



THE  
DIRECT  
PATH

SATIPATTHANA SUTTA  
ADHISTHANA

SEMINAR NOTES



# THE DIRECT PATH

*satipatthana sutta*

Adhisthana

August 2021

Extracts from

*Living with Awareness*

Sangharakshita's commentary on the sutta

## I / THE DEFINITION

*Thus have I heard.*

*On one occasion the Blessed One was living in the Kuru country at a town of the Kurus named Kammasadhamma. There he addressed the monks thus:*

*'Monks.' 'Venerable sir,' they replied. The Blessed One said this:*

*'Monks, this is the direct path for the purification of beings,  
for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation,  
for the disappearance of dukkha and discontent,  
for acquiring the true method for the realization of Nibbana,  
namely, the four satipatthanas.*

*'What are the four?*

*Here, monks, in regard to the body a monk abides contemplating the body,  
diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world.  
In regard to feelings one abides contemplating feelings,  
diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world.  
In regard to the mind one abides contemplating the mind,  
diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world.  
In regard to dhammas one abides contemplating dhammas,  
diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world.*

*'Monks, this is the direct path for the purification of beings,  
'Ekāyano ayaṃ, bhikkhave, maggo sattānam visuddhiyā,*

### **The direct path**

The term mindfulness crops up in some of the most important formulations of the Buddha's teaching. It is one of the seven factors of Enlightenment, ... the five spiritual faculties, ... one of the limbs of the Noble Eightfold Path. Here ... the Buddha appears to suggest that mindfulness is nothing less than the whole of the path, the 'direct way' for overcoming sorrow and lamentation. ... in the Mahāyāna tradition also, and throughout the Buddhist world, mindfulness continues to be recognized as fundamental to spiritual growth – and it is the *Satipatthāna Sutta* ... that gives us the clearest and most detailed account of why this should be so.

This sense of a unified way is emphasized throughout the Buddha's teaching. It is what the path is in principle, as distinct from all the different presentations of it ... One cannot say that any one presentation of the doctrine, or any one method, is the best under all circumstances and for all people, but for all the diversity of these presentations of the Buddhist path, each in its own way embodies the same spiritual principles.

... the principle of conditionality, the truth that whatever exists owes its arising to causes and conditions; that is, things change – we change – and we have the capacity to direct that change towards spiritual growth and development.

The 'direct way for the purification of beings' is the sum total of the ethical and spiritual qualities that a human being must develop in order to reach what Buddhists call Enlightenment. But mindfulness is more than just a mixture of all these aspects of the path. It is a distinct spiritual faculty – the defining quality of all Buddhist practice – and according to the *Satipatthāna Sutta*, one learns to practise it by attending to four basic aspects or 'foundations' of mindfulness ... Mindfulness harmonizes and unifies every aspect of Buddhist practice into a concentrated, responsive awareness of body, feelings, mind, and mental objects ... a state of clarity and positivity that saturates and colours the whole of our experience ...

The Buddha therefore proceeds to elaborate on each foundation in turn ... This detailed approach helps to counteract the tendency to over-generalize the nature of spiritual development ... insight is not a general, abstract understanding, and it will not come about by chance.

It has become a commonplace of contemporary Buddhist teaching that we can learn to be mindful while eating, doing the washing up, and so on – and we certainly can, indeed must. ... At the same time, as so often in the Pāli canon, the emphasis is placed on the practice of meditation as the basis of the whole process ... In the Buddhist tradition meditation practices are generally classified as being of two kinds: *samatha*, 'calming', and *vipassanā*, 'insight'. ... As we shall see, the distinction between these two kinds of meditation is not as clear-cut as it is sometimes thought to be ... and the *Satipatthāna Sutta* encompasses both types of practice.

*ardent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world.*  
*ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassam.*

## **Ardent**

Like the Pāli word it is translating, *ātāpa*, the word ‘ardent’ has connotations of warmth, suggesting not a cool, cerebral approach to life, but an iridescent mindfulness, an emotionally committed, passionate awareness.

### **a sense of the direction we want to move in / *Sati-sampajañña***

Despite their different emphases, mindfulness and clear comprehension of purpose often appear as a compound term in Pāli, *sati-sampajañña*, and the two words can be considered to be so close in meaning as to be virtually interchangeable ... know not only what you are doing but why you are doing it. It is in this twofold sense that the Buddha exhorts his followers to be aware – ‘clearly comprehending and mindful’ – of the four foundations of mindfulness.

The Pāli term *sati* is usually translated into English as ‘mindfulness’, which in Western Buddhist circles has come to be associated with a keen attention to one’s present experience. This is not wrong – awareness of the present moment is certainly crucial to self-transformation – but mindfulness is not just a spotlight focused on the present ... While staying receptive to and being enlivened by the whole range of your present experience, you also try to wake up to the true significance of that experience – which involves awareness both of the past and the future. ... everything we do should be done with a sense of the direction we want to move in and of whether or not our current action will take us in that direction ... we need to be as clear as we can about the nature of what we are doing and why.

The implicit purpose of human existence is to evolve and develop ... when we become aware of that sense of direction, we should do whatever we can to ... intensify our experience of it, and allow it to permeate and transform us. Once you are conscious of yourself unfolding within the framework of conditionality, you can make a directed effort to strengthen the process of growth and remove obstacles from its path. This is mindfulness of purpose, *sampajañña* ... it is the implicit purpose of all your activities, and you can aim to let it gradually pervade every aspect of your life.

The important thing is to enter every activity having formed a clear intention and not to lose sight of your purpose even in the midst of the complexity of life ... recollecting one’s goal often enough and deeply enough to ensure that one’s life is organized around it.

It is hard to get this objective perspective – to see ourselves as others see us – and this is why friendship is so valuable to spiritual growth ... Best of all is to tell your life-story as a continuous narrative ... You are not always aware of what is there until it is disclosed; but as a result, you can sometimes find a clear thread running through your life, revealing all your disparate experience as the manifestation of a single developing individuality ... You might not realize the path your life is taking until you look back on it, but when you do become aware of your purpose, it might seem uncannily as though your life has had a direction of its own, independent of your conscious volition. As that direction emerges into consciousness, with the arising of some degree of clear comprehension, it is intensified and you can pursue it even more vigorously ...

*'And how, monks, does one in regard to the body abide contemplating the body?*

*Here, gone to the forest, or to the root of a tree, or to an empty hut, one sits down; having folded one's legs crosswise, set one's body erect, and established mindfulness in front of him, mindful one breathes in, mindful one breathes out.*

### **The breath**

awareness ... is not easy to develop. The Buddha's method is therefore to start by encouraging us to develop awareness of the aspect of our experience that is closest to us: the body ...

but it is hard to focus on 'the body' as a whole ... Breathing is a simple activity, providing a relatively stable object of attention that is both calming and capable of sustaining one's interest. On this basis, you can go on to become aware of the body's sensations and even of your feelings and thoughts, which are still more subtle and difficult to follow.

The precise details of the mindfulness of breathing are not recorded in any text, perhaps because the detailed ins and outs of the practice have traditionally been handed down from teacher to pupil by word of mouth;

The best method to start with is probably the traditional Theravādin practice of *ānāpāna-sati*. This is divided into four stages, the first two of which involve counting the breaths, to stop the mind from wandering and help you become aware of the breathing's dynamic yet gentle regularity. In the first stage you count at the end of each out-breath; according to the commentaries this corresponds to the phrase in the *Satipatthāna Sutta* which describes the meditator as knowing 'I am breathing in a long breath.' There is nothing sacrosanct about this counting – in a sense it doesn't matter what number you count to. In some traditions you don't count at all ...

*'Breathing in long, one knows 'I breathe in long,'*

*'breathing out long, one knows 'I breathe out long.' ...*

Presumably a correspondence between the sutta's instructions at this point and the first two stages of the *ānāpāna* method is made because the breath has a natural tendency to become a little longer in the first stage and a little shorter in the second.

For all its qualities of strength and steadfastness in the face of distraction, mindfulness is neither forceful nor aggressive in its quiet taming of the wayward mind ... If you fix your attention too rigidly on the object of meditation, subtle states of concentration will have little opportunity to arise. The aim is a gradual process of unification: you guide your energies firmly until they harmonize about a single point without strain or tension, and you are absorbed in the breathing for its own sake. A deep contentment will then lead quite naturally into concentration, as the traces of distraction fall away.

## Dhyana

Gradually, if you keep your momentum, you will be able to ... to enter full mental absorption or *appanā-samādhi*, otherwise known in Pāli as *jhāna* and in Sanskrit as *dhyāna*. In *dhyāna* you enter a crucial stage, passing beyond the psychological process of integrating the disparate aspects of yourself into true concentration ... Absorption in *dhyāna* is inherently pleasurable. It is a highly positive state of integration and harmony, which moves consciousness, at least temporarily, into the realm of genuinely spiritual experience.

But for all its skilfulness, *dhyāna* is by no means the final goal of the mindfulness of breathing. Its main importance lies in the fact that it is the basis for the development of transcendental insight ... and there is thus no need to draw too clear a line between *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation. The process is essentially the same: you start by becoming aware of the aspects of existence most immediately apparent to you ... and then you narrow the field of concentration in order to cultivate the *dhyānas* ... Having narrowed the field of your attention to deepen your experience, you expand that field ... within the broader perspective of *vipassanā*.

## Insight

*'one abides contemplating the body internally ... externally ...both internally and externally.'*

... the exhortation to contemplate the body 'externally' as well as 'internally' ... is usually taken to mean contemplation of the physical experience of others ... you can recollect that just as you are breathing, so too are all other living beings ... In this way you cultivate a feeling of solidarity with all other forms of life. As far as I know, this sort of reflection forms no specific part of the mindfulness of breathing as it usually practised, but it is the natural result of sustained practice: you realize in a very immediate way that just as you are breathing in and out, so too are other beings ... practised in this way [it] provides a corrective against an alienated or one-sided approach to spiritual life. It seems a shame that it is not standard practice.

In reflecting that we share with all breathing beings the same body of air and the same material elements, we approach the third mark of conditioned existence – that the distinction we make between ourselves and others is quite arbitrary ... that the discrete and permanent self is an illusion.

*Or, one abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body;*

*or one abides contemplating the nature of passing away ...*

*or one abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away ...*

One tends not to think of the mindfulness of breathing as an insight practice, but in principle it is, just as much as practices more usually designated 'vipassanā' ... this section of the sutta moves beyond the technical description of the establishment of concentration around the breath, it goes into a series of more general reflections concerning the nature of breathing: the contemplation of the breath internally and externally, and of the origination and dissolution factors of the breath ... to reflect on the nature of the breath is in essence to reflect on what the Buddhist tradition calls the three *laksanas* (Pāli: *lakkhanas*), the three characteristics or 'marks' of mundane existence: that it is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and insubstantial – and what could be more directly related to insight than that? ...



## II / FEELINGS

*'And how, monks, does one in regard to feelings abide contemplating feelings?  
'Here, when feeling a pleasant feeling, one knows 'I feel a pleasant feeling';  
when feeling an unpleasant feeling, one knows 'I feel an unpleasant feeling';  
when feeling a neutral feeling, one knows 'I feel a neutral feeling.'*

### **what makes it possible for us to follow the Buddhist path**

being able to identify feelings (in the sense of *vedanā*) is what makes it possible for us to follow the Buddhist path.

The Pāli term *vedanā* refers to feeling not in the sense of the emotions, but in terms of sensation. *Vedanā* is whatever pleasantness or unpleasantness we might experience in our contact with any physical or mental stimulus ... In Buddhist psychology, *vedanā* is said to combine with *sankhārā*, a volitional quality involving a tendency towards action. It is this combination of sensation with volition that ... we would recognize as fully developed emotion.

The practice of recollecting feelings is intended to help us be aware of our feelings before an emotional reaction to them sets in. If we can distinguish between the feelings we receive as impressions and what we then make of them, we will be able to take more responsibility for our emotions, while not suppressing our feelings. We need to know what we feel if we are to direct the flow of our emotional life in a positive way. This is quite difficult to do, because most of the time our feelings get lost in our emotional reactions to them ... Our natural tendency is to want to get away from a feeling if it is painful and to want more of it if it is pleasant. Before we know where we are, we have thus shifted from the simple experience of pleasure or pain into some form of craving or hatred. The practice, therefore, is to keep returning to the bare feeling, allowing no space for these habitual reactions to establish themselves.

If spiritual practice is to transform your life, you need to think of it as something you can enjoy, not just a grind ...

Everybody is subject to craving and attachment in one way or another, because we all tend to look outside ourselves for something that can only be developed from within. But we can draw on our own deep resources of positivity by focusing on the quality of our responses to experience.

## **Samisa / niramisa: worldly and unworldly feelings**

*'When feeling a worldly pleasant/ unpleasant / neutral feeling,  
one knows 'I feel a worldly pleasant/ unpleasant / neutral feeling';  
when feeling an unworldly pleasant/ unpleasant / neutral feeling,  
one knows 'I feel an unworldly pleasant/ unpleasant / neutral feeling';*

The Pāli word the Buddha used, *nirāmisa*, literally means 'not dependent upon food' ... while in the *Satipatthāna Sutta* the same word is used to indicate a mode of feeling which has gone beyond the closed polarity of pleasure and pain that characterizes feeling on the physical and mental level. This is the realm opened up to us through beauty and through meditation, in which we learn to experience rapture and bliss without need of any sensory stimulus ...

### **Recognizing the ethical content of our emotions**

If we are to refine the quality of our consciousness and build bridges between worldly and spiritual experience, we need to be able to recognize the ethical content of our emotions, distinguishing between the positive and the negative, in order to actively develop ethically skilful, positive emotions. It is impossible to jump from preoccupation with worldly pleasures like food and sex straight into meditative concentration ... you need to find a way – your own way – of coaxing your feelings up to a more subtle level, and from there into meditation ...

Another feature of modern life is the extraordinary range of superficial enjoyments available to us. Although many of these little outlets of energy are not harmful or unethical in themselves, if our attention is spread thinly ... we will be unable to have any single experience of real depth ...

If you are feeling depressed, for example, you might decide to spend a day in the country to put you in a more positive mood. If you feel uninspired, making contact with someone who shares your ideals and aspirations will give life a much more positive aspect ... One might say that this is the purpose of going on retreat ... an environment dedicated to concentrating one's energies and directing them towards the attainment of higher states of awareness and ... emotion.

### **Enjoyment is an essential element in the spiritual life,**

Pleasure – even sensuous pleasure – is, after all, not in itself unskilful. Enjoyment is an essential element in the spiritual life, helping one to sustain a sense of vitality, enthusiasm, and interest. Once you begin to draw consciousness upward and outward into brighter, more expansive states, pleasure plays an increasingly important part in your experience – pleasure that will not tip over into pain and grief, as worldly pleasure inevitably must. These subtle enjoyments do not arise in the same way as the evanescent pleasures of worldly life. They are the fruits of a positive effort to transform consciousness.

### III / MIND

*'And how, monks, does one in regard to the mind abide contemplating the mind?*

*'Here one knows a lustful mind to be 'lustful',  
and a mind without lust to be 'without lust';  
one knows an angry mind ... a mind without anger ...  
a deluded mind ... a mind without delusion ...*

*one knows a contracted mind to be 'contracted',  
and a distracted mind to be 'distracted'  
a great mind ... a narrow mind ...  
a surpassable mind ... an unsurpassable mind ...  
a concentrated mind ... an unconcentrated mind ...  
One knows a liberated mind to be 'liberated',  
and an unliberated mind to be 'unliberated.'*

The essence of the Buddha's teaching is quite simple: consciousness is not fixed but subject to change, and if we can learn to trace the way it changes, we can direct that change towards positive growth. This section thus represents a next step from the last one ... The mindfulness called for here thus involves *sampajañña* as well as *sati*, right from the start. You are gathering information on how to proceed, ascertaining the level of consciousness on which your experience of pleasure or pain takes place, its ethical significance, and how it relates to other states of mind.

#### **The three roots**

*Sarāgam/vītarāgam; sadosam/vītadosam; samoham/vītamoham*

... it begins with a more broad-brush, general approach, with the 'three roots'. This is the most elementary classification of all: analysing whether one's consciousness is with or without lust, with or without hate, with or without delusion. This threefold formulation, which appears very early in the Buddhist tradition ... gives us a benchmark, a basic measure of mindfulness.

#### **Contracted and distracted**

*Sankhittam/vikkhittam.*

In this rigid state, the mind has settled into a fixed position from which it is reluctant to budge. This contracted or inflexible mental attitude is at the opposite extreme from another, equally limited state of mind, the distracted mind, which has a tendency to be over-expansive and over-flexible, far too easily diverted, and always keen to explore new avenues ... If the shrunken mind seeks the security of a narrow field of reference, the distracted mind tries to escape into one so broad ... thus avoiding responsibility and commitment.

### **Surpassable and unsurpassable**

*mahaggatam/amahaggatam.*

Once you have overcome whichever of these two opposite mental tendencies you are prone to, the developed or 'exalted' state – *mahagatta* – can emerge. Mahagatta literally means 'become great', and it refers to the expanded consciousness of meditative concentration, or *dhyāna*.

### **Liberated and unliberated**

*vimuttam/avimuttam*

... yet it is still only relatively more luminous, only relatively clearer and more enjoyable; beyond it there are the various levels of transcendental consciousness. Getting a sense of how far consciousness can be expanded, exalted, and ultimately liberated places our experience in the broadest possible perspective. If you wrongly imagine that there is no mental state superior to the one you have reached, you are stuck.

### **The point of the practice**

Discriminating between states of consciousness is not an end in itself. The point of the practice is not just to notice them as they come and go, but to transform them. You are not saddled with your present state of consciousness: if you don't like it, you can do something to change it – so long as you know what steps to take. This ability to discriminate between mental states and follow certain mental avenues in preference to others is what makes meditation possible.

As soon as you become aware of your self you have in some sense changed: you have gone a bit further, become a bit more creative ... there is always more of our being than we have knowledge of. But we need not be too concerned about this. Provided we remain mindful, the process of transformation will continue of its own accord.

## The Hindrances

*Nīvaranapabbam: The Section about the Hindrances*

*'And how, monks, does one in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas?*

*Here in regard to dhammas one abides contemplating dhammas in terms of the five hindrances. And how does one in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas in terms of the five hindrances?*

*'If sensual desire is present in one, one knows 'there is sensual desire in me';*

*if sensual desire is not present in one, one knows 'there is no sensual desire in me';*

*and one knows how unarisen sensual desire can arise,*

*how arisen sensual desire can be removed,*

*and how a future arising of the removed sensual desire can be prevented.*

*'If aversion ... sloth-and-torpor ... restlessness-and-worry ... doubt is present in one,*

*one knows 'there is aversion ... sloth-and-torpor ... restlessness-and-worry ... doubt in me';*

*if aversion ... sloth-and-torpor ... restlessness-and-worry ... doubt is not present in one,*

*one knows 'there is no aversion ... sloth-and-torpor ... restlessness-and-worry ... doubt in me';*

*and one knows how unarisen aversion ... sloth-and-torpor ... restlessness-and-worry ... doubt can arise,*

*how arisen aversion ... sloth-and-torpor ... restlessness-and-worry ... doubt can be removed,*

*and how a future arising of the removed aversion ... sloth-and-torpor ... restlessness-and-worry ... doubt can be prevented.*

### To 'contemplate mind-objects' is to simplify

States of consciousness are far from simple; in any state of mind, there is always a lot going on. To 'contemplate mind-objects' – such as the hindrances – is therefore in a sense to simplify, ... so that one might discriminate between those aspects of it which could lead to subtler modes of awareness and those which will obstruct our efforts to develop those subtle states.

### The hindrances

Buddhaghosa associates meditation with *sammā vāyāma*, perfect effort. This is described as being fourfold: the effort to prevent the arising of unskilful mental states; the effort to eliminate unskilful mental states that have arisen; the effort to cultivate positive mental states; and the effort to maintain positive mental states that have arisen.

The intention of dividing unskilful states into those characterized by sensuous desire, by ill will, by sloth and torpor, by restlessness, and by doubt – this is the list commonly called the five hindrances – is to give us the opportunity to transform them.

If awareness of a hindrance is not enough to shift it, you can bring to mind the various antidotes ... The antidotes are useful as a sort of first aid measure during the meditation session itself. If your states of awareness are to be radically transformed, however, you will have to do more than

that ... We experience the hindrances because this is our usual state in daily life. By the same token, the more we can simplify and unify the mind, whatever situation we are in, the closer our mental state will naturally be to meditative concentration ... a consistent practice of mindfulness will do more to overcome the hindrances than anything we do once we have started to meditate ...

Perhaps more effective, and in a way more radical, is the cultivation of the mental attitude of *apamada* or 'non-heedlessness' – an overall vigilance that takes into account a broad range of conditions, both within and outside us, enabling us to be active and open to what is going on around us while still maintaining mindfulness ... You do need to be vigilant, but there is no need to be too defensive ... The best method of defence is attack: why not use ... ordinary life to cultivate even more positive states of mind than those you enjoyed on retreat? The whole point of spiritual practice is to be able to operate in difficult and challenging circumstances ... one's continuity of intention might have to take into account some inner conflict, but should not be undermined by it. We need a strong sense of initiative, responsibility, and decisiveness if we are to counteract the hindrances.

### **Fetters and Hindrances**

The overlap between the hindrances and the fetters – sensual desire, doubt, restlessness, and ill will appear in both formulations – indicates that the two groups of negative mental states are not distinct classifications ... Through the practice of mindfulness, as the obscurations to perfect vision are progressively removed, insight begins to unfold of its own accord ... one enters the Stream when the first three of them have been worn so thin that they finally break. These three fetters are: belief in a fixed self, doubt about the Buddha's teaching, and attachment to moral rules and rituals as ends in themselves – and each of them has to be removed before we can make any real progress ... They certainly share a characteristic that marks them out from the other three: they are each 'intellectual' – that is, they consist essentially in an attitude of mind.

To know something – indeed, to know anything – seems naturally to call for a 'knower' as well as something that is known. But the Buddhist position runs counter to this intuitive 'knowledge': it asks us to note what we observe in our actual experience from moment to moment and then ask ourselves whether we can really deduce, from the stream of sense impressions alone, the presence of a permanent self that 'has' all these experiences. Obviously, this is a question expecting the answer no ... all we can say with certainty is that consciousness exists. The unchanging self or soul that is supposedly the source of that consciousness is something we have added on ... and if we can convince ourselves through our own observation that this 'self' is an illusion, the fetter will be broken.

## **Awakening**

*Bojjhangapabbam: The Section about the Factors of Awakening*

'Here, if the mindfulness awakening factor is present in one, one knows 'there is the mindfulness awakening factor in me'; if the mindfulness awakening factor is not present in one, one knows 'there is no mindfulness awakening factor in me'; one knows how the unarisen mindfulness awakening factor can arise, and how the arisen mindfulness awakening factor can be perfected by development.

'If the investigation-of-dhammas ... energy ... joy ... tranquillity ... concentration ... equanimity awakening factor is present in one ... is not present in one ...  
how the unarisen factor can arise, and how the arisen factor can be perfected by development.

## **A creative process**

The Buddhist path is essentially a creative process, transforming something positive into something more positive, and creating from that something more positive still.

## **Mindfulness / *sati***

The whole series of Enlightenment factors ... begins with a simple question: 'Am I being mindful?' ... Our mindfulness should include an awareness of the conditions that will support mindfulness and those that will undermine it ... *sati-sampajañña* steers your consciousness towards your true heart's desire and away from any obstacles that might close down awareness.

## **Investigation / *Dhammavicaya***

it is appropriate in this context to take *dhamma* ... to mean 'state of consciousness', so *dhammavicaya* means 'investigation into one's own states of consciousness' ... It is the faculty with which we sort out our states of consciousness into the skilful – which we need to cultivate – and the unskilful – which we need to transform ... in view of your overall spiritual purpose.

## **Energy / *Virya***

As a consequence of *dhammavicaya* you will naturally turn more and more of your attention towards the positive aspects of your experience ... withdrawing energy from things that hold you back ... our priorities become clearer, conflicts are resolved and energy is released.

## **Joy / *pīti***

With rapture or *pīti* the unmistakably cumulative and creative nature of the *bojjhangas* really emerges: here we experience the snowballing quality of spiritual development most spectacularly ... you draw your energies together and a fragmented sense of self becomes an integrated individuality. As a result, more energy is liberated, and joy or rapture starts to bubble up.

## **Tranquility / *passaddhi***

*Passaddhi* is a kind of calming down – the necessary transition from the highly energetic state that precedes it to the state of intense bliss that follows. The bodily manifestations of *pīti* subside as one's consciousness turns deeper into itself, withdrawing from the physical senses into the realm of the mind alone ... it is an active state of increasingly concentrated energy.

*Sukha*, or bliss ... has no explicit mention in the *bojjhangas* but can be understood as being synonymous with *passaddhi*.

### **Concentration / *samādhi***

Concentration is the natural outcome of spiritual bliss ... this process of deepening and refining pleasure has the effect of deepening one's concentration even more. This must have been what the Buddha realized when he recollected his childhood experience of spontaneously entering into the first *dhyāna* ... It was not so much the first *dhyāna* itself that was the answer, but the natural manner in which he had entered into that state... to allow a natural unfolding of the whole being to take place, through the application of mindfulness.

if you are to proceed to the goal of the Buddhist path, the blossoming of insight into the nature of reality, the practice of *samādhi* has to be understood as far more than the cultivation of *dhyāna*. The intensely positive experience of *dhyāna* has to be invested with the clear recollection of your purpose ... to produce a firm foundation for the final stage in this series of Enlightenment factors: equanimity.

### **Equanimity / *upekkhā***

*upekkhā* marks the arising of an entirely new quality, the direct experience of insight into the ultimate meaning of things. This steadily deepening realization emerges here as a state of equanimity that reorients all the preceding factors ...

In this state of equanimity in its perfected form you no longer make any distinction between yourself and others, because that duality has been transcended ... a fully perfected equanimity has gone beyond all dualism, even the dualism of being and non-being ... all the *bojjhangas* ... merge with *upekkhā* and are permanently stabilized by that quality.

### **nidānas, and the bojjhangas**

like the twelve positive *nidānas*, the *bojjhangas* are meant to represent the unfolding process of the mind ... Perhaps the most straightforward way to think about developing the *bojjhangas* is to consider that they are simply the states that arise from establishing mindfulness more and more firmly. The more you cultivate the four foundations of mindfulness, the more these factors of Enlightenment can be expected to grow.

### **A condensed form of the practice**

the important thing is to get the feel of this gradual progression, the sense of everything coming together, energy welling up, and a continuous upward movement running right up to the attainment of transcendental insight and beyond ...

if – taking up the *Satipatthāna Sutta* – you were to concentrate on the mindfulness of breathing, the four foundations of mindfulness themselves, and the seven factors of Enlightenment, leaving out all the sections on the corpse meditations, the *khandhas*, the elements, and so on, you would have a condensed form of the practice which would be entirely in the spirit of the teaching and very effective ...



### Contemplating internally and externally.

*'In this way ... one abides contemplating the body / feelings / mind / dhammas internally ... externally, or ... both internally and externally.*

#### *The body*

... the exhortation to contemplate the body 'externally' as well as 'internally' ... is usually taken to mean contemplation of the physical experience of others ... you can recollect that just as you are breathing, so too are all other living beings ... In this way you cultivate a feeling of solidarity with all other forms of life. As far as I know, this sort of reflection forms no specific part of the mindfulness of breathing as it usually practised, but it is the natural result of sustained practice: you realize in a very immediate way that just as you are breathing in and out, so too are other beings ... practised in this way [it] provides a corrective against an alienated or one-sided approach to spiritual life. It seems a shame that it is not standard practice.

In reflecting that we share with all breathing beings the same body of air and the same material elements, we approach the third mark of conditioned existence – the fact that the distinction we make between ourselves and others is quite arbitrary. This is the truth of insubstantiality – the fact that the discrete and permanent self is only an illusion.

#### *Mind*

This is clearly somewhat akin to the method of the four *brahmavihāra* meditations, which are designed to develop loving-kindness, sympathetic joy, compassion, and equanimity. In the first of these, the *mettā bhāvanā*, you develop loving-kindness towards yourself, then towards a good friend, then towards someone you scarcely know, and so on.

at least in my reading of it – the *Satipatthāna Sutta* is here suggesting something rather different: not so much the cultivation of a particular emotional response to others, but the contemplation of their mental states.

### Arising and passing

*Or, one abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body / feelings / mind / dhammas  
or one abides contemplating the nature of passing away ...  
or one abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away ...*

#### *Body*

One tends not to think of the mindfulness of breathing as an insight practice, but in principle it is, just as much as practices more usually designated 'vipassanā' ... this section of the sutta moves beyond the technical description of the establishment of concentration around the breath, it goes into a series of more general reflections concerning the nature of breathing: the contemplation of the breath internally and externally, and of the origination and dissolution

factors of the breath ... to reflect on the nature of the breath is in essence to reflect on what the Buddhist tradition calls the three *laksanas* (Pāli: *lakkhanas*), the three characteristics or 'marks' of mundane existence: that it is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and insubstantial – and what could be more directly related to insight than that? ...

### *Mind*

The intention is to encourage us to be constantly aware of our states of consciousness as they arise and fall away. When a state of consciousness of whatsoever nature arises, you note that it arises. When it ceases you note that it ceases. You know the liberated state of consciousness as the liberated state, the unliberated state as the unliberated, and so on. The bhikkhu establishes mindfulness of consciousness in this way and 'abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world'. He sees nothing permanent, or unchanging, or of the nature of a self, but only a stream of states of consciousness, constantly arising, constantly passing away.

### **The warmth of compassion**

*Or, mindfulness that 'there is a body' is established in him*

Reflecting in this way is not meant to alienate you from your body; you are trying to see it as an impersonal process, part of the universal rise and fall of things. It is another move towards a sense of solidarity with other beings ... That means looking out for situations in which someone needs help and you can respond, in however small a way.

*Anattā* is not a cold, alienated vision of impersonality; it is imbued with all the warmth of the Buddha's compassion. To realize it, we need to be prepared to look after and care for other bodies with the same warmth and responsiveness we lavish upon our own.

### *Dhammas*

Strictly speaking, contemplating the seven factors of Enlightenment 'externally' – that is, in other people – is only possible if one has oneself experienced the factors in some depth; one may then be able to have a direct apprehension of someone else's experience of them. Whatever the truth of this, a simple point we can take from it is that contemplating other people's positive qualities is much more worthwhile than noticing the way they are in the grip of the hindrances and fetters.

Appreciating people's qualities and rejoicing in their merits is an expression not only of *mettā* but also of faith in the teaching. If we can look at someone's behaviour and observe that they are cultivating a certain quality successfully, this will encourage us to do so ourselves.

## IV / THE PREDICTION

*'Monks, if anyone should develop these four satipatthanas in such a way for seven years, one of two fruits could be expected for one: either final knowledge here and now, or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non returning. Let alone seven years ... six years ... five years ... four years ... three years ... two years ... one year ... seven months ... six months ... five months ... four months ... three months ... two months ... one month ... half a month ... if anyone should develop these four in such a way for seven days, one of two fruits could be expected for one ... So it was with reference to this that it was said:*

*'Monks, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of dukkha and discontent, for acquiring the true method, for the realization of Nibbāna, namely, the four satipatthanas.'*

*That is what the Blessed One said. The monks were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words.*

It is as though by its very nature there is a gradual acceleration of the whole spiritual process, if you put enough effort into it.

In the Buddha's original teaching, at least in its earlier phases, what afterwards came to be known as Stream Entry was the real turning-point: subsequent stages of attainment seem to have been elaborated later.

... although it is necessary to have a clear sense of the goal, the Buddha put much more emphasis on the metaphor of the path as a means to Enlightenment than on any description of the goal to which that path led ... At any level of spiritual attainment, one doesn't have to analyse one's progress all the time. As the days and weeks go by you will feel intuitively that you are becoming spiritually more alive: you will see the little knots of habit and attachment breaking up as you become steadily less attached to material things, less prone to be upset by what others say, and so on.

In the end all the teachings of the *Satipatthāna Sutta* are concerned with a single ambition: transformation ... on the basis of the defining principle of Buddhism: that states of consciousness never arise haphazardly, but are the product of definite conditioning factors.

We need to learn to monitor our states of consciousness much more closely and in much greater detail than people usually do. It isn't enough just to keep up a vague general awareness: we need to scrutinize our mental state almost from moment to moment ... Immersing yourself in a flow of positive and creative states, you come to get a feeling for the Unconditioned and the 'direct way' towards which this sutta steers us, and thus focus and refine your efforts towards growth. Once we have acknowledged that mundane consciousness is an ever-changing, conditioned phenomenon, through the practice of mindfulness we can steer that change in the direction of the highest spiritual and moral perfection. And the key to all this is provided in the succinct words of the *Satipatthāna Sutta*.