consciousness, do we need to cultivate all four foundations of *Satipaṭṭhāna*? When does one progress from *kāyaṇuassanā* to *vedanānupassanā*?

Answer:

The *Satipaṭṭhāna Saṃyutta* has a direct reference to the *Padesa sutta* (SN 47.26), where Venarable Anuruddha mentions it is

sufficient to master one type of *Satipaṭṭhāna* to attain stream entry, *sotāpanna*.<sup>6</sup>

The *Samatta sutta* (SN 47.27) mentions that, to attain *arahantship* one needs to have an experiential understanding of all four types of *Satipaṭṭhāna*.<sup>7</sup>

By mastering *vedanānupassanā*, one can be a stream winner (*sotāpanna*), but to become an *arahant*, it is necessary to have mastery of the four foundations of mindfulness.

The transfer from *kāyānupassanā* to *vedanānupassana* is a natural process. One may start with *kāyānupassanā* and develop an understanding about the characteristics of the elements, “*rūpa*” - with repeated and continued practice, one then gradually progresses to *vedanānupassana*.

Certain *yogis* get maximum benefit from *kāyānupassanā*, some benefit from *vedanānupassana* and the other *anupassanas*. Some may progress from *kāyānupassanā* to *vedanānupassana* very quickly and benefit more from *vedanānupassana*. Some others may spend more time in *kāyānupassanā* or *cittānupassana*. The experience differs from one *yogi* to another. The transition is a natural progression.

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6 “*catunnaṃ kho, āvuso, satipaṭṭhānānaṃ padesaṃ bhāvitattā sekho hoti*”. - Padesa sutta (SN 47.26).

7 “*catunnaṃ kho, āvuso, satipaṭṭhānānaṃ samattaṃ bhāvitattā asekho hoti*”. - Samatta sutta (SN 47.27).

# PART 3

## *Cittānupassanā* *Contemplation on the Mind*

### Chapter 8 – The Mind

The *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice is the direct path to purification of beings, to overcome sorrow and lamentation, end unsatisfactoriness, despair, anguish, and negative mental states.

This is the path to be traversed to realise *nibbāna* with direct experiential knowledge. By reflecting on the practice, one realises this is what needs to be done, this is the correct path and feels determined to strive, to continue the path.

The focus of this chapter is *cittānupassanā* (contemplation of the mind). In the *Ānāpānasati sutta* (MN 118), the Buddha explains that it is difficult to practice *cittānupassanā* if one's mindfulness is weak and wavering.<sup>8</sup> Well established mindfulness and clear comprehension are essential to practise *cittānupassanā*.

For this reason, the practice should be commenced with *kāyānupassanā*.

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<sup>8</sup> *nāhaṃ, bhikkhave, muṭṭhassatissa asampajānassa ānāpānasatiṃ vadāmi.* - *Ānāpānasati sutta* (MN 118).

## *Commencing the practice with ānāpānasati*

Commencing the practice with an observation of the breath, an in-breath; and an out-breath (*so satova assasati, sato passasati*) is straightforward, but can be difficult. Its' simplicity does not guarantee it can be easily done, although, it can take us to a more profound understanding. Necessarily, the method of practice should not be complicated.

The minds of present-day people are complex compared to people during the Buddha's period, when they had simple livelihoods dependent on agriculture and didn't require so many gadgets, the internet, Facebook, or WhatsApp. The father went to the paddy field in the morning and returned home in the evening - the wife and children were at home, living harmoniously. They had the Buddha's teachings to practice. Their thinking was not complicated.

These days, news from across the globe is available and we eagerly listen to it, we are busy watching movies, television and reading newspapers. Ultimately, our minds are corrupted. Purifying such a mind is not easy. So, it is necessary to understand the context of present day living. It is different to the Buddha's time and we may take a little more time to get to the practice of *cittānupassanā*. That is why understanding or practising *kāyānupassanā* is very important because it opens the path in a simpler manner.

The Buddha instructs us to commence the practice with a focus on the breath, to be aware of each inhalation and exhalation. Our mindfulness improves if we can continue with the task. When the practice is commenced, retaining

attention on even five breaths is difficult as the mind is distracted. With repeated practice, continuous attention is retained on twenty breaths, indicating that a fair amount of mindfulness, concentration and restraint is developed.

Humility is a necessary aspect of the practice. One must have a beginners' mind to commence the practice, without thinking about one's professional accolades and academic achievements.

The breath (physical process) can be distinguished from the knowing mind as attention is retained on each inhalation and exhalation. The observing mind is the mental activity. Habitually, the mind is never aligned with the physical process, instead, chasing after past incidents, memories or being distracted about the future. With continued practice, awareness can be retained on presently arising physical actions as much as possible. The physical process is a tool which enables mental observation to be retained in the present moment.

Continuing the process, one can recognise whether the in-breath is warmer or cooler; or the out-breath is warmer or cooler, whether it is long or short and the difference between an in-breath and an out-breath, from which nostril the in breath comes in and from which nostril the out-breath goes out. Extracting and understanding the subtle details related to the breathing process enables one to develop clear comprehension -*sampajāna*. The subtle details become evident with well-developed *sampajāna*.

Continuing further, the various stages of an in-breath can be seen, how an in-breath begins at a very subtle level, reaches

its threshold, and calms down to ultimately disappear. After a little gap, the out-breath begins. It reaches a threshold and disappears. After that, a little gap can be observed before the next in-breath occurs.

The cyclical nature to breathing can be recognised - how the mind is restrained and one's attention can be maintained for a long time over a very subtle incident, how one's mindfulness is improved, sharpened and clear comprehension is developed. It is difficult to observe the subtle information with a distracted mind. Focusing well, practising thin slicing of time, and staying attentive suggests that one has developed spiritual capacity.

With these skills, one can progress to practise *cittānupassanā* with established mindfulness and clear comprehension. In practice, the progress to *cittānupassanā* is a natural process. With the progress of *kāyānupassanā*, one slowly moves to *vedanānupassanā*, become mindful about feelings, observing pleasurable, painful, and neutral feelings as well as the subtle aspects of feelings. It is a natural evolution and has a cause-and-effect relationship.

The Buddha describes the quality of *Dhamma* to be *opaneyyiko*. If one honestly and continuously undertakes the practice, the practice will naturally navigate to the next stage. The *kāyānupassanā* practice is a disengaged observation of the physical process. There is mental noting of the unfolding physical processes. With continued practice, the physical and mental processes can be distinguished, and one can discern between physicality and mentality - (*nāmarūpa pariccheda ñāṇa*). Physicality is *rūpa*, mentality is *nāma*.

Gaining this insight transforms one's understanding. Habitually, one considers oneself as an individual – “I am a person, I am breathing” but, this wrong perspective is eliminated. Instead, one realises there is a body that breathes, a physical process unfolding and an ongoing observing process. One's perspective has now changed. When it comes to *vedanānupassanā*, there are various feelings and one can be aware of the feelings. The observing mind and the feelings experienced are separate and the difference can be discerned.

The *cittānupassanā* practice is more challenging as one mental process is observed through another. By successfully developing *kāyānupassanā* and *vedanānupassanā*, the mind undertakes a disengaged observation. If one's mindfulness is weak, one may not know how to recognise various thought patterns or emotions and will be carried away with various defilements and emotions. That is why the Buddha recommends mindfulness and clear comprehension are essential to enable the *cittānupassanā* practice.

### ***Becoming aware of mind states and emotions***

Progressing in the *cittānupassanā* practice, the Buddha instructs us to recognise the lustful mind (*idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu sarāgaṃ vā cittaṃ 'sarāgaṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti*); to be aware of the absence of lust and when a thought on renunciation is experienced (*vītarāgaṃ vā cittaṃ 'vītarāgaṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti*); to recognise the presence of aversion or anger (*sadosaṃ vā cittaṃ 'sadosaṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti*); to be aware of thoughts on loving kindness (*vītadosaṃ vā cittaṃ 'vītadosaṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti*); when the mind is entangled,



deluded or coloured, to be aware the mind is impure, entangled and confused (*samohaṃ vā cittaṃ 'samohaṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti*); to know the clarity of mind when delusion is absent, the mind is clear, transparent, vivid, and there is no ignorance (*vītamohaṃ vā cittaṃ 'vītamohaṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti*).

In the *cittānupassanā* practice, the conditional nature of wholesome and unwholesome mind states can be recognised without getting rid of unwholesome thoughts or encouraging wholesome thoughts, trying to develop it as much as possible.

Habitually, practitioners tend to immediately get rid of an unwholesome thought that arises or to develop wholesome thoughts as much as possible. In the practice of *cittānupassanā*, one recognises the conditioned nature of thoughts. When a lustful thought arises, one becomes aware that a lustful thought has arisen; when anger arises, one becomes aware that anger has arisen; a thought of renunciation is observed as well as confusion and clarity of mind. The observation is objective and disengaged without forming any relationship. Disengaged observation is a critical part of the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice.

In the practice of *cittānupassanā*, there is a disengaged observation of emotion, where one has disengaged attention on emotions without being driven by emotions. The lustful mind, the mind of loving kindness, the agitated mind, the distracted mind, all have an emotional impact. With established mindfulness, despite the myriad of emotions engulfing the mind, one can discern the presently arisen emotion with detached observation.

Taking a step back to observe various emotions, one no longer falls victim to emotions and emotions fade away quickly. Previously, one was caught up with emotion and driven by it, crying, laughing, becoming tense, stressed. Now it is possible to step back and observe emotions without promoting them.

The technique to overcome thought patterns is to objectively discern thoughts without entanglement. Continuing the practice in this way there is a lessening of the frequency of thoughts arising. If there were hundred thoughts per minute at the beginning, with practice, there might be seventy-five thoughts per minute and in time, reduced to sixty thoughts per minute, then fifty thoughts per minute, thirty thoughts per minute, ten thoughts per minute.

Previously there were so many thoughts arising rapidly, one after the other and it was difficult to recognise the lifespan of a thought. Now with clarity of mind, the lifespan of a thought can be observed. The practice becomes easy as it is not a rapid succession of thoughts arising.

The beginning, the middle and the end of a thought can be seen. At the end of a thought, there may be a gap before another thought arises. The mind has clarity, silence and when a thought arises, it can be readily discerned. When mindfulness is absent, it is difficult to recognise thoughts arising, they proliferate and give effect to emotion.

At the level of *cittānupassanā*, one is still in the early stages and unable to observe the beginning of a thought. Rather it is observed when it has progressed to some level. Only an emotion (a thought which has progressed) is experienced. It

is only with mindfulness that one can take a step back to observe it at inception.

Watching a stage drama is a useful simile here. Say you are on the stage with many actors and actresses. You may sing, dance, or even cry and the audience is filled with expectation, clapping, and laughing – there is emotion. A lot goes on and you are an actor in the drama. Assume you get fed up, leave the stage, and sit in the audience. Now you are no longer the actor, rather, you are in the audience. A drama unfolds and you are a spectator.

Assume all others in the audience leave and you are the only one watching the drama. Instead of clapping and cheering, you just watch the drama. You are no more in the script and know it is a drama, that the roles played out are not real. They are actors, depicting a future incident – it is just fiction, not reality. Knowing this, you no longer laugh, cry, clap – it is just fiction. In such an atmosphere, the actors and actresses in the drama do not get any encouragement and may feel exhausted or unhappy, there are no spectators, and they may slowly stop the drama. Only an empty stage is available once the drama finishes.

This is what happens in our mind.

Typically, we are in a drama, being an actor or an actress. We cry, laugh, jump up and down, there is so much going on. We fall victim to what unfolds, driven by mental process, thoughts, emotions. Now, with the practice of *cittānupassanā*, we gain a distance from emotions.

Emotions may continue. It is difficult to completely stop the emotions, but you are no longer a victim of thought

processes. Rather, you understand there is a possibility of coming out of it, to step back and watch it.

### *Differing mind states*

Whilst harnessing this skill, one develops mindfulness, clear comprehension, and wisdom, understanding that these are simply thoughts. They need not be claimed, possessed and one need not accept responsibility about them. Their nature is to arise and pass away, they have a very short life span. The unfolding mental mechanism is now clear and the frequency of thoughts arising is less.

With only a few thoughts arising, the gaps between thoughts can be recognised. Clarity improves with more space in the mind. When thoughts arise, one directly observes their nature to arise and pass away - (*samudayavayadhammānupassī vā cittaṃ viharati vāyadhammānupassī vā cittaṃ viharati samudayavayadhammānupassī vā cittaṃ viharati*) and progress to a state of mind where emotions can be managed.

One can observe when the mind is contracted, focused, hinged or locked with something (*saṃkhittaṃ vā cittaṃ 'saṃkhittaṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti*), how the mind is distracted, jumps around, but one is not concerned by it (*vikkhittaṃ vā cittaṃ 'vikkhittaṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti*). Typically, at the beginning of the practice, when the mind is distracted, one feels unhappy about it. Now, the distraction, the scattered nature of the mind can be observed at a distance. One no longer falls victim to emotions and can come out of it.

During the *ānāpānasati* practice, when the mind is absorbed, there is a sign of concentration (*nimitta*) and one completely

absorbs into it. The mind is blissful, experiencing a heightened state of concentration. This blissful and concentrated mind must be objectively discerned without attachment and one can see how one comes out of it (*mahaggataṃ vā cittaṃ 'mahaggataṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti, amahaggataṃ vā cittaṃ 'amahaggataṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti*).

The Buddha's instructions for a *yogi* in absorption (*jhāna*) is to come out of it, to objectively observe the unfolding. There is no attachment to the experience, rather, it becomes a raw material for observation - one does not spend hours in *jhāna*, in absorption, and emerge from it, whilst observing it. The experience of the mind is mundane as one comes out of it - (*amahaggataṃ vā cittaṃ 'amahaggataṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti*) and the differing mind states can be recognised. Even at these highly concentrated states, one does not fall victim to it, being driven by it or attaches to it and instead, observes it.

The Buddha then takes us to even more subtle levels. The Buddha says '*sauttaraṃ vā cittaṃ 'sauttaraṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti, anuttaraṃ vā cittaṃ 'anuttaraṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti*' - assume one is in the first *jhāna* and wishes to progress to the second *jhāna*, which is more subtle, delicate, and advanced. Now, one has a comparing mind and compares the second *jhāna* to the first and no longer feels satisfied with the present state (*sauttaraṃ vā cittaṃ 'sauttaraṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti*) and wishes to progress to the more refined mind states. The comparing nature of the mind can be observed, how the mind inclines towards more refined states. When one reaches the refined state, one feels it is very much the unsurpassable state – a more contented state (*anuttaraṃ vā cittaṃ 'anuttaraṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti* - second *jhāna*).

One knows when the mind is concentrated (*samāhitaṃ vā cittaṃ 'samāhitaṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti*); and when the mind is not concentrated (*asamāhitaṃ vā cittaṃ 'asamāhitaṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti*); when the mind is temporarily liberated (*vimuttaṃ vā cittaṃ 'vimuttaṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāti*), and the mind is not yet liberated (*avimuttaṃ vā cittaṃ 'avimuttaṃ cittaṃ'ti pajānāt*).

If you are undertaking *mettā* meditation, you can attain various *jhāna*. At each level, one must be aware “now I am in the first *jhāna*, I have reached this stage practising *mettā*, and it is very pleasant, very blissful”. One can come out of it and be aware of the qualities of *mettā* in the first *jhāna* - how they are impermanent and transient.

If one inclines towards the second *jhāna* and feels content, one can observe contentment. Typically, *mettā* finishes at the third *jhāna* and if loving kindness is developed towards all beings, in all directions, one reaches *mettā ceto vimutti*. That is the complete freedom of mind attained through *mettā*.

The *Bodhisatva* found various teachers as he went in search of the *Dhamma*, in search of *nibbāna*. First, the *Bodhisatva* came across Āḷāra Kālāmaputta who guided him to attain nothingness (*ākiñcaññāyatana*), as he thought that was the end, being fairly absorbed in this mind state, thinking that was *nibbāna*, completion and perfection. The *Bodhisatva*, keenly aware that it was not *nibbāna*, came out of it and looked at the imperfections, disadvantages, drawbacks in nothingness (*ākiñcaññāyatana*) and went to another teacher, Uddakarāma Putta.

Uddakarāma Putta was at a more refined state – neither perception nor non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*),

where there is no gross signage, *saññā*. Uddakarāma Putta thought this was *nibbāna*, final attainment, but the *Bodhisatva* was able to come out of it and understand the various drawbacks in it. In *samatha* concentration, the mind is conditioned by attaching to refined states and possibly one can reach a wrong conclusion that one has attained *magga phala* - path and fruition. These highly concentrated states are prone to wrong views and this must be understood carefully, to avoid being drawn to wrong conclusions.

In the *Brahmajāla sutta*, the Buddha considers 62 wrong views of which 49 relate to deep levels of concentration. When one attains deep concentration and is unable to come out of it or see the drawbacks in it, one might develop a wrong view that one has attained *nibbāna*.

In *cittānupassanā*, the Buddha carefully takes us to a wiser level, a more refined understanding, a more knowledgeable level, that these highly concentrated states are conditioned, their nature is to arise and pass away. They are dependent on many causes and conditions and are not *nibbāna*. Such refined (concentrated) mental states become the raw material for one's practice. If one is attached to concentrated states of mind, this can be difficult to understand.

Commencing with an understanding of emotions, the mind becomes refined and able to discern when it is focused on an object, is distracted, and absorbed in an object. As the mind continues to experience more refined states, there is comparison, an inclination towards higher states. One can understand when one is content in concentration and when one reaches *ceto vimutti* – liberation of the mind. These mind states are conditioned and are not permanent.

In the *cittānupassanā* practice, one looks at these levels objectively and develops a fair amount of wisdom that their nature is to arise and pass away (*samudayadhammānupassī vā cittasmiṃ viharati, vāyadhammānupassī vā cittasmiṃ viharati, samudayavāyadhammānupassī vā cittasmiṃ viharati*).

One understands that various concentrated states are impermanent, non-self and it is difficult to expect lasting happiness from such states as their nature is to arise and pass away. Then one develops an understanding about the mental states, using them to further develop mindfulness and to broaden one's wisdom (*atthi cittaṅ'ṭi vā paṇassa sati paccupaṭṭhitā hoti yāvadeva ñāṇamattāya paṭṭissatimattāya*).

With continued practice, the mind becomes clear, unattached, free from conditions and detached from bodily process, any form of feeling, emotion, or thoughts. The mind becomes detached from anything in the world (*anissito ca viharati, na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*), where one aims to retain the mind free and detached, without grasping to anything in the world. At the beginning, this freedom is temporary, although with continued practice and restraint, one can further develop this detached state towards complete liberation of the mind.

A fair amount of restraint, through morality (*sīla*) is necessary for clarity, collectedness of mind (*samāhita*) and one understands the need for *samādhi*, clarity of mind. This is not a state of absorption, but, collectedness of mind, clarity to see the conditional nature. Where the clarity is less, the mind once again becomes corrupt with various defilements. It is important to ensure the mind does not get absorbed in higher concentration. Mental balance is important.



Defilements, the various hidden tendencies, traits may remain in the mind and it is necessary to develop wisdom. One can understand that *sīla, samādhi, paññā* is the path. Likewise, in the *cittānupassanā* section, one can say the Buddha takes us to refined mental states, commencing with wholesome and unwholesome levels, and progressing further, observing them as conditioned mind states.

A *yogi* is expected to use these levels as raw material for the *vipassanā* practice, to understand the conditioned, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and non-self-nature in phenomena. One who has such deep understanding has a mind which is free from everything, no attachment, grasping to anything in the world (*anissito ca viharati, na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*).

The Buddha's instructions are to establish in the various mental states, *satipaṭṭhāna* – to see the arising and passing nature, the reality, the behaviour of various mental states – *satipaṭṭhāna bhāvanā*. When a fair amount of mindfulness, clear comprehension and wisdom are developed, one recognises that a complete path must be followed.

One must develop the path and understand through one's own practice that *sīla, samādhi, paññā* must be developed by progressing on the noble eight-fold path - *satipaṭṭhāna-bhāvanāgāminiñca paṭipadā*. The depth of mindfulness the Buddha refers to is very comprehensive, deep, and complete.

# PART 4

## *Dhammānupassanā* *Contemplation on Dhamma*

### Chapter 9 – Five Hindrances

Direct experiential knowledge is a critical skill and tool in the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice. It is not borrowed knowledge gained through a book or by listening to a Dhamma talk. The approach of the *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice, to directly experience bodily activities and process, feelings, mental formations, and phenomena is a unique noble experiment (*ariya pariyesana*).

In the *kāyānupassanā* practice, prominence is given to the body and various bodily activities are directly observed to establish mindfulness. When the breath is observed, the breathing is the physical process (*rūpa*) and the mind observing it is the mental process (*nāma*).

Anchoring one's mindfulness on bodily processes, one moves to *vedanānupassanā*, to observe presently arising feelings. With sharpened mindfulness, one can observe bodily activities and feelings at their inception, as soon as they arise.

In the *cittānupassanā* practice, presently arising emotions and their passing are directly observed with detached observation. One does not personalise the lustful thoughts or resentment that have arisen and instead, there is an objective discernment of phenomena. The lustful thought (mental) process is mentally noted. This observation can be challenging unless one's mindfulness is well established.

Direct observation is necessary to practise *dhammānupassanā* - contemplation of *dhamma*, where mindfulness is established by observing mental phenomena. Each of the foundations of mindfulness enables mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom to develop, to liberate the mind, *albeit* temporarily. With further refinement and dedicated practice according to the *Satipatṭhāna sutta*, complete liberation is possible.

## ***Introduction to Dhammānupassanā***

The Buddha introduces *dhammānupassanā* with a discussion of the five hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*) which contaminate the mind. When the mind is contaminated with hindrances, one cannot realise *nibbāna* and the Buddha asks that we recognize them.

The Buddha invites us to investigate the five hindrances: sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), ill will (*vyāpāda*), sloth and torpor (*thīna middha*), restlessness and worry (*udaccha kukkuccha*) and doubt (*vicikicchā*). Our mind, by its nature is pure, innocent, detached and unentangled, but these hindrances cover the pure and lustrous nature of the mind.

The corrosive nature of defilements covers the mind, obstructing clarity and concentration. With mindfulness, the outer cover can be removed to penetrate the lustrous nature of mind. With established morality, concentration is developed to maintain clarity of mind; and wisdom is applied again and again to cleanse the mind.

A discussion of the hindrances is followed by a direct and experiential understanding of the five aggregates (*khandha*). Instead of attributing a self, an 'I', and defining it as 'me' and 'mine', giving various names and labels, the Buddha instructs us to become aware of the experience of the five aggregates.

Next, the Buddha introduces a direct observation of the six sense bases (*āyatana*) through which one engages with the world, become aware of various sense bases, the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and the mind.

The Buddha's instructions for the *dharmānupassanā* practice are a gradual progression towards a deeper understanding of the *dhamma*, commencing with the five hindrances, to understand the aggregates and progress towards an understanding of the sense bases (*āyatana*); the seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*) and finally, understanding the four noble truths.

As one's practice deepens, one can develop and experience enlightenment factors such as mindfulness (*sati*), investigation (*dhamma vicaya*), effort (*viriya*), rapture (*piti*), tranquillity (*passadhi*), concentration (*samādhi*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

By further developing these positive qualities, the mind is attuned towards a realization of *nibbāna* and a practical understanding of the four noble truths.

The Buddha emphasises that a very refined observation of suffering, stress and tension in the body and the mind could be discerned with objective reflection, paving the way for insights to arise. The teachings commence at a gross level to progress towards a more refined understanding of deep insights.

Such insights are possible by practising *kāyānupassanā*, *vedanānupassanā* and *cittānupassanā* with dedication and diligence.

In the *dhammānupassanā* practice, the Buddha emphasizes revisiting the *anupassanā* by using various phenomena, to penetrate deeper, to free the mind.

### ***Similes describing the Hindrances***

The Buddha presents powerful similes to describe the experience of entrapment when one is under the influence of hindrances. Freedom from hindrances is available at any given time, but we fail to appreciate the freedom, feeling bored when the mind is not agitated. We try to call someone, read a newspaper, watch a movie, or browse the internet to once again, agitate the mind. By habit, we experience boredom in the absence of hindrances and fail to appreciate the calmness. The mind feels heated when ill-will is present and when there is no regret, we ruminate over past events,

thinking, worrying, introducing restlessness to the calm mind.

When hindrances are absent, there is lightness, freshness, a feeling of being unburdened and a sense of detachment. These qualities appear subtle; and a fair amount of introspection is needed to enhance and maintain such mind states.

The Buddha draws a simile between the flow of defilements and a flood (*ogha*), explaining that mindfulness (*sati*) serves as a dam to block the flow of water.<sup>9</sup> One no longer supports the continuation of sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness, regret, and doubt when they are observed at their inception.

Observing them objectively, the hindrances begin to fade away, there is no mental proliferation or rumination; instead, the presence of hindrances is recognised to stop the cycle and clarity of mind is experienced.

The presence of hindrances can be recognised, and one becomes aware of the freedom experienced when they fade away. With refined mindfulness one can see how defilements arise and quickly dissipate. Practising like this, one no longer falls victim to hindrances.

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9 *yāni sotāni lokasmim, sati tesam nivāraṇaṃ.*  
*sotānaṃ saṃvoraṃ brūmi, paññāyete pidhiyyare*  
 - Ajitamāṇavapucchā (KN 5.56).

In the *Sangāraṇa sutta* (SN 46.55) in the *Bojjaṅga saṃyutta*, the Buddha compares different situations of a vessel of water to the presence of various hindrances. If one were to fill a vessel with a fair amount of water and there is no turbulence, the water is clean, one's reflection can be easily seen. If dye is applied to water, it becomes coloured and obstructs one's reflection. The Buddha says that sensual desire blocks the mind's purity and obstructs one from seeing the real picture. Being under the influence of sensual desire is like adding colour to water - it is difficult to see through it.

When the water is boiled, the water becomes heated and water bubbles appear – it is difficult to see one's reflection. The Buddha describes that when acting under the influence of ill-will, the mind is heated, and it is difficult to have a correct perspective.

If the same water is poured to a bucket and is kept for a long time, due to rain, leaves might collect, creepers like algae cover the surface and the water becomes foggy. One's reflection cannot be seen in the water as it is hindered due to the fog. Similarly, the Buddha says that a mind under the influence of sloth and torpor cannot have correct perspective.

The Buddha compares the restless mind to turbulent water. When a huge wind blows and causes ripples and waves to form on the water surface, there is turbulence; and it is difficult to see one's reflection. Similarly, the Buddha says

there is no clear seeing when the mind is under the influence of restlessness and regret (*uddachcha kukkuchcha*).

A mind under the influence of doubt is perplexed and the real picture cannot be seen. When a water vessel is kept in darkness, the face - reflection cannot be seen due to insufficient illumination. The Buddha describes doubt (*vicikicchā*) in this way.

The Buddha provides opposite similes to describe a mind free from hindrances. If you have taken a significant loan and you are in debt, you need to pay interest every month to pay it off in instalments and feel continually burdened. At times, the lender can exert pressure about the funds owing. One day, the debt is paid off and you experience freedom. The Buddha says that a mind free from sensual desire is similar. A mind under the influence of sensual desire is very much in debt. Once paid off, the mind is free and no longer burdened, feels lighter, there is no debt owed, no more sensual desire - only freedom.

The Buddha gives another simile of a person suffering from an illness to describe ill-will. If one is infected with COVID 19 or some other illness, suffering is experienced, one's movement is restricted due to the illness, it is not possible to go out and be with friends, there is bodily discomfort. One day, one recovers from the illness and experiences freedom. One can freely move with others, eat as one wishes and regain good health, feel happy and be free. The Buddha explains the experience of a mind free from ill-will to be



similar. This freedom must be recognised and appreciated as one no longer feels unwell.

The Buddha uses imprisonment as a simile for being under the influence of sloth and torpor. Entrapped, there is no freedom to do what one prefers, to be with friends or family. One might be required to undertake hard labour, undergo punishment whilst being locked in a prison cell. One day, one is freed and feels relaxed, light and experiences freedom, being able to be with family and go anywhere one likes. Coming out of the drowsiness of sloth and torpor, the freedom experienced is like freedom from imprisonment.

The Buddha describes freedom from regret and restlessness as freedom from slavery. There is entrapment in enslavement, a sense of being tortured and an absence of peace of mind. One experiences a feeling of servitude. If one were to be freed from a situation of enslavement, one can move around freely, be with friends and family and feel relaxed.

The Buddha describes the experience of doubt like being lost in a desert. If you are on a long journey through a hot desert with insufficient food and water, without any knowledge of the next destination or how to cross over to a nearby village, you feel perplexed, restless, and anxious. One day, you find the way to a nearby village, feel relaxed and light, knowing where to go and that food and water is within reach. The mind feels free and light.

## *Observing the hindrances*

The Buddha instructs us to become aware of the presence of sensual desire (*santaṃ vā ajjhattaṃ kāmacchandaṃ 'atthi me ajjhattaṃ kāmacchando'ti pajānāti*). When the mind is free from sensual desire, to be aware that sensual desire is absent (*asantaṃ vā ajjhattaṃ kāmacchandaṃ 'natthi me ajjhattaṃ kāmacchando'ti pajānāti*). When mindfulness and clear comprehension are further improved, one knows when sensual desire arises (*yathā ca anuppannassa kāmacchandassa uppādo hoti tañca pajānāti*) and when sensual desire passes away (*yathā ca uppannassa kāmacchandassa pahānaṃ hoti tañca pajānāti*). By observing sensual desire like this, it begins to swiftly disappear.

The same is true for ill-will. When ill-will arises in the mind, one must become aware of it immediately, directly observing it and know when ill-will is no longer present. This observation is immediate (*sanditṭhika*) - an important quality of the Buddha's teaching.

Sloth and torpor can also be understood in this way. One is aware when one experiences lethargy or drowsiness. One does not promote it or is driven by it and instead, objectively discerns the process without claiming the experience. When it is no longer present, the mind is free from sloth and torpor.

The experience of regret must be observed without promoting it or being driven by it and the experience fades away. Restlessness can be objectively discerned without promoting it and it dissipates, and one becomes aware of the absence of restlessness.

Doubt must be objectively discerned with detachment, without rumination and proliferation and instead, being aware that doubt has arisen in the mind.

Practising like this, the frequency and duration of thoughts become less. If one experiences hundred thoughts per minute, with repeated practice, it might lessen to seventy-five thoughts, then to sixty, forty to ten thoughts per minute. With a lessening of the number of thoughts generated, there is space and clarity of mind, and if sensual desire arises again, one instantly becomes aware of it. Since one does not attach or promote it, it quickly fades away.

With refined mindfulness, hindrances can be observed at their inception. With clarity of mind, the arising of lustful feelings and ill-will can be readily discerned with detached observation. The same occurs with sloth and torpor. Previously, sloth and torpor were observed as lethargy or drowsiness, but, with refined mindfulness, it can be seen at its inception, without promoting it or being driven by it.

When restlessness is identified in the early stages, it can be observed as several thoughts unrelated to any specific matter, without a relationship to an incident, jumping from one thought to another. Restlessness begins to fade away with a calming of the mind and the mind returns to concentration. The mind regains energy, experiences equanimity and clarity of mind.

The first thought of doubt itself can be observed with established mindfulness as well as the calm and clarity when doubt is absent. The mind once again returns to clarity, to equanimity, free from doubt. Through the practice of *dhammānupassanā*, hindrances can be observed with a

detached mindset. Wisdom can be developed using the hindrances, knowing that defilements are just mental phenomena, just *dhamma*, and there is no self or “I” to promote the experience. They arise due to causes and conditions and don’t belong to a self.

Typically, we fail to appreciate mental freedom and instead promote hindrances by wishing for excitement and adventure. Take the example of attending a theatre production, where one impatiently and eagerly waits for the theatre to unfold with eyes wide open. Now a beautiful scene unfolds and there is excitement - the theatre breaks into a song and the audience begins to sing. Then, there is a catastrophe, panic, and sadness. One begins to cry. Now, immersed in the movie, feeling completely lost from the present moment, one keenly engages with the picture, the theatre, engrossed in fantasy and being carried away by it - laughing, smiling, enjoying the theatre and entering an entirely different world.

Assume, on the other hand, one is mindful during the theatre production and realises that what unfolds is fiction, fantasy. One no longer promotes it and takes a step back from the audience, remains seated in the audience and is no longer part of the theatre, only a spectator, mindfully observing the theatre unfolding. Now there is correct perspective, a detached observation.

Similarly, when the mind is driven by hindrances, one becomes part of the theatre, an actor, an actress, moving from one part of the script to another. With mindfulness, a detached observation is possible; and one gains a vantage point to realise how the hindrances and the knowing mind are separate.

One no longer promotes the experience, and the hindrances fade away – there is freedom when hindrances are absent. With detached observation, one retains attention on the breath, one's posture, feelings or thoughts arising in the present moment and the mind does not grasp (*anissito ca viharati, na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*).

Freedom can be experienced when hindrances are observed with detached observation. Any form of emotion fades away with detached observation. Its nature is to arise, persist and to cease and one experiences a mind independent from the sensory world.

### *A lustrous mind free from hindrances*

All human beings have the capacity to experience the beautiful nature of mind, the mind's lustre when defilements are kept at bay.<sup>10</sup>

This original nature of mind is free of defilements caused by external conditions. Witnessing this lustrous nature of the mind, one is free from defilements and develops oneself to further establish clarity, a pure state of mind. The Buddha encourages us to experience this clear and unattached state of mind, which is spacious, calm, and peaceful.

Recognising the nature of hindrances, one no longer engages in self-criticism and instead objectively discerns the arising of hindrances with detached observation, without

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10 *pabhassaramidaṃ, bhikkhave, cittaṃ. tañca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi vippamuttaṃ.* - Pañihitācchavaggo (AN 1.50)

personalising the experience. As a result, hindrances become weaker and there is freedom, at least for some time. When the hindrances subside, one goes back to the lustrous mind (*pabassara citta*), the mind's original nature, the simple and unattached nature of the mind.

When this state of mind is experienced, its nature must be recognised and appreciated. Maintaining clarity of mind and the experience of calm, one feels relaxed. There is no more agitation when the mind is no longer under the influence of hindrances.

With more emphasis on introspection, one begins to see the intricacies of the mind, the mind's tendencies and become aware of one's behaviour and how the hindrances influence one's actions. In the *Dvedhāvitakka sutta*, the Buddha mentions that when one recollects lustful events again and again and paves the way for more sensual desire to arise, the mind is inclined towards lust. The same occurs if one begins to think about someone that one dislikes, purposely thinking again and again, paving the way for anger to arise and proliferate in the mind. The mind is then habitually inclined to think in this way. This process is described as neuroplasticity, where one's thinking pattern becomes habit and is engraved in the brain.

If our thoughts are habitually in a positive light, we develop loving kindness and compassion. Positive sentiment becomes a habitual tendency when a positive attitude is harnessed again and again. These tendencies can be seen if we have honest reflection to recognise these qualities of the

mind without rationalisation and instead, with objective (unbiased) discernment.

The Buddha first considers the presence or absence of hindrances. Next, if one is familiar with it, clarity of mind improves. When clarity of mind can be maintained for a certain amount of time, freedom from hindrances is experienced and there is calmness of mind - equanimity. If hindrances arise again, one has the skill to observe the arising nature of hindrances.

By vigilantly observing the arising of sensual desire, one understands the causes for its' arising, how the mind transitions from a calm state to agitation and the dependent origination of the hindrances. There is no personality in the experience or an attempt to personalise it or claim the experience because one is mindful and vigilant. With established mindfulness, one undertakes an objective assessment of what unfolds and takes a step back to observe hindrances at play. When agitation subsides and calmness is experienced one becomes aware of the causes and conditions that can prolong clarity and calmness of mind.

Recognising how defilements arise, one can unentangle from defilements to experience freedom of mind, a spacious mind, unburdened, simple and free.

With a practical application of this knowledge, hindrances can be used to develop mindfulness and to facilitate wisdom. It is like preparing good compost fertiliser from garbage – the hindrances are like waste material, which can produce a good fertiliser if it is handled properly.

## Chapter 10 – The Five Aggregates

There are three stages to the *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice: firstly, to develop mindfulness by anchoring the mind on an object; closely observing and examining arising insights; and harnessing insights to develop the path to be practised. These three progressions to insight are mentioned in the *Satipaṭṭhāna vibhaṅga sutta* (SN 47.40).

The previous chapter considered how hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) can be used to develop mindfulness and wisdom. One must objectively discern the arising of hindrances, the freedom experienced when they fade; how hindrances arise due to various causes and when the causes cease, the resultant hindrances also fade.

The focus of this chapter is the aggregates (*khandha pabba*), an important teaching of the Buddha. The Buddha invites us to objectively discern the experience of the five aggregates, to take a step back from the experience.

One of the five aggregates relate to materiality and the other four to mentality. All material aspects of one's body and the outside world are considered in the aggregate of form (*rūpa khandha*). The experience of feelings are considered in the aggregate of feelings (*vedhanā khandha*); signs and perceptions gathered throughout one's childhood to death are included in the aggregate of perception (*saññā khandha*); fabrications and various mental states are considered in the aggregate of mental formations (*saṅkhāra khandha*) and finally, cognition, the knowing - recognition of various sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and mental



objects are considered in the aggregate of consciousness (*viññāṇa khandha*).

## ***Observing the five aggregates***

The Buddha introduces the five aggregates and explains how to be aware of them:

*idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu — ‘iti rūpaṃ, iti rūpassa samudayo, iti rūpassa atthaṅgamo; iti vedanā, iti vedanāya samudayo, iti vedanāya atthaṅgamo; iti saññā, itisaññāya samudayo, iti saññāya atthaṅgamo; iti saṅkhārā, iti saṅkhārānaṃ samudayo, iti saṅkhārānaṃ atthaṅgamo; iti viññāṇaṃ, iti viññāṇassa samudayo, iti viññāṇassa atthaṅgamo.*

The instructions begin with a recognition of how the aggregates operate (*iti rūpaṃ, iti vedanā, iti saññā, iti saṅkhārā, iti viññāṇa*). In the *Khajjanīya sutta* of the *Khandha Saṃyutta*, the Buddha describes the aggregates as a burden, an agitation and inquires why *rūpa khandha* is described as ‘*ruppana*’ which literally means subject to change. The nature of form is to change – change due to cold, heat, hunger, thirst, wind, sun or when it contacts with flies, mosquitoes or serpents. Due to external factors, form is subject to deformation and this causes suffering.

The body experiences suffering throughout one’s life. Nowadays, the COVID pandemic is causing much distress and one feels unwell if one tests positive to the virus - experiencing a fever, cough, phlegm, and other ailments. In winter, when there is snowfall, the body experiences discomfort and we need to wear winter clothes and turn on heaters to maintain body temperature. The body is vulnerable to hunger and thirst and must be maintained

amidst difficulties caused by external conditions to retain its form.

The feeling aggregate (*vedhanā*) feels everything, whether the experience is pleasurable, unpleasant or neutral (neither painful nor pleasurable) – all experiences have the quality of happiness, unhappiness or equanimity.

The aggregate of perception (*saññā*) perceives, recognises various signs and marks. As kids, we learnt about colours, to discern red from blue, white from black. Later in life, we recognised a colour immediately as red or blue. Many perceptions are introduced to us and we store some markers, and when something is experienced later, the prior knowledge and experience helps us to recognise.

The Buddha explains how the aggregate of formations (*saṅkhāra khandha*) is responsible for mental fabrications, adding names and labels to an experience based on personal preference. The experience of sound is considered pleasurable or unpleasant depending on the quality of the feeling and one might even own the experience and add to it.

When a mental image appears in the mind, one may readily label the experience as pleasant or unpleasant. Some form of personal experience is attributed to the experience and ultimately it becomes a fantasy, a weaved story which began as a mental image.

Our tendency is to fabricate based on perception. If we experience a thought of loving kindness, our tendency is to enhance it. Wholesome and unwholesome states of mind are

common to everyone and the mind's tendency is to further construct and fabricate these formations in the mind. Whenever there is cognition, be it a sight, sound, or smell, we don't stop at that and instead, fabricate. This is how the aggregate of formations (*saṅkhāra*) operate.

The Buddha describes the aggregate of consciousness as cognition, where the mind cognises a bitter taste or sour, sweet, and salty flavours. Then the Buddha considers consciousness related to sights, sounds, smells, tactile sensations, and various mental phenomena.

In the discussion of aggregates, the Buddha considers not only the present aggregates but that of the past and aggregates to be born in the future (*atīta, anāgata, paccuppanna*), close and far away, internal, and external, gross and refined. It is not one single experience, but a collective and every individual's experience can be explained through the operation of the five aggregates. Being aware of their operation is critical and important for the practice.

The operation of the five aggregates can be observed in any experience. Take the example of listening to a *Dhamma* sermon; the intention to listen is mental formation (*saṅkhāra*) - one is first motivated by an intention to listen to a *Dhamma* sermon; then, attuning one's ear to the listening, one becomes aware of sound at a very foundational level of ear consciousness (*sota viññāṇa*). This is related to the consciousness aggregate (*viññāṇa khandha*) and one hears various sounds and starts to give various interpretations to what is heard; words as well as their meaning are recognised. This is the aggregate of perception.

From our childhood, we have learnt English and whenever a word is uttered, we can readily discern its meaning. The sounds and the ear are physical instruments belonging to the aggregate of form. The *Dhamma* talk might be rather boring, involving theory or data and one might experience a neutral feeling (equanimity). That is the aggregate of feelings. In this way, it can be seen how the five aggregates are involved in every experience.

With close attention, it can be seen there is no ‘self’ in the experience and instead, it is a combination of aggregates operating together. There is no personality in the experience. The more one engages in such an analysis without being driven by the experience and establish mindfulness, the different aggregates and their experience is properly understood. The form component, feeling component, perception component can be readily discerned.

### ***Establishing mindfulness on the five aggregates***

Establishing mindfulness on form can be described through an example of walking meditation (*kāyanupassanā*). The interplay of the five aggregates in the experience of walking can be readily seen. First, one must have the intention to undertake walking meditation and go to the walking path. The intention to walk is the aggregate of formations (*saṅkhāra khandha*). While walking, one may experience a neutral feeling in the toes, or the foot and experience the aggregate of feelings. If the walking is undertaken on a sand path, hardness, stiffness and roughness, the qualities of the aggregate of form (*rūpa khandha*) are experienced. One may have the perception of the earth element (*paṭhavi dhatu*) or

being in the middle or the end of the walking path have certain marks and signs with the experience.

Among the five aggregates, when practising *kāyānupassanā*, prominence is given to the aggregate of form, the body, hardness, softness, roughness, smoothness, heaviness, lightness - the qualities of the earth element and one can experience how heaviness transfers to a feeling of heat or coolness, the experience of vibration, movements. All these are components of the form aggregate, which can be experienced in the *kāyānupassanā* practice.

Whenever the mind shifts to various feelings, that feeling must be properly observed and investigated. This is the practice of *vedanānupassanā* which gives prominence to the aggregate of feelings. In a session of sitting meditation, the experience of various feelings can be carefully observed, retaining one's attention on each feeling, whether it is a pleasurable feeling, painful feeling or an equanimous feeling.

Similarly, in the practice of *cittānupassanā*, one observes lustful thoughts or thoughts of anger and recognises various mental formations, and at times, perceptions. In the practice of *cittānupassanā*, one deals with the three aggregates of perception, formation and consciousness. The practice of *dhammanupassanā*, involves all five aggregates.

### ***Similes describing the five aggregates***

The Buddha provides an eye-opening simile for us to reflect on each aggregate. For the aggregate of form, the simile of foam generated on the bank of the river *Ganges* is given, where waves hit the bank again and again to generate a

lump of foam, which appears like white colour stones when seen from afar. The *Buddha* mentions the form aggregate to be like the lump of foam. A closer look may confirm it is empty and hollow, without a core or substance.

If one undertakes the practice of *kāyānupassanā* and investigates the aggregate of form (*rūpa kandha*), an absence of a personality can be seen, it is hollow, without substance, void and of no interest. It arises due to conditions, is vulnerable to change and one has no control over it. When this is realised, one experiences dispassion (*nibbidā*) towards the form aggregate.

The Buddha's simile for feelings is a raindrop on the water surface in the autumn season, generating water bubbles to arise and to immediately burst. Another raindrop falls on the water surface to generate a water bubble and immediately bursts. Heavy rain strikes the water surface of a reservoir and generates rapid water bubbles which then burst - there is no core, it is empty, void, transient and without substance. In this way, the Buddha describes the aggregate of feelings to be like water bubbles (*vedanā bubbulūpamā*).

In the *vedanānupassanā* practice, one develops the perception that different feelings arise without one's control and passes away. One may wish for pleasurable feelings, but painful feelings arise, persist, and passes away. One may wish to prolong a pleasurable experience, retain it in vain, but it quickly vanishes. There is no control over feelings. With closer examination, each feeling is seen as a group of feelings and described as water bubbles, rapidly arising, persisting, and passing away, is without substance, void and empty.

The aggregate of perception is compared to a shimmering mirage, where, to a thirsty deer, it has the promise of water. In the hot sun, a mirage appears like a pool of water and a deer runs after it trying to get close to it. But the mirage is seen to be far away no matter how swiftly the deer runs. The promise of water is just a mirage - empty, hollow and without substance. The Buddha describes perception as such, where all signs and markers, when closely examined is without substance. Our nature is to be concerned about perception, the various labels, designation, recognition, and respect. Proper investigation and practice will reveal the hollow and empty nature of perception.

The analogy of a man in a forest in search of hardwood is used to describe the aggregate of formations. Whilst going in search of hardwood, the man comes across a banana tree and begins to cut the roots in search of hardwood in the banana trunk, peeling and unrolling the coils, one coil after another. Peeling in search of hardwood, he is disappointed as there are only layers of coil in the banana tree although it appeared to be a straight and rigid form of tree. Taking a closer look, he realises it is an empty trunk without substance.

The aggregate of formations is described by the Buddha to be similar, where it appears solid until its' weaving process is discovered, then it is seen as a fabrication of many limbs. There is no core, no hardwood and the middle is empty and hollow. Similarly, one develops dispassion and detachment towards formations when their nature is understood, placing little emphasis on the content.

The Buddha described the consciousness aggregate as a magical illusion without a core, as void, hollow and without any substance. Consciousness performs magic, but it is only that much, a deceptive illusion without substance. When the consciousness aggregate is investigated and analysed, it can be seen how it is a form of reflection, a hallucination.

By considering these beautiful and powerful similes in the *Phenapiṇḍūpama sutta* (SN 22.95), the Buddha outlines a very profound teaching about the aggregates.

### *Aggregates are non-self*

In the *Anattalakkhaṇa sutta*, the Buddha mentions about the non-self-nature of the aggregates, how one has no control or command over them. The Buddha describes how form is non-self (*rūpaṃ bhikkave anattā*). For example, even if one wishes to be free from illness, the body feels unwell, and one has no command over the body. The same with a painful experience, where one wishes for it to go away, but it can't be controlled according to one's wishes. There is no personality in the experience of the aggregates, they do not behave as one wishes and according to their own causes and conditions.

The Buddha mentioned the aggregates as impermanent and seeing this, one feels disenchanted about the five aggregates. In this statement, the Buddha includes past, future, and present aggregates (*atīta anāgata paccuppanna*), internal and external aggregates (*ajjhatta bhahidhā*), gross and subtle aggregates (*olarikhamva sukhumamva*), inferior and superior aggregates (*hīnaṃvā panītaṃvā*) and those that are near and far away (*yaṃ dūre santike vā*).



Reflecting on the five aggregates, one experiences disenchantment and gains a better understanding about them and wisdom arises. Craving is cut off and dispassion is experienced when the five aggregates are well understood. In the *Sāmidatta Thera gāthā*, Venerable Arahant *Sāmidatta* mentions that he has fully comprehended the five aggregates, they are now like palmyra trees that have been cut off and one can completely uproot *samsāra*; there is no rebirth<sup>11</sup>. Freedom is experienced when the five aggregates are understood in practice.

Once the Arahant nun *Vajirā* was living in *Andhavana* where the *Mara* approaches her, trying to confuse her and asks who owns the body, infusing a personality to the line of questioning. Venerable *Vajirā*, realising that it is the *Māra*, responds with a beautiful simile of a cart.<sup>12</sup> If we put in today's terms, when four wheels, four tires, bonnet, the engine, seats, and steering wheel are assembled, it can be given the label of a car, bus, or a van - if the components were dismantled, it is no longer a bus or a van. The assembled components make it a vehicle.

When the five aggregates come together, convention (*sammuti*) is formed. There is no essence in it, only suffering, which arises and fades away. When components come together, a conventional name is given. We say a car exists,

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11 *pañcakkhandhā pariññātā, tiṭṭhanti chinnamūlakā.*

*vikkhīno jātisaṃsāro, natthi dāni punabbhavo'ti* - *Sāmidatta Thera gāthā.*

12 *yathā hi aṅgasambhārā, hoti saddo ratho iti.*

*evaṃ khandhesu santesu, hoti sattoti sammuti* – *Vajirā sutta* (SN 5.10).

it belongs to us, it is solid, and we become entrapped in conventional reality.

### *Arising and passing of the five aggregates*

An analysis of the five aggregates helps to unbundle an experience and understand it in the proper perspective. The Buddha invites us to examine the five aggregates (both internal and external aggregates) and to closely investigate the arising and passing nature.

In the *Samādhībhāvanā sutta* (SN 22.5), the Buddha explains that one with good concentration can see things as they truly are<sup>13</sup>. The Buddha recommends that the five aggregates, their arising and passing nature must be properly understood, explaining the causes of the five aggregates and their conditional nature. When one takes delight in form, talks about form, and becomes absorbed in it, delight (*nandi*) arises.

This can be explained with the example of a mother fantasizing about her child’s future – the mother ponders “how will I bring up my child to become a doctor in the future” and have some form of ambition for the child, feeling happy about it, imagining and grasping to pleasurable thoughts about the child’s success – now the mother is living in a fantasy, closing her eyes, dreaming about it and is in a different world – this is *bhava*, where one is born to it. Ultimately, the parent understands that it is simply a dream,

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13 *samādhīṃ, bhikkhave, bhāvētha; samāhito, bhikkhave, bhikkhu yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*. – Samādhī Bhāvanā Sutta (SN 22.5).

a projection of the mind and if there was disturbance, will open the eyes and the whole experience collapses.

Meanwhile, there has been an accumulation of the aggregate of perception and the parent has fertilised the experience, strengthening perception and the associated aggregate of feelings and formations, harnessing many mental fabrications of the child's future. Many thoughts are weaved; and the five aggregates have come to being due to attachment.

Another example is when a young boy's attention is caught by the sight of a young girl. Seeing her, immediately, pleasure arises in the mind and the boy attaches to the feeling and begins to imagine a future - "I will marry her, I want to love her and keep her", entering a dreamworld, fantasy, losing the present moment, entangled in a dream, a fantasy. After a while, she might disappear or have got down from the bus and the boy once again returns to the present moment, the dream vanishes and the world collapses.

In the *Samadhi Bhavana sutta*, the Buddha explains that the five aggregates arise all the time – one experiences happiness attaching to the aggregate of form, experiencing a pleasurable feeling (aggregate of feelings). One delights in it, grasps, and absorbs into it. With increased mental proliferation, there is fabrication and different perceptions. Attaching to a pleasurable feeling, one delights in it, grasps, becomes entangled and loses the present moment.

The nature of each aggregate, how they are formulated; the experience of aggregates and how a story is weaved when they are encouraged must be recognised. One should not feel agitated or delighted when form is observed, grasping to pleasurable feelings when they are experienced or reject displeasure. The experience, their arising and passing nature and how they arise due to causes and conditions must be objectively discerned. One must not act on them and allow them to fade away. When there is no grasping, there is no becoming (*bhava*), no birth, no decay, sorrow, lamentation, or death.

Practising like this, aggregates are not promoted or accumulated - they arise due to various causes and pass away. Understanding the causes, one can pause without feeding them - the aggregates which have arisen become weak and fade away. The mind remains calm and is not agitated by the experience. Clarity of mind enables one to know which aggregate is prominent without falling victim to it, to be cautious, to allow things to pass away. In the *Samadhi Bhavana sutta*, the Buddha attributes the genesis of aggregates to delight and grasping, the reason for their growth and accumulation. Holding, grasping, delighting in it is the problem and with the *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice, the process can be stopped.<sup>14</sup>

When undertaking walking meditation, one closely observes the foot touching the ground, the experience of hardness and softness, there might be heat, stiffness and the

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14 *ko ca, bhikkhave, rūpassa atthaṅgamo,...idha, bhikkhave, nābhinandati nābhivadati nājjhosāya tiṭṭhati.* – Samādhi Bhāvanā Sutta (SN 22.5).

aggregate of form can be considered at a fundamental level. With continued practice, these qualities become evident and ultimately one loses interest in it, no longer grasps, and observes the experience in a detached manner. With detached observation, the walking is observed objectively as an outsider. There is a change in perception, a non-judgmental observation and one begins to see the vulnerable and transient nature of the aggregate of form. It is impossible to find lasting happiness from such a transient experience without substance.

As wisdom develops, one no longer grasps, maintains a detached mind, let go, relinquishes, having understood the nature of aggregates, that there is no essence, no self in it. The aggregates can be a tool for contemplation, to refine mindfulness and wisdom. There is detachment with relinquishment. Dispassion arises as the unentangled and unconditioned nature of the mind is revealed - one loses the interest to cling, to grasp and experiences freedom in maintaining a simple, non-fabricated mind state (*anissito ca viharati na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*).

Understand the nature and operation of the aggregates without promoting the experience or grasping, then, with objective discernment, what appeared solid, disappears. The arising and passing nature of aggregates can be seen and understood. To strengthen this understanding, one must adjust one's livelihood, maintain one's morality (*sīla*), develop concentration (*samādhi*) so that wisdom (*paññā*) can arise. Sustaining these three aspects, a complete path to cessation from suffering can be developed by undertaking the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice

## Chapter 11 – The Six Sense Bases

We communicate with the external world through the six sense bases (*Āyatana*). Everyday life is a combination of sensory experience: the eyes see various objects; the ears hear sounds; the nose experiences fragrances; the tongue experiences various tastes; the body experiences tactile sensations and the mind experiences mental objects.

Sensory experience is felt as a serial occurrence due to the mind's rapid succession of sensory contact - everything is felt as happening simultaneously. It feels as if a sound can be heard while looking at a visual object. One sensory experience takes prominence at a time while others remain in the background, but the rapid succession of sensory contact makes one feel that sensory contact is collectively experienced.

A computer with high process speed provides a useful analogy here, where internally, time sharing occurs within the process architecture to enable various programs to run concurrently with each program given a processor resource. The user experience is that many programs are running simultaneously, although the laptop or computer only has one single processor.

In the same way, the mind experiences a series of events occurring one after another. Owing to the rapidity of events, sensory experience is felt as occurring simultaneously – tasting food, listening to conversation, seeing friends, and thinking to happen at the same time.

## *Self-view colours sensory experience*

In the *Indriya Saṃyutta*, a brahmin and scholar named *Uṇṇābha* presents before the Buddha and asks a question – “eyes can only see sight, but cannot hear sounds or experience taste; the ears can only hear sounds, but, cannot see sights, smell or experience tactile sensations; the tongue can only taste, but, cannot see sights, hear sounds and the body cannot see or hear, but can experience tactile sensations – the senses have specific domains and are not mixed up – who consumes these sensory objects (*ārammaṇa*) received through sensory contact?

The *brahmin's* question is about how an object seen could remain in the eye if the eyes are closed and eye function is unavailable; how can sounds remain with us or tastes remain in the mouth after a mouth wash. Who is it that consumes, stores, or retains sensory experience?

The Buddha responded that it is the mind (*māna*) which consumes everything.<sup>15</sup> The mind receives, recognises, analyses, and memorises sights seen by the eyes – the same process follows with the other faculties - sounds don't remain in the ears, they are received and retained in the mind, the same with tastes and smells. It is the mind that governs sensory perception, playing a vital role in recognition and interpretation. Sensory contact is

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15 *imesaṃ kho, brāhmaṇa, pañcannaṃ indriyānaṃ nānāvisayānaṃ nānāgocarānaṃ na aññamaññassa gocaravisayaṃ paccanubhontānaṃ mano paṭisaraṇaṃ, manova nesam gocaravisayaṃ paccanubhoti*”ti. - Uṇṇābhabrāhmaṇa sutta (SN 48.42).

experienced from childhood to death and many objects are perceived and stored in the mind.

Then, the *brahmin* asks: what is the refuge for such a mind? The Buddha responds - ‘mindfulness is the refuge for such a mind’<sup>16</sup>. Mindfulness is the refuge for a mind which is polluted and corrupted.

By habit, past sensory perception interrupts sensory experience. You might meet someone who has hurt you accidentally down the street after some time, just by seeing the person, memories flood to cloud the present experience. Instantly, you recall how the person looked down on you during a difficult time, caused you agony. A fair amount of projected information infiltrates the mind. Each day, we project pre-conceived views to what is heard, tasted, seen, smelt, felt, thought, and our interpretation is coloured by past events.

Every experience has an objective and subjective influence. The subjective influence colours and conditions the experience, blind folding reality. Things are viewed as permanent, lasting and an expectation is created that sense impingement - sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles can give happiness. There is also a sense of control and governance over sensory experience, that it can be managed, controlled, or manipulated and the experience is personalised: “I am listening, I am seeing, I am tasting, I am smelling, I am feeling, I am thinking”. A personality is added to the experience. Now the experience is complicated, and

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16 *manassa kho, brāhmaṇa, sati paṭisaraṇan”ti.*

- Uṇṇābhabrāhmaṇa sutta (SN 48.42).



one feels as if an individual is experiencing something external.

Since our childhood this has been the context to our learning. We think there is an individual experiencing something external and our minds are conditioned to think through the lens of a personality. We pass on this thinking to our children. We are unable to understand the real picture and instead, think, "I" am perceiving, "I am listening", "I am seeing", feeling trapped, reinforcing self-view. Mindfulness and insight meditation are the only way out of such an entanglement, to remove confusion and complication.

### *Establishing mindfulness on sensory experience*

Continued attention on the sense bases enables one to observe how objects are recognised and the mind adds pre-conceived views to the experience. One can see how eyes recognise a visual object, the mind entangles with personality view and experiences agitation based on the experience. The calm and clear mind is unattached until a song is played; and the mind starts to listen, there is entanglement as the mind inclines towards the song.

The experience of fragrances is similar, where the mind attaches and prolongs it, and adds bias to the experience. In the *āyatana pabba*, the Buddha instructs us to recognize the operation of the sense bases, the objects received; and the process of entanglement caused by sense impingement when mindfulness is absent.

One must become mindful of how the eye receives visual objects and how eye contact arises. Become attentive to

sensory experience occurring through the sense bases and the mental attachment, the entanglement with experience, how the mind shifts to the sensory object. The Buddha instructs us to pause and observe how the mind entangles with sensory experience; how sense impingement is experienced by the nose, tongue, body, ear and how the internal and external sense bases come together and grasping arises in the mind.<sup>17</sup>

The immediate reaction to bodily pain is rejection. With improved mindfulness it can be seen how defilements are generated in a clear, unattached, equanimous and spacious mind due to sense impingement - the presence of a fetter and its arising can be seen.<sup>18</sup>

With established mindfulness, one can take a step back to watch the process and no longer fall victim to sensory experience, driven by it and recognise the defilements that have arisen. The eye and the sights are in contact and a defilement arises in the mind. One is vigilant and aware of the defilement, takes a step back to observe it and is no longer driven by the defilement or falls victim to the defilement. With wise attention, there is clear knowing, and the defilements fade in one's awareness<sup>19</sup>.

With established mindfulness, a defilement that has arisen now fades away. When the experience is mindfully

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17 *cakkhuñca pajānāti, rūpe ca pajānāti, yañca tadubhayaṃ paṭicca uppajjati saṃyojanaṃ tañca pajānāti.*

18 *yathā ca anuppannassa saṃyojanassa uppādo hoti tañca pajānāti.*

19 *yathā ca uppannassa saṃyojanassa pahānaṃ hoti tañca pajānāti.*

observed, there is disengagement, and the defilements fade away.

With wise attention, mindfulness is clearly applied to the arising and fading. Defilements disappear and may not arise for a while and the mind returns to equanimity, is calm, spacious, and peaceful.<sup>20</sup> The peaceful and calm mind must be valued and appreciated.

In the *Koṭṭhita sutta* of the *Salāyatana Saṃyutta*, Venerable Koṭṭhita asks Venerable Sāriputta whether sight is a fetter to the eye or is the eye a fetter to sight? Venerable Sāriputta responds by saying 'No'. The same questions are posed about sounds and the ear; tastes and the tongue; smells and the nose; tactile sensations and the body, mental objects, and the mind and Venerable Sāriputta's response is 'No'. Venerable Koṭṭhita, being an *arahant* makes these inquiries for the benefit of our understanding.

Venerable Koṭṭhita requests an example from Venerable Sāriputta. Venerable Sāriputta considers the example of a white bull and a black bull being tied up with a rope. The white bull goes in one direction – the black bull, tied to the white bull, must follow. The black bull then pulls to the other side and the white bull must follow suit. Venerable Sāriputta asks Venerable Koṭṭhita - is the black bull a fetter for the white bull? or the white bull a fetter for the black bull? Venerable Koṭṭhita responds and says, it is the rope, the bondage that binds them together. Sight cannot be a fetter for the eye or the eye a fetter for sight, rather, it is the

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<sup>20</sup> *yathā ca pahīnassa saṃyojanassa āyatiṃ anuppādo hoti tañca pajānāti.*

bondage, desire and lust arising (*chanda-rāga*) due to sense impingement that generates a fetter.

We can't wish for all sights of beautiful women or handsome men to be removed to maintain a calm mind. We can't ask everyone to switch off their radios, TVs, loudspeakers. Our role is to observe how the mind responds and reacts, to recognise defilements arising in the mind.

In the *Nibbedhika Sutta*, the Buddha explains how attractive sights remain as they are, but the wise person tames the mind and uproots defilements and desires.<sup>21</sup> This can be done when one is vigilant with sensory experience, keep guard on the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and the mind, to recognise how the mind entangles with sense impingement due to desire.

### *Causal nature of sensory experience*

The Buddha explains sensory experience to be a cause-and-effect relationship. The eye and form contact to generate eye-consciousness (*cakkhu viññāṇa*) and there is 'seeing'. What is seen generates pleasure (*sukha vedanā*), to which there arises craving (*taṇhā*), attachment and clinging (*upādāna*). With clinging, the mind shifts to a new experience (*bhava*) and loses the present moment. The calm and spacious mind is lost, and one enters a new world (*jāti*). At the sight of a beautiful garden, one enjoys beautiful flowers and trees, feels happy and wishes to prolong the experience, even with

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21 *na te kāmā yāni citrāni loke - saṅkapparāgo purisassa kāmo, tiṭṭhanti citrāni tatheva loke - athenṭha dhīrā vinayanti chandan'ti.*  
- Nibbedhika sutta (AN 6.63).

the eyes closed, the beautiful garden is projected in the mind, grasping to pleasurable experience.

Mental fabrications over beautiful sight continues as one enjoys a world of fantasy, if someone disturbs and says, “hey what are you doing?” one might come to one’s senses. When the fantasy world collapses, the imagination is lost. One might experience sorrow, lamentation and suffering when the fantasy world collapses (*jarā maraṇa soka parideva dukkha domanassa upāyāsā sambhavanti*). The fantasy world now appears like a dream – the Buddha reminds us that the experience is simply a projection of the mind and that sensory experience is a cause-and-effect relationship.

To establish mindfulness on sensory experience, the Buddha recommends the *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice. There is less entanglement and one can mindfully see, hear, smell, taste, and have an unbiased observation of what unfolds. There is correct perspective, and one does not fall victim to sensory experience.

The internal sense bases contact with external objects: the eye with form; ear with sound; nose with smells; tongue with taste; the body with various tangibles and the mind with mental objects. The defilements generated due to sensory contact are considered fetters (*saṃyojana*).

The Buddha recommends us to recognise these hindrances, be watchful of the eye, how the eye and form contact to generate defilements, to be alert about the ear and sounds; nose and odours, tongue, and tastes; and to observe how the mind attaches to tactile sensations or rejects painful

experience; how thoughts arise in the mind. This requires established mindfulness.

### *Keeping guard at sense bases*

During the time of the Buddha, an old Monk named Venerable Māluṅkyaputta approaches the Buddha and requested “Bhante I am pretty old now, I want to cross *samsāra*, please advise me”. Without immediately responding, the Buddha arouses urgency in him, saying “you are quite an old monk - what am I going to talk to these young monks? They are vigilant, motivated, and ready to do anything. When you ask such questions, what am I going to tell them?” Venerable Māluṅkyaputta once again begs for a teaching, “Bhante, don't say like that, please help me, although I am old, I am confident that I can do this. Please advise me”.

The Buddha asks Venerable Māluṅkyaputta whether one could generate defilements over form which one has never seen, is not presently seeing, has no desire to see and will not see in the future?

Venerable Māluṅkyaputta answers, “No” - defilements cannot be generated over form which one has not seen, is not presently seeing, has no desire to see and will not see in the future.

Assume there are sounds that Venerable Māluṅkyaputta has never heard, not being heard at present or desire to hear in the future. Such sounds cannot generate defilements.

There may be smells that Venerable Māluṅkyaputta has never sensed, is not presently experiencing, or going to experience in the future. Such odours cannot generate defilements.

There may be various tastes which Venerable Māluṅkyaputta has never tasted, that are not being tasted or will taste in the future. Such tastes cannot generate defilements.

Venerable Māluṅkyaputta may not have experienced some thoughts, is not thinking such thoughts and will not experience such thoughts in the future. The Buddha asks, “can defilements arise due to such thoughts?” Venerable Māluṅkyaputta answers “No”.

The Buddha narrows the practice, without extending it to one’s experience of all sorts of form, all sorts of sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and thoughts as it would be endless. The Buddha limits the discussion to what one has seen, is currently seeing and wishes to see in the future and identifies how only such sights can cause defilements to arise in the mind. The same applies to sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and mental objects.

The Buddha shows how sense impingement known to us can arouse defilements. In a world of a million people, only the ones known to us generate defilements – those in a faraway land, whom we have never seen, heard of, and never thought about are of no interest. Similarly, only sense objects that are received can cause defilements. The Buddha clarifies the method and narrows down the path for us,

taking out what is unnecessary to enable us to understand the necessary domain for observation.

The Buddha instructs Venerable Mālun̄kyaputta to pause at mere seeing, become aware of the eye base and when the eye contacts form, to stop there (*diṭṭhe diṭṭha mattaṃ bhavissati*). With hearing, to stop short of hearing without mental proliferation, weaving stories and to stop at mere hearing. With the nose, tongue, body, and the mind, to stop at contact with the object without thought and mental proliferation. Seeing should be just seeing, hearing just hearing without going any further. Restrain from fabrication or rumination and stop short at awareness of the sensory experience. Rejoicing at the Buddha's explanation, Venerable Mālun̄kyaputta repeats his understanding of the Buddha's teaching:

*rūpaṃ disvā sati muṭṭhā, piyaṃ nimittaṃ manasi karoto.  
sārattacitto vedeti, tañca ajjhosāya tiṭṭhati.  
tassa vaddhanti vedanā, anekā rūpasambhavā.  
abhijjhā ca vihesā ca, cittamassūpahaññati.  
evaṃ ācinato dukkhaṃ, ārā nibbānamuccati.<sup>22</sup>*

An unmindful person will personalise sensory experience when the eye contacts with a visual object, taking delight in it, attaching to the signs, figures, and attributes of the object. Developing desire towards what is seen, one becomes trapped in the lustful experience. Delightful feelings arise, ignorance takes over and strong desires arise to generate more defilements. One then loses freedom and moves away

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22 Mālun̄kyaputta sutta (SN 35.78).



from the path to *nibbāna*, away from calmness: serenity and with growing dissatisfaction, experiences suffering.

Venerable Mālunkyaputta explains that one who unmindfully listens to sound will do so with lust, attach to the sound, its signs and attributes and the mind becomes entangled with the object and delightful feelings are generated. Defilements infiltrate the mind, greed and aversion take over, then, one loses freedom and moves away from *nibbāna*, away from calmness. A similar experience occurs with the nose, the body, tongue, and the mind.

*na so rajjati rūpesu, rūpaṃ disvā paṭissato.  
virattacitto vedeti, tañca nājjhosa tiṭṭhati.  
yathāssa passato rūpaṃ, sevato cāpi vedanaṃ.  
khīyati no pacīyati, evaṃ so caratī sato.  
evaṃ apacinato dukkhaṃ, santike nibbānam vuccati.*

One who is mindful guards the sense bases, is mindful of seeing and vigilant about defilements, not chasing after the detail in objects and experiencing delight. Instead, there is restraint from attachment and clinging. There is freedom from lustful thoughts, freedom from defilements and delusion, no entanglement, there is clarity of mind, one is calm, peaceful, and closer to *nibbāna*. The same can be experienced with the ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. One who guards the sense bases gets closer to *nibbāna*.

### ***Returning to equanimity***

Once, a Brahmin named Uttara presented before the Buddha. The Buddha asks Uttara what his teacher Pārāsariya, recommends about restraint of the faculties?

Uttara responds that his teacher's recommendation is to not look at form, sights, listen to sounds or smell various incense, go after tactile sensations. The Buddha says, if that is the case, all deaf and blind people would already be enlightened as they are unable to see or hear anything.

A profound way to understand the senses and develop the noble path is available in the *Indriya bhāvanā Sutta* (MN 152), where the Buddha explains it is not that one is not seeing, not hearing, not sensing, not thinking, but maintains guard at the sense bases, is aware of the eye to observe what is seen and immediately become aware of any pleasure or displeasure arising in the mind.

Essentially, one must have well established mindfulness to be vigilant and diligent. When the mind wanders after sense contact, know the mind has gone astray, has drifted from its state of equanimity, diverted to pleasure or despair. The Buddha recommends that one must not remain in that agitated state and return to the state of equanimity, the baseline as quickly as possible. If one becomes elated after seeing someone and the mind shifts from the baseline of mindfulness, it is important for the mind to return to its calm and equanimous state (*etaṃ santam etaṃ paṇītam yadidaṃ upekkhā'ti*).

The Buddha recommends us to always return to a state of equanimity, a calm and serene mind and appreciate the value of equanimity. Equanimity is subtle and far more fruitful than being agitated. The Buddha's recommendation is to return to equanimity at the blink of an eye, elaborating on the need to respond with immediacy. Initially, it might take a minute or two to return to equanimity, with continued

practice, one can return to equanimity very quickly. The same approach can be followed with the other senses, to become aware when the mind drifts to a song, is entangled with a pleasant odour, or indulges in a delightful taste and return to equanimity immediately.

There are three ways to return to equanimity.

An agitated mind is rough (*olārikam*) compared to a peaceful state of equanimity. When the mind is agitated, become aware of the agitation, the gross feeling, the heaviness of mind, the corrosive state of mind. Without remaining in the agitated state of mind, recognise it and appreciate the lightness of equanimity and return to it. One must be vigilant of the heaviness and roughness of an agitated mind.

Becoming aware of mental fabrication (*saṅkhatam*) helps one to quickly return to equanimity. Mindfully, recognise how the mind became agitated due to sense impingement, diverted from a state of equanimity – observe the mental fabrication, rumination and exaggeration, the weaving process that led to agitation. Become aware of how the clear mind disappeared, the conditioning that led to agitation due to personal preference; and what was added to fabricate the agitation.

It is like the trunk of a banana tree, which appears hard, but, once it is peeled, has no core. With wise attention, one steps back to recognise the weaving process, to realise how a personality was introduced, a story was crafted over sense impingement – “I weaved this, I am the one who constructed this, I am the one who formed this”. Recognising the process

of fabrication, one can quickly return to equanimity, a state of mind that is clear, simple, unattached, and free.

The third method is understanding the cause-and-effect relationship (*paṭiccasamuppannaṃ*). When the eye contacts with form, eye consciousness arises, there is cognition. Contact generates a feeling, with recognition there is perception and thought is generated. Mental proliferation generates more thoughts, conditioning the experience. There is endless proliferation and rumination as if one is in a dream. If the cause-and-effect relationship is understood, one quickly returns to equanimity. The practice is not to close off or be separate from the senses, rather to be vigilant, know the agitation, not propel the agitation and to immediately return to equanimity.

The *Chabbisodhana sutta* (MN 112) considers how a monk handled the senses to become an *arahant* without attaching (*anissita*) to whatever seen and being unbounded (*appaṭibaddho*) by it and kept the mind independent of bondage (*vippamutto*) and disassociated with the sense object (*visaṃyutto*).<sup>23</sup>

On a walking path, one might see a butterfly, a monkey, an airplane, or another person, if it is something you like, the mind diverts away from the walking to the sight and becomes entangled and loses the present moment. If the sight is unpleasant, there is immediate repulsion; and one might quickly look away at something else. The mind is

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23 *ditṭhe kho ahaṃ, āvuso, anupāyo anapāyo anissito appaṭibaddho vippamutto visaṃyutto vimariyādīkatena cetasā viharāmi.*

- Chabbisodhana sutta (MN 112).

involved with the visual object and is not free and bound to it.

One who has developed *Vipassanā* and undertakes continuous practice will see the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and non self, nature of the object and maintain equanimity without involvement with sense objects. The mind will be free from external impingement, stay in the middle without going after external distractions. There is no involvement with sights, sounds, tastes, smells, tactile sensations, or thoughts. The mind rests in the middle like an island separate from external sense impingement.

The monk continued to practise in this way without distraction about sights, sounds, smells, taste, tactile sensations, thoughts, and mental objects. With continuous practice, his mind was free, independent, uninvolved, without desire or rejection, clear and spacious. What is seen, heard, sensed, cognised will fade away without arousing defilements, latent tendencies start to weaken, and the mind does not cling.<sup>24</sup>

The practice must be developed in one's daily life by cultivating morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). By establishing mindfulness, one must develop wisdom, to see how things arise, persist, change, and pass away. One must have morality, sense restraint and guard the faculties to develop wisdom by maintaining clarity and calmness of mind.

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<sup>24</sup> *evaṃ kho me, āvuso, jānato evaṃ passato imesu catūsu vohāresu anupādāya āsavehi cittaṃ vimuttan'ti.* - Chabbisodhana sutta (MN 112).

## Chapter 12 – Seven Factors of Enlightenment

The *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice has three stages: establishing mindfulness, developing wisdom, and cultivating the correct path of practice as a complete way of life. The four foundations of mindfulness: *Kāyānupassanā*, *Vedanānupassanā*, *Cittānupassanā* and *Dhammānupassanā*, each have several meditation instructions, meditation tools and methods (*Kammaṭṭhāna*) and each method involves the above three stages.

*Dhammānupassanā* consists of five components: the hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*), the aggregates (*khandha*), the sense bases (*āyatana*), the factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*) and the four noble truths (*sacca*). This chapter considers the factors of enlightenment, which are antidotes to the five hindrances. The factors of enlightenment can only be developed when hindrances fade away. The term *bojjhaṅga* means the factors that lead towards awakening, enlightenment. One must develop certain positive qualities and skills to attain enlightenment, to be awakened.

In the *Bhikkhu sutta* (SN 46.5), the Buddha describes the term *bojjhaṅga* to refer to positive mental qualities, the factors of enlightenment or awakening, essential for *nibbāna*. There are seven enlightenment factors:

1. *Sati sambojjhaṅga* – mindfulness enlightenment factor.
2. *Dhammavicaya sambojjhaṅga* - investigation enlightenment factor.
3. *Viriya sambojjhaṅga* - effort or energy enlightenment factor.
4. *Pīti sambojjhaṅga* - rapture enlightenment factor.
5. *Passaddhi sambojjhaṅga* - tranquillity enlightenment factor.
6. *Samādhi sambojjhaṅga* - concentration, or collectedness enlightenment factor.
7. *Upekkhā sambojjhaṅga* - the equanimity enlightenment factor.

### ***Developing the enlightenment factors in practice***

In the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (MN 118), the Buddha outlines how the enlightenment factors can be developed through the *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice. Mindfulness is the foundation to develop the enlightenment factors.

Initially, when one aims to establish mindfulness in the *Ānāpānasati* practice, the mind may drift to the past or the future. As a result, one struggles to establish mindfulness and is not in a state to develop the enlightenment factors. Continuing the practice, mindfulness can be maintained for longer (for example, 30 or 50 breaths), and being aware of each in-breath and each out-breath, the first enlightenment factor – mindfulness (*sati*) starts to develop.

There is a logical approach to developing the enlightenment factors, commencing with continuous mindfulness on each breath. When unremitting mindfulness is established, the first factor of enlightenment begins to develop. The Buddha recommends a close examination, to investigate the qualities of the breath, when mindfulness is developed on the breath. Doing so, the second factor of enlightenment, investigation (*dhammavicaya sambojjhaṅga*) is developed, and the subtle qualities of each breath can be seen.

When the investigation factor is developed with close observation, there is no inner chatter, the mind is calm and quiet, well focused on the investigation, closely analysing the intricacies of the breath. This process requires applied energy as the phenomena under observation may not be particularly interesting.

Contrast this experience with watching a movie. A movie can be intriguing and does not require much focus to retain the mind's attention on the lustful scenes, attractive landscapes, the scenery, music, narrative, all of which is interesting. Defilements are generated at a high level and one becomes absorbed and trapped in the movie. Compared to the movie, a close observation of presently arising phenomena, the rising and falling of the abdomen or the breathing process is bland, the experience is subtle with equanimity and a fair amount of applied energy is needed to sustain attention. Undertaking this examination for an hour requires effort, the mind feels bored, lethargic, discouraged and energy must be aroused again and again. Then the enlightenment factor of energy (*virīya sambojjhaṅga*) is harnessed. When the mind says, "I am tired, I am not



interested”, the mind must be energised, to continue the practice.

By arousing tireless energy to investigate presently arising phenomena, the energy enlightenment factor - *virīya sambojjhaṅga* is developed. Repeated practice fulfils *Virīya sambojjhaṅga*. Energy applied at the start of one’s practice varies and when mindfulness is well established during the practice, the energy levels will vary. During sitting meditation, a fair amount of energy is initially applied. Once the investigation commences, less energy is applied, and the mind is retained on the object with close examination. With continuous mindfulness, the energy applied must be balanced. With continued awareness of the object, the mind is free from hindrances, peace and delight arises in the mind. There is no more torment from defilements. As one’s attention is closely retained on presently arising phenomena, the meditation gathers momentum, less energy is applied, and rapture arises in the mind.

The delight experienced is the beginning of the enlightenment factor of rapture (*Pīti sambojjhaṅga*). In the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha mentions how continued attention on the arising and passing of various phenomena lends towards an unworldly form of happiness<sup>25</sup> – the investigation feels boring only at the beginning, but later, as one succeeds in mindfulness, the experience is energetic and pleasant.

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25 *suññāgāraṃ pavitṭhassa, santacittassa bhikkhuno.  
amānusi rati hoti, sammā dhammaṃ vipassato* – Dh 373.

When one feels satisfied, the mind and the body calms down - there is no agitation, and the enlightenment factor of tranquillity (*passadhi sambojjhaṅga*) is aroused. The mind is rapturous, tranquil, content and does not divert to external distractions and experiences an inner quality of unworldly happiness. There is contentment. A useful simile here is grocery shopping on the home front – once it is done and the refrigerator is full, there is no need to venture outside. Everything is available and there is fulfilment. When calmness and tranquillity set in, the enlightenment factor of tranquillity makes one comfortable, satisfied, content - there is no agitation in the mind. The mind and body are comfortable, and the tranquil state of mind lends towards developing concentration.

To develop concentration, the mind must be happy, pleasant, and peaceful.<sup>26</sup> With tranquillity, there is mental and bodily comfort, which paves the way for concentration to arise. The presence of concentration makes the mind focused on presently arising objects and one can continue in mindfulness and investigate phenomena, maintaining the necessary amount of energy. Succeeding in this practice, one experiences a pleasant feeling, there is calmness; and a calm environment produces concentration. There is instantaneous concentration, where one's focus is on presently arising phenomena. The enlightenment factor of concentration (*samādhi sambojjhaṅga*) develops; and one continues with a chain of unbroken mindfulness, focused on investigation with balanced energy. There is tranquillity in

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<sup>26</sup> *passaddhakāyassa sukhino cittaṃ samādhīyati*  
- Ānāpānassati sutta (MN 118).

the body and mind; the experience is pleasant, there is nothing to be done other than remaining in equanimity, allowing the meditation to continue in its momentum.

Now you are an observer, closely observing the process and allowing it to happen - the mind takes over, no adjustments are required, and you can rest to allow the mind to continue the process. Various phenomena arises and the mind is applied to the phenomena, examining and investigating what happens naturally. This equanimous approach is developing the enlightenment factor of equanimity (*upekkhā sambojjhaṅga*).

The seven factors of enlightenment can be developed by practising the four foundations of mindfulness.

Our habit is to attach to pleasure and reject pain. The appropriate balance is to neither attach nor be repelled by feelings. This balance is maintained in the *Vedanānupassanā* practice when mindfulness is established on feelings to observe their nature and characteristics and one can see whether it is a single feeling or a combination of feelings arising together or at different times and their disappearance. Through this investigation, the enlightenment factor of investigation (*dhammavicaya*) develops. A fair amount of energy must be applied to patiently observe a painful feeling. Doing so, one develops the enlightenment factor of energy. Rapture is experienced with tranquillity and one experiences comfort as concentration develops. Then, the enlightenment factor of equanimity is developed.

In the *Cittānupassanā* practice, various mind states are observed. When mindfulness is weak, one is driven by defilements - when mindfulness is established, defilements can be observed as defilements - *kilesa* as *kilesa*, to establish mindfulness on a lustful thought, become aware of it; become aware of mental resistance, the scattered and distracted nature of mind; and when the mind is focused, to know the mind is well focused.

If you are undertaking the *samatha* practice, with established mindfulness, you can know the mind is in absorption without being trapped in it. When the mind is concentrated, various mental states can be seen objectively. With established mindfulness, *sati sambojjhaṅga* develops and you can see what type of defilements are generated, whether it is lust, anger, sloth and torpor, restlessness, regret, doubt, or jealousy. You must continuously investigate the causes to develop the enlightenment factor of investigation. Defilements may arise again and again even with long term practice, but one must not feel discouraged and persevere with the practice, knowing ‘this is the only way, this is the correct practice’. Then one feels energised with the enlightenment factor of energy.

As the practice gathers in momentum, tranquillity sets in and the enlightenment factor of rapture (*pīti sambojjhaṅga*) develops. You can distinctly recognise the mental states with clear comprehension, investigation, and steadfast mindfulness, allowing things to unfold smoothly and develop the enlightenment factor of equanimity.

The enlightenment factors must be maintained and improved once they are developed. When the enlightenment

factor of investigation (*dhammavicaya*) is activated, the mind examines and investigates phenomena - in the absence of *dhammavicaya*, there is no examination or penetration, the mind remains on the surface<sup>27</sup>. When the mind is engaged in phenomena with established mindfulness, one continues to investigate and is fully aware of the whole operation.

### ***Knowledge and freedom through the Enlightenment factors***

By developing the enlightenment factors, one can accomplish ‘*vijjā*’ and ‘*vimutti*’. *Vijjā* is knowledge and *vimutti* is freedom. The Buddha enumerates:

“how, bhikkhus, do the seven enlightenment factors, developed and cultivated, fulfil true knowledge and deliverance?”<sup>28</sup>

This is an advanced stage of the practice for one with a substantial understanding of *vipassanā*. The Buddha’s instructions are to develop these awakening factors, so they lead towards freedom and knowledge. The Buddha further enumerates:

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27 *asantaṃ vā ajjhataṃ dhammavicaya sambojjhaṅgaṃ ‘natthi me ajjhataṃ dhammavicaya sambojjhaṅgo’ti pajānāti*

28 “*kathaṃ bhāvitā ca, bhikkhave, satta bojjaṅgā kathaṃ bahulīkatā vijjāvimuttiṃ paripūrenti?*” - Ānāpānassati sutta (MN 118).

“Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu develops the mindfulness enlightenment factor, which is supported by seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, and ripens in relinquishment.”<sup>29</sup>

“He develops the investigation enlightenment factor, which is supported by seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, and ripens in relinquishment.”<sup>30</sup>

The enlightenment factors must be developed in seclusion (*vivekanissitaṃ*), where the mind does not associate sights, sounds, smells, taste, tactile sensations, and mental objects. The mind has found its seclusion, found its own island, its freedom. When the mind associates with freedom, the mind associates with seclusion and prefers to be alone. That solitude, freedom, seclusion is what the mind now associates (*vivekanissitaṃ*).

One perceives phenomena (sights, sounds etc.) with dispassion (*virāganissitaṃ*). There is no grasping, no attraction. The mind treats whatever unfolding with dispassion. The mind is balanced with dispassion (*virāga*) and there is no passion towards sight, sounds, smell, taste, or tactile sensations.

Everything that unfolds is seen through a lens of cessation (*nirodhanissitaṃ*), the mind rests in *nirodha* and no longer pays attention to phenomena and remains focused on cessation.

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29 *idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu satisambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāveti vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmiṃ.*

- Ānāpānassati sutta (MN 118).

30 *dhammavicayasambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāveti vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmiṃ.* - Ānāpānassati sutta (MN 118).

The mind's inclination is 'letting go' (*vossaggapariṇāmiṃ*). Our habit is to grasp. Now the approach is completely different, the mind's attitude is letting go. In this way, the Buddha mentions how the enlightenment factors must be developed, so they direct to knowledge and freedom - *vijjā and vimutti*.

### ***The factors of enlightenment lead to expansive awareness***

In the *Aggi sutta* (SN 46.53) of the *Bojjhaṅga saṃyutta*, the Buddha mentions that the enlightenment factors must be balanced and refers to three groups: one pertaining to excitement or activation of the mind, the second leading to tranquillity of the mind and the third to an entire observation, monitoring of the mind.

The group which makes the mind active is the enlightenment factors of investigation (*dhammavicaya*), effort (*virīya*) and rapture (*pīti*). If the mind is lethargic, lazy, one must arouse energy so it can further investigate and arouse rapture.

If the mind is distracted due to excitement or agitation, the tranquillity group of enlightenment factors, tranquillity (*passadhi*), concentration (*samādhi*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*) must be developed. These three factors should be given prominence when the mind is excited.

On the other hand, the Buddha recommends developing the enlightenment factor of mindfulness all the time<sup>31</sup> as it does

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31 *satiñca khvāhaṃ, bhikkhave, sabbatthikaṃ vadāmi* - *Aggi sutta* (SN 46.53).

the balancing and monitoring. Mindfulness does the supervision and monitoring; and one must continuously develop mindfulness and maintain a well-balanced attitude of dispassion, bent towards seclusion, cessation, letting go (*vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggaparīṇāmiṃ*)

Practising like this, the enlightenment factors continue to evolve.

When the mind progresses to the second level, there is no more grasping to objects, the mind is light, free, calm, tranquil, peaceful. The mind is not concentrated or absorbed to anything and rather remains in an expansive stillness. The concentration and awareness are expansive, not focused on a single object, there is expanded stillness, no distraction or grasping. This is an evolved state of the enlightenment factor of concentration.

*Ānāpānasati* or *Satipaṭṭhāna* are not the only methods to develop the enlightenment factors. The *Bhojjaṅga saṃyutta* refers to *suttas* that consider various techniques to develop the enlightenment factors, including the *Brahmavihāra - mettā, muditā, karuṇa, upekkhā*. *Mettā* is loving kindness, *karuṇa* is compassion, *muditā* is joy and *upekkhā* is equanimity. The four *brahmavihāra* contribute towards the development of enlightenment factors.

Correct perceptions such as perception of impermanence (*anicca saññā*)<sup>32</sup>, perception of unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha saññā*)<sup>33</sup>, perception of non-self (*anatta saññā*)<sup>34</sup>, perception of

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32 Anicca sutta (SN 46.76).

33 Dukkha sutta (SN 46.77).

34 Anatta sutta (SN 46.78).



dispassion (*virāga saññā*)<sup>35</sup> etc. contribute towards development of the enlightenment factors.

The *Abhaya sutta* (SN 46.56) of the *Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta*, outlines that the seven factors of enlightenment lead towards knowing things as they truly are (*yathābhūtaṃ jānāti passati*) as one develops the factors of enlightenment by associating seclusion, dispassion, cessation and an attitude of letting go. Such an understanding supports knowledge about the nature of phenomena (*yathābhūta ñānadassana*) as the mind is calm, tranquil, unbiased, and there is clarity of mind - whatever happens, one remains vigilant. Amidst such a background, one gains a sound understanding of reality that leads to vision and knowledge (*ñānadassana*).<sup>36</sup>

The enlightenment factors lead towards deeper tranquillity, calming down, peace and letting go, non-grasping, an increased stillness and expansion of the mind. This approach is different compared to other practices. In the *samatha* practice or various other religious practices, the mind is concentrated, absorbed, and narrowed to an object, confined to something.

The Buddha's approach is focused on concentration, awareness on an object at the beginning, but when the mind is calm, tranquil, and equipped with wisdom, there is release. The mind recognizes freedom, detachment,

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35 Virāga sutta (SN 46.80).

36 *satisambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāvitena cittena yathābhūtaṃ jānāti passati — ayampi kho, rājakumāra, hetu, ayaṃ paccayo ñāṇāya dassanāya.*

- Abhaya sutta (SN 46.56).

seclusion and becomes expansive. There is no grasping, no distraction, and the mind becomes still. This is the difference between the Buddha's practice and other contemplative practices.

### *Overcoming bodily ailment with the enlightenment factors*

Developing the enlightenment factors helped the Buddha and other great *arahants* to overcome certain bodily illnesses. On one occasion Venerable Mahā Moggallāna was resident at the Gijjhakūṭa mountain caves and became extremely ill. The Buddha approached him and inquired whether he was getting well, the ailment was increasing or decreasing/calming down or becoming worse. Venerable Moggallāna answered, “Bhante, I can't bear this sickness, it is increasing, it is extremely difficult, there is severe pain” and described the pain experienced due to the illness. The Buddha recited the seven enlightenment factors, how they are developed and lead to awakening, enlightenment. As the Buddha recited the factors of enlightenment, Venerable Mahā Moggallāna regained his mental power, mental energy; complete composure, felt content, balanced and lighter in composure and there was expansion in the mind, and started to recover from the illness.

Psychosomatic diseases can be reduced when one has a healthy mind. One's mental state has a significant impact on many bodily diseases. There might still be instances where the body is afflicted by various diseases due to bad food, food poisoning, climatic changes, past *kamma* or due to someone else's harm. Developing the enlightenment factors

contribute towards a healthy mind that leads to a healthy body.

Once Venerable Mahā Kassapa also became severely ill; and the Buddha approached and recited about the enlightenment factors. After the recitation, Venerable Mahā Kassapa also recovered from his illness.

On another occasion, the Buddha became unwell and requested Venerable Mahā Cunda to recite the seven enlightenment factors. After hearing the seven enlightenment factors, the Buddha regained bodily health, and completely recovered.

The great *arahants* were also subject to bodily illness and affliction, but they had the mental power to overcome and recover from illness. Irrespective of being *arahants*, their bodily health had a significant impact on their mind. Recollecting the enlightenment factors gave them energy, rapture, balance, tranquillity, and mental strength to regain health.

### ***Recognising the quality of mind through the factors of enlightenment***

With established mindfulness, the various mind states must be observed and understood, whether the mind is excited, restless, agitated, drowsy or lethargic. Being aware of the mind, one must activate the proper enlightenment factors to balance the mind.

One must know the mind states and what enlightenment factors are present, have taken prominence, and which factors are yet to be developed. This monitoring, reflective

practice is essential. If certain factors are weak, unavailable, or inadequate, they must be aroused and developed by identifying the reasons, adopting different methods. It is necessary to guard the mind by recognising mind states and taking corrective measures.

In the *Abhaya Sutta* (SN 46.56), the Buddha describes how hindrances and the factors of enlightenment are opposite to one another. When we are unable to free ourselves and allow hindrances to govern, there is ignorance and blindness (*aññānāya adassanāya*). On the other hand, the Buddha mentions the development of enlightenment factors to be the cause for the knowledge leading to awakening and vision (*ñānadassana*).<sup>37</sup>

Hindrances can be used as a tool to develop the enlightenment factors. One must recognise lust as lust, greed as greed, hatred as hatred, restlessness as restlessness, regret as regret, doubt as doubt, know their arising, presence and fading. These subtle defilements must be recognised with the presence of investigation. Then, one is no longer discouraged or afraid of hindrances and is confident about overcoming them. When the hindrances have ceased, there is calmness, peace, stillness and equanimity.

Each foundation of mindfulness can be a tool to develop the enlightenment factors. Without being driven by an experience, take a step back to establish mindfulness, become aware of the physical aspects of the experience.

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37 *ayampi kho, rājakumāra, hetu, ayam paccayo ñānāya dassanāya*  
– *Abhaya sutta* (SN 46.56).

Recognise the experience of a pleasant feeling, the perceptions involved in the experience, mental fabrications, sense bases and the aggregates. When the aggregates in each experience are recognised, the enlightenment factors of investigation and effort are engaged; and one no longer falls victim to the experience. The mind calms down; becomes still, calm, tranquil and the enlightenment factors are at work. Equanimity pervades when there is nothing to be done other than awareness.

Become aware of the enlightenment factors, their presence and absence, know the strategies to arouse and further develop them. The enlightenment factors can be used to further strengthen mindfulness, wisdom and to maintain a mind free from grasping. Inferentially, we can know when the enlightenment factors are present in the minds of others.

Knowing the nature and quality of our mind, we inferentially know another person's agitation, whether they are calm, acting with wisdom or experiencing lethargy. The fluctuation of enlightenment factors can be seen, at times they are present and at another time, absent - they are not permanent.

The presence and intensity of the enlightenment factors, how they fluctuate and are maintained, developed, and aroused are understood with the *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice.

We must walk this path. Our journey is not for a single day, a week, but a lifetime of practice underpinned by morality in mind, body, and speech. *Sīla, samādhi, paññā* must be mobilised to maintained clarity of mind and to harness wisdom.

## Chapter 13 – The Four Noble Truths

The focus of this chapter is the four noble truths (*sacca*).

Each of the four foundations of mindfulness, *kayānupassanā*, *vedanānupassanā*, *cittānupassanā* and *dhammānupassanā* can be used to understand the four noble truths through a different framework.

The noble truths can be considered through the lens of an *Āyurvedic* recovery approach, where there's an ailment - a disease, a cause for it, there is freedom from it and a path to freedom from the disease.

The first noble truth is that there is suffering (*dukkha sacca*), the second being the cause of suffering (*dukkha samudaya sacca*), thirdly the cessation of suffering (*dukkha nirodha sacca*) and finally, the path leading to the cessation of suffering (*dukkha nirodha gāmiṇīpaṭipadā sacca*). It is only after the Buddha fully realised the four noble truths that he declared to be fully enlightened (*sammā sambuddha*).

There are three stages to each noble truth. The first is the theoretical understanding (*pariyatti*), then practically implementing the theory (*paṭipatti*) and once the methodology is set in motion, realising the noble truth (*paṭivedha*). Adopting these stages with each of the four noble truths, a twelve-fold understanding of the noble truths (*dvādasākāra*) can be experienced.

## *The first noble truth of Suffering*

The first noble truth is the existence of suffering (*idaṃ dukkhaṃ ariya saccam*). The suffering we experience is not personal. Any form of pain, sickness, subtle resistance, tension, or stress is not ours.

Suffering must be objectively discerned without personalising the experience, to understand its nature and characteristics – the resistance, mental stress, uneasiness, the various conditioned phenomena, and their impermanent nature. Mindfully, the experience must be observed to recognise its nature.

The experience of suffering must be understood and investigated without immediately trying to get rid of it or rejecting the experience (*idaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccam pariññeyyan*). This presents a different approach to dealing with suffering.

Our habit is to react to bodily aches, trying to get rid of it. Instead, we must recognise pain and accept there is suffering – pain. The immediate reaction to bodily pain is to change posture. When suffering is objectively discerned with equanimity, there is no mental suffering. With repeated practice, the four noble truths can be seen – the experience of suffering, its' cause, its' cessation, and the path leading to its cessation. Letting go is the third noble truth, where there is a cessation of suffering and one enters a pleasant, calm, and peaceful state. This path, methodology and strategy must be repeatedly applied to our lives.

*Dukkha* (suffering) is broad and can range from minor frustrations to significant life events. Our daily routine comprises of numerous frustrations. For example, when we drive, we stop at the traffic lights and might feel rather impatient and frustrated as we are forced to come to a halt. Then the lights change in colour and we start driving again. Someone might overtake the car and we experience agitation. If the car is met with an accident, we might suffer injuries, there might be bleeding, bodily pains and we experience extreme suffering.

The suffering (*dukkha*) experienced in life is numerous. We must objectively understand suffering and recognize various kinds of *dukkha*. Our knowledge must be experiential, not limited to theory, but an application of the teachings to our lives.

In the first sermon, *Dhammacakkappavattana sutta* (SN 56.11), the Buddha elaborates on the ten forms of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.<sup>38</sup>

At birth, during old age and at death one experiences bodily pain and discomfort - the experience of *dukkha*. Associating someone unpleasant can cause suffering. Departing from

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38 *jātipi dukkhā, jarāpi dukkhā, byādhipi dukkho, maraṇampi dukkhaṃ, appiyehi sampayogo dukkho, piyehi vippayogo dukkho, yampicchaṃ na labhati tampi dukkham.*- Dhammacakkappavattana sutta (SN 56.11).



loved ones, can cause suffering. Not getting what one wants can cause suffering. Not getting a job you want, not passing an examination, not getting a salary increment or a promotion causes suffering, and one experiences mental stress.

Starting with obvious forms of suffering, physical pain, physical illnesses, mental despair, sorrow, lamentation, the Buddha explains suffering from severe bodily discomfort to more subtle mind related causes such as clinging to the five aggregates as a cause for suffering (*pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkha*).

Our reaction to life is to personalise the experience - “I am suffering”, “why is this happening to me”, “everyone else is living happily, all the problems are happening to me”. Taking every experience personally, we entangle ourselves in a web of negative thought process.

*Dukkha sacca* is not like that, where *dukkha* is observed objectively. There is no grasping or rejection.

Take the example of walking meditation. During a session of walking meditation, as the leg touches the ground, there is hardness – when the quality of elements experienced is viewed objectively, we can see the experience is not ours, it is just hardness.

### ***The second noble truth – the cause for suffering***

The second noble truth is that there is a cause for suffering. The Buddha identifies the cause of suffering as craving

(*taṇhā*) and instructs us to let go of craving (*idaṃ dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pahātabban*). This is the teaching underpinning the second noble truth. One must let go of desire, recognising it to be the cause of suffering.

Desire (*taṇhā*) is threefold: sensual desire (*kāmatāṇhā*), desire to become (*bhavataṇhā*) and desire to get rid of (*vibhavataṇhā*).

*Kāmatāṇhā* is sensual desire, the desires we long for as human beings. We desire to see beautiful sights, listen to beautiful songs, hear pleasant sounds, experience pleasant odours, taste delicious food, gratifying the body with comfort, enjoy tactile sensations. These are the five-fold forms of sense gratification (*pañcakāma*) referred to as *kāmatāṇhā*. This is common to all human beings, sensual beings, and animals. Life is driven by pleasure and as much as possible the aim is sensual gratification through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and the body. Such desire is within us. The human realm and the celestial realm are sensual realms. Like humans, celestial beings attach, satisfying their senses using the five chords of sense pleasures. This is *kāmatāṇhā*. The Buddha explains that sensual desire is a cause of suffering.

Another subtle side to craving (*taṇhā*) is *bhavataṇhā*, translated as desire for existence. Practically considered, it is about a lack of mental satisfaction '*ūno loko atitto taṇhādāso*'. The Buddha described the world to be unfulfilled (*ūno*), missing something – dissatisfied (*atitto*), and people falling victim to craving, becoming a slave to craving (*taṇhā daso*). This is the typical nature of worldly beings - never satisfied.

Millionaires and billionaires may exist, but are not satisfied, wanting more and more. One may be dissatisfied with their car, seeking after another car, a better model, the latest model, failing to be content with what one has, always seeking after more, driven by desire, looking to the future, trying to be, to become. Never satisfied with the current job, and wishing to be promoted, earn more money, get an increment. The present moment is not fulfilled, always driven by desire.

Driven by ambition, we look to the future - if I get that, I will be happy, if I marry her, I will be happy, if I have a child, I will be happy, when the child grows to adolescence, I'll be happy, if I get that job, I'll be happy, when my child is married, I'll be happy.

We are always forward looking in our lives, failing to be satisfied with the present moment. The desire to become (*bhavataṇhā*) drives us, always looking ahead, even trying to have a future life, to be satisfied. If you couldn't fulfil your desires in this life, you may recollect the many meritorious acts done and wish for a heavenly rebirth, better fortunes in the next life. This form of desire is expansive, there is a desire for future events and ultimately a future birth.

The third category the Buddha mentioned is *vibhavataṇhā*, the wish to get rid of suffering, to have distaste towards an event, refusing to accept an unpleasant event or circumstances. This resistance, rejection, the desire to get rid of, is *vibhavataṇhā*.

The three forms of desire are interwoven and operate in a very subtle way in our mind. Wanting to get rid of an unpleasant bodily pain is *vibhavataṇhā* and wishing to be pain free, comfortable is *bhavataṇhā*. Trying to be comfortable, one may try to gratify one's senses and that is sensual desire (*kāmatanhā*).

Desire is a cause for future birth (*ponobhavikā*). Feeling dissatisfied in the present moment, wishing for a happier future can lead to a future birth (*ponobhavikā*) which fuels the *saṃsāric* journey. Desire generates delight (*nandiraga-sahagata*), temporary satisfaction and the mind attaches to it (*tatrataṭṭhābhinandini*). The experience of delight is imagined, “if I get this, I feel happy; if I get a promotion, I will be happy”; and internally projected.

In the *kayānupassanā* practice, one might experience the elements and mindfully observe the characteristics of the elements - hardness, softness, roughness, heaviness, and the changing nature of phenomena. This change causes suffering (*yadaniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ*). Whatever that is impermanent, inconstant, causes unhappiness – is suffering. There might be happiness now, but the experience can change in the next moment and you might immediately feel unhappy if you are attached to some other physical or mental state. The new experience is not the same as the happiness previously experienced, it is different and there could be disappointment.

You might support a certain political group contesting to gain political power and you expect prosperity if they were

to win the election, feeling happy when they win. After some time, they change their policies, and you feel unhappy. Similar situations arise throughout our life, we desire to prolong a pleasant experience, but it changes. We try to fix something to avoid disappointment in what is impermanent, trying to find permanence in the impermanent flux and this causes suffering (*yadaniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ*).

Whatever that changes, is inconstant, leads to suffering. When the changing nature in the elements can be experienced in the practice of *kayānupassanā*, you understand it cannot give lasting happiness. Bodily characteristics constantly change. They don't remain the same and don't have a long-life span, the characteristics of the elements change from one moment to the next and are transient. It is impossible to have lasting happiness from transient circumstances.

The four noble truths can be applied to an observation of the elements (*dhātumanasikāra*) - the constant change, the flux, is suffering. The experience cannot be controlled, there is no power of command over them, they arise, persist, and pass away. One might try to see more details of the elements, their characteristics with sharpened mindfulness, but it might not be possible. It might be the case that mindfulness is not sufficiently strong; and one experiences regret or disappointment. If one can let go of desire, the suffering disappears and ceases as one has let go of the desire, there is freedom, a cessation of suffering.

Suffering covers a broad spectrum ranging from mild mental stress, resistance to severe bodily pain. Whatever that is impermanent, inconstant, leads to suffering. We might like something, attach to it, but in the next moment, it changes to something else. It is impossible to find lasting happiness from such changing phenomena.

As the Buddha mentioned, whatever that is impermanent, causes suffering and clinging to the five aggregates causes suffering. When the mind is attached to form or various feelings, perceptions, formations and consciousness, we suffer, because attachment leads to grasping and grasping leads to suffering.

### *The third noble truth – cessation of suffering*

The third noble truth is the cessation of suffering. When the cessation of suffering is understood, one can let go of desire without satisfying it. When desire ceases, suffering also ceases. By letting go, the suffering, un-satisfactoriness, uneasiness, frustration, and stress calms down, the mind becomes peaceful, and there is cessation of suffering (*nirodha sacca*).

Typically, we try to get rid of a calm and peaceful mind state, treating it as boredom. Instead, we must appreciate the quality of the experience, the peace, absence of friction or desire and the calmness of mind. Know the mind is not agitated. There is no grasping. Trying to get rid of the experience, we fail to recognise it. One must dwell in this state (*anissito ca viharati*) so that grasping can be recognised

and release it, to allow the mind to return to a state of cessation.

We must apply this method to life experience, life's resentments, the various pains, unsatisfactory states of mind so the noble truths are practically understood and applied to real life circumstances. Then it becomes part of life's journey, the path of practice. That is the fourth noble truth. The fourth noble truth, the path leading to a cessation of suffering must be cultivated again and again (*dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ bhāvetabban'ti*).

Although the four noble truths begin with suffering (*dukkha*), there is a way out of suffering, a path leading to a cessation of suffering. The Buddha's teaching is aimed at bringing us towards the calm, the peace and stillness. With repeated practice, one develops sublime qualities, the experience of contentment, peace, calming of the mind and stillness. This is where the practice leads us. To acknowledge suffering, identifying its cause, cessation and progressing on a path leading to a cessation of suffering.

The Buddha recognises the third noble truth as *vijjā* and *vimutti*. *Vijjā* is knowledge. *Vimutti* is freedom. A mind strengthened with wisdom can let go of attachment to enjoy freedom. As a result, there is no grasping, no attachment and there is an experience of freedom.

One repeatedly applies the mind's attention to an object in the *samatha* approach and at one point, the mind becomes absorbed in it and attaches to the experience of bliss and serenity – there is grasping and clinging towards it. In the

*vipassanā* approach, the mind understands various drawbacks and disadvantages, and lets' go of everything. There is nothing to hold and the mind enjoys freedom.

The Buddha exclaimed the original nature of the mind is pure, although intruding defilements can cause suffering and cover the beautiful and serene mind.<sup>39</sup>

Defilements can be removed when their unsatisfactory nature is understood. One let's go of desire and once again dwells in peace. The experience of peace is strengthened with wisdom. With strengthened understanding, one maintains peace, feels grounded and profound in wisdom. Understanding the nature of conditioned phenomena, their inconsistent nature and how they cause suffering, one realises there is no point in attaching to suffering. One can let go of desire, knowing its nature. There is peace and freedom. With wisdom and knowledge (*vijjā*), one experiences freedom (*vimutti*). Knowledge and freedom are interdependent – it is right understanding that leads to freedom.

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39 *pabhassaramidaṃ, bhikkhave, cittaṃ. Tañca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ* – Paṇihitāccha vaggo (AN 1.49).



## *The fourth noble truth – path leading to a cessation of suffering*

The Buddha has mentioned that the Noble Eightfold Path helps to develop *samatha* and *vipassana*.<sup>40</sup> The mind's nature is to be scattered and not be concentrated. As a result, from time to time, it is necessary to concentrate the mind and allow concentration to evolve.

At the beginning, our attention is focused on various phenomena, recognising their nature and behaviour. As the disadvantages and their drawbacks are understood, we let go of such phenomena, the mind no longer attaches and then enjoys freedom. The mind loses its focus on an object and remains established in freedom (*nirodha*). Then, one's concentration drastically changes. Previously, we had focused (concentrated) attention, but the mind has now evolved to expanded stillness and no longer holds to anything. There are no boundaries. The mind is not narrowed down to an object and now enjoys an expanded freedom. There is a significant change in concentration (*samādhi*) and the path and enlightenment factors evolve.

The following beautiful verse is familiar to Sri Lankans:

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40 *ariyaṃ aṭṭhaṅgikaṃ maggaṃ bhāvento ariyaṃ aṭṭhaṅgikaṃ maggaṃ bahulīkaronto .. ye dhammā abhiññā bhāvetabbā, te dhamme abhiññā bhāveti. .. katame ca, bhikkhave, dhammā abhiññā bhāvetabbā? samatho ca vipassanā ca – Āgantuka sutta (SN 45.93).*

“*aniccā vata saṅkhārā, uppādavaya dhammino.  
uppajjitvā nirujjhanti, tesam vūpasamo sukho*”<sup>41</sup>

*aniccā vata saṅkhārā* –

all conditioned phenomena are impermanent,  
inconstant.

*uppādavaya dhammino* –

their nature is to arise and to pass away,

*uppajjitvā nirujjhanti* –

while being arisen, they passed away,

*tesam vūpasamo sukho* –

their cessation, complete calming down, their  
natural ending is *sukha* - happiness, calmness, and  
peace.

This verse points to cessation (*nirodha*), calming down of conditioned phenomena (all formations and fabrications) lead to cessation (*nirodha*) calmness, happiness, and contentment. Practising like this, the three forms of influxes (*āsava*) are uprooted, and one dwells in cessation. Continuing in this state, understanding the pure mind, subtle defilements can be recognised and become visible as they arise; and one can easily let go and purify the mind.

In the *Āsavakkhaya sutta* (SN 56.25), the Buddha exclaimed:

“Bhikkhus, I say that the destruction of taints is for one who knows and sees, not for one who does not know and does

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41 Mahāparinibbāna sutta, parinibbutakathā (DN 16.37).

not see. For one who knows what, for one who sees what, does the destruction of the taints come about? The destruction of the taints comes about for one who knows and sees: 'This is suffering'; for one who knows and sees: 'This is the origin of suffering'; for one who knows and sees: 'This is the cessation of suffering'; for one who knows and sees: 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.' It is for one who knows thus, for one who sees thus, that the destruction of the taints comes about."<sup>42</sup>

With repeated practice of the four noble truths and dwelling in the third noble truth, all influxes will be uprooted and fade away (*tasmātiha, bhikkhave, 'idaṃ dukkhan'ti yogo karaṇīyo*).

The Buddha's recommendation is for us to develop and understand the four noble truths so we can uproot defilements and purify the mind.

*Dhammānupassanā* ends with the four noble truths, where we reach a refined understanding.

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42 "*jānatohaṃ, bhikkhave, passato āsavānaṃ khayam vadāmi, no ajānato apassato.*

*kiñca, bhikkhave, jānato passato āsavānaṃ khayō hoti?*

*'idaṃ dukkhan'ti, bhikkhave, jānato passato āsavānaṃ khayō hoti,*

*'ayaṃ dukkhasamudayo'ti jānato passato āsavānaṃ khayō hoti,*

*'ayaṃ dukkhanirodho'ti jānato passato āsavānaṃ khayō hoti,*

*'ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā'ti jānato passato āsavānaṃ khayō hoti.*

*evaṃ kho, bhikkhave, jānato evaṃ passato āsavānaṃ khayō hoti.*

- *Āsavakkhaya sutta* (SN 56.25).

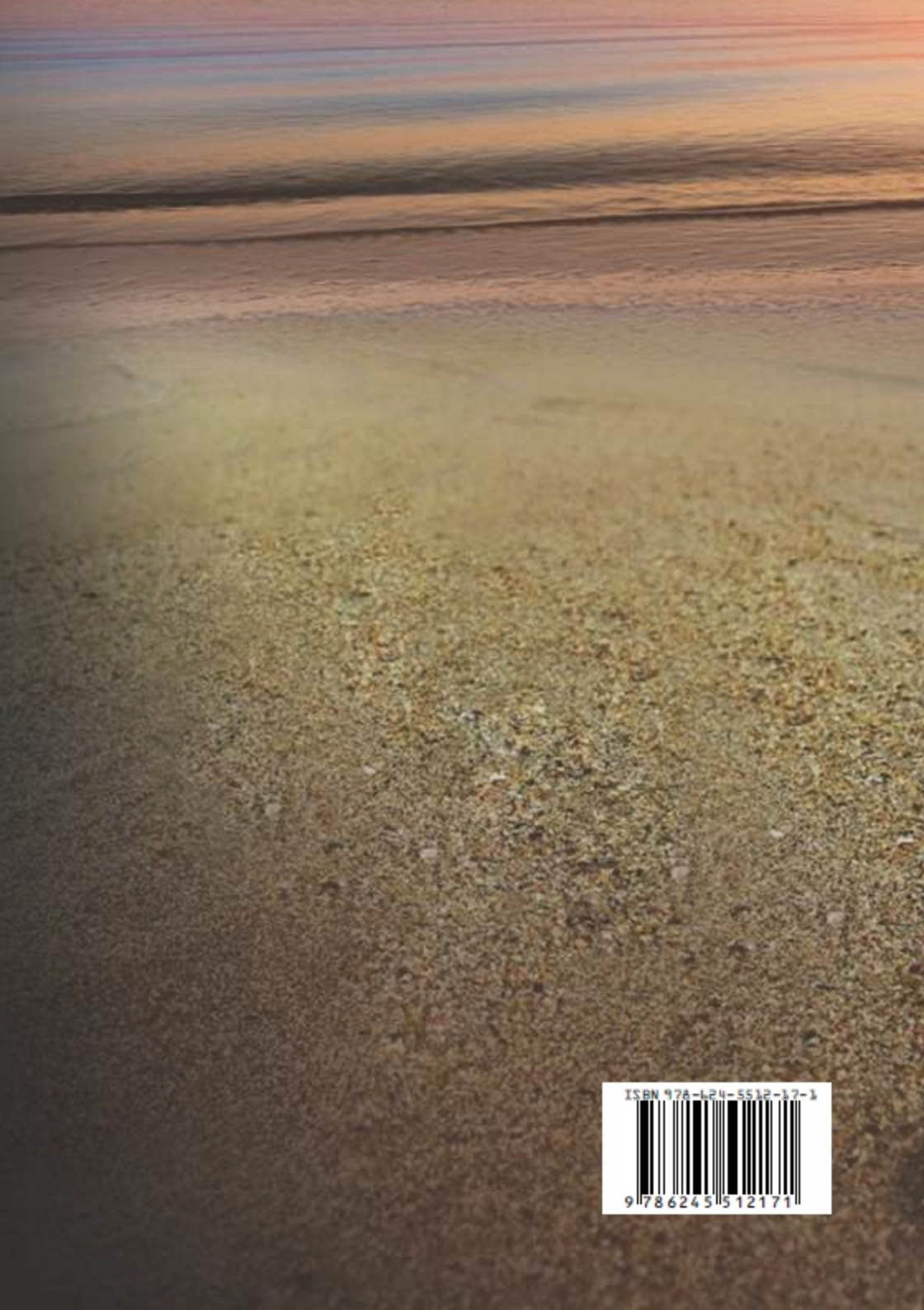
The section commences with the hindrances, outlining how they cover the mind and once they are removed, wisdom is developed. We are then encouraged to recognise the experience of the five aggregates so that we can disclaim personality view. One can then further develop one's knowledge by understanding the external and internal sense bases, recognising how suffering arises based on the various forms, sounds, smells, tastes, thoughts, and tactile sensations. By developing wisdom, recognising the nature of the internal and external sense bases, one strengthens the enlightenment factors to consider the four noble truths.

Reflecting on the nature of the mind, any form of stress, resistance or pain that is available in the mind can be recognised. It can be linked to recognising bodily stress or pain. Now mental pain and resistance are removed; and one experiences cessation - calm and peace of mind.

Various bodily pains and diseases might exist, but one can have stillness in the mind, irrespective of bodily discomfort. The mind experiences calmness. One no longer adds mental stress to bodily pain.

Without taking a personal approach to suffering and promoting self-view, when suffering is objectively discerned, the initial resentment to suffering (*vibhavathana*) can be recognised. It can be seen how one struggles to get rid of the pain and accept the nature of the suffering and let go of the desire to get rid of the pain. Then, the mind relaxes and releases the grasping and calms down.

Although bodily pains exist, one will disengage from the physical pain and discomfort and the mind can rest and maintain its peace and experience freedom from mental pain. It is not possible to stop bodily pain as the body is conditioned phenomena, but we can maintain a free, calm, and peaceful mind.



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