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Satipaṭṭhāna Mūla

The root focuses of mindfulness

A reconstruction of the "original" pre-sectarian Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta

Reconstruction & notes by **Sujato Bhikkhu** ©2005

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Introduction

There is an unfortunate side-effect of the kind of textual analysis I have undertaken in this book. It is not all that difficult to deconstruct such ancient, heavily edited texts as the Buddhist scriptures. There are abundant fault-lines, anomalies, and obscurities if one wishes to look. But what are we to do—demolish the palace and leave just a pile of rubble? This too is not authentic to the texts, for the undeniable fact is that, despite everything, the Nikāyas/Āgamas offer us a vast body of teachings springing from a remarkably uniform vision, a clarity and harmony of perspective that I think is unparalleled in any comparably large and ancient body of writings. To convey the impression that the situation is hopelessly confused and problematic is to deny acknowledgement of the extraordinary fact that we have the texts at all.

Somehow, the group of men and women that made up the ancient Buddhist Sangha managed to organize themselves to produce and maintain a magnificent spiritual literature for 2500 years. While denial that there are problems is naïve and no longer tenable, throwing our hands up in the air in despair shows an excess of what the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta calls "spiritual depression" (*nirāmiṣa domanasā*). I think the lines of unity and consistency in satipatthana¹ are far more significant and powerful than the fractures. But in this book so far, the threads of connection and continuity are buried in the pages of analysis: the question is, how to make this unity vivid?

My solution is to present a full reconstruction of what I consider to be the authentic source material for the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. While, obviously, any such attempt is deeply problematic, I do not think it is less problematic than simply walking away and leaving the job undone. None of the scriptural traditions offer us a pile of meaningless, deconstructed rubble. Reading a reconstructed text will at least allow those interested to gain a more immediate impression of what the satipatthana teachings may have been like, if my methods and conclusions have any validity.

Before proceeding to the *Satipaṭṭhāna Mūla, let us review the ground we have covered so far. The following table displays **a summary of the contents of satipatthana** as represented in the above materials. It graphically shows the strands of continuity and discontinuity between the recensions. The table does not differentiate between the versions in the Theravada Dīgha and Majjhima Sections that I consider authentic are shaded. The identification of the Indian originals for some of the Chinese terms in the contemplation of mind is uncertain.

¹ I have here (and elsewhere) retained Sujato's spelling of what he regards as common Pali terms adopted into English, and as such we can dispense with the diacritics. (Piya)

*The anterior asterisk means that the word or the work it precedes is a reconstruction without any precedent.

Vibhaṅga	Dharmaskandha	Sāriputrābhidharma	Theravāda Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta	Sarvāstivāda Smṛtyupasthāna Sūtra	Ek'āyana Sūtra	Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra
Parts of the body	Parts of the body 6 elements	Four postures Clear comprehension Ānāpānasati Parts of the body 4 elements Food Space (5 th element) Oozing orifices Charnel ground	Ānāpānasati Four postures Clear comprehension Parts of the body 4 elements Charnel ground	Four postures Clear comprehension Cutting off thought Suppressing thought Ānāpānasati 4 jhāna similes Perception of light Basis of reviewing Parts of the body 6 elements Charnel ground	Parts of the body 4 elements Oozing orifices Charnel ground	Four Postures Clear comprehension Anapanasati 4 elements Parts of the body Charnel ground
Pleasant/painful/neutral Carnal/spiritual	Pleasant/painful/neutral Bodily/Mental Carnal/spiritual Sensual/Non-sensual	Pleasant/painful/neutral Carnal/spiritual	Pleasant/painful/neutral Carnal/spiritual	Pleasant/painful/neutral Bodily/Mental Carnal/spiritual Sensual/Non-sensual	Pleasant/painful/neutral Carnal/spiritual No mixed feelings	-----
With/without lust With/without anger With/without delusion Contracted/scattered Exalted/unexalted Surpassed/unsurpassed Samadhi/no samadhi Released/unreleased	With/without lust With/without anger With/without delusion Contracted/scattered Slothful/energetic Small/great Distracted/undistracted Quiet/unquiet Samadhi/no samadhi Developed/undeveloped Released/unreleased	With/without lust With/without anger With/without delusion Contracted/scattered Exalted/unexalted Surpassed/unsurpassed Samadhi/no samadhi Released/unreleased	With/without lust With/without anger With/without delusion Contracted/scattered Exalted/unexalted Surpassed/unsurpassed Samadhi/no samadhi Released/unreleased	With/without lust With/without anger With/without delusion Defiled/undefiled Contracted/scattered Small/great Lower/higher Developed/undeveloped Samadhi/no samadhi Released/unreleased	With/without lust With/without anger With/without delusion With/without affection With/without attainment With/without confusion Contracted/scattered Universal/not universal Exalted/unexalted Surpassed/unsurpassed Samadhi/no samadhi Released/unreleased	-----
5 hindrances 7 enlightenment-factors	5 hindrances 6 sense media 7 enlightenment-factors	5 hindrances 6 sense media 7 enlightenment-factors 4 noble truths	5 hindrances 5 aggregates 6 sense media 7 enlightenment-factors 4 noble truths	6 sense media 5 hindrances 7 enlightenment-factors	(5 hindrances in intro & conc.) 7 enlightenment-factors 4 jhānas	-----
Internal/external	Internal/external Shortcomings	Internal/external Shortcomings Rise/fall Knowledge Independence	Internal/external Rise/fall Knowledge Independence	Internal/external Knowledge	(Internal/external in introduction only. Body: refrains vary. Feelings, mind, dhammas) Rise/fall Knowledge Independence Arahantship	Internal/external Independence

How the Satipaṭṭhāna Mūla was reconstructed

1 Basic principle

The basic principle in editing the *Satipaṭṭhāna Mūla is simple. We have **seven early texts**² that teach satipatthana in detail. These all have much in common with each other. They are also substantially different from any other teachings on satipatthana, being the only places that spell out the details of the four satipatthanas. One possible explanation is that they are descended from a common source. The most likely content of this source is the shared material found in each of the texts.

However, we also have to bear in mind that different types of text use different editing principles. For example, the Theravada Abhidhamma typically does not include similes, so the absence of such material in the Vibhaṅga does not suggest that it was absent from the *Satipaṭṭhāna Mūla. Similarly, the Ekāyana Sūtra is somewhat later, erratically edited, and divergent compared with the other sources. Generally, then, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Mūla will include **only material found in all texts**, but will occasionally allow phrases found only in four or five.

By taking just the common material, we end up with a text that, in effect, is much like the Theravada Abhidhamma Vibhaṅga, minus the special Abhidhamma material. I hope I have shown in the discussion of this text that it is refreshingly free of the kinds of anomalies and problems found elsewhere. So my postulated *Satipaṭṭhāna Mūla is not mechanically produced by assuming that the concordance of the texts "must" be the original core. I have also considered the internal coherence of the material, intertextual relationships with the rest of the scriptures, cultural and philosophical contexts at the time of the Buddha, evolution of sectarian positions, and so on. I think all of this evidence taken together constitutes a powerful case for the main thrust of my reinterpretation of satipatthana. Using the concordance of material from all the sources we end up with a text that is internally logical and consistent, fits neatly with the satipatthana teachings in the rest of the canon, and closely resembles an existing text.

2 Evolution of the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas

In such a delicate operation I run a serious risk of being misunderstood, so I must make my claims explicit. The tradition supplies us with a rational explanation of how the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas were produced; that is, they were spoken by the Buddha. That may be so. However, for a number of reasons I find this implausible. Most importantly, the traditional explanation cannot account for the divergences between the existing texts.

If I wish to offer an alternative, I should supply a demonstration of how the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas could have evolved that

- (1) is rational;
- (2) accords with historico-critical methodology;
- (3) accounts systematically for the existing texts on satipatthana;

² There are 3 complete versions of Satipaṭṭhāna S available: one in Pāli and 2 in Chinese. There is a fourth, an incomplete version, found in the Mahā Prajñā, pāramitā Sūtra (found in Tibetan and Chinese). The 7 texts mentioned above are: (1) **Vibhāṅga** of the Pāli Abhidhamma Piṭaka; (2) **Dharma,skandha** of the Sarvāstivāda; (3) **Sāriputrā-bhidharma** of the Dharma, guptaka; (4) **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22; M 10) of the Theravāda; (5) **Smṛtyupasthāna Sūtra** (MĀ 98) of the Sarvāstivāda; (6) **Ekāyana Sūtra** (EĀ 12.1), probably of the Mahāsaṅghika; and (7) **Prajñā, pāramitā Sūtra**. The first 3 are "early Abhidharma" texts. See Sujato, 2005:chs 13 (147-161) and 14 (161-178). On the respective Abhidharma texts, see Sujato 2004: (1) pp148-151; (2) pp152-156; (3) pp156-161; (4) pp173-178; (5) pp 164-170; (6) pp170-173; (7) pp161-164; see also Potter et al (edd), *Encyclopedia of India Philosophies* vol 7: (1) pp 90-92, 165-178; (2) pp103, 179-187; (3) pp317-325; (4) pp52-55.

- (4) enhances understanding of the subject;
- (5) allows us to draw inferences about the evolution of doctrine in early Buddhism that may be tested by comparison with other texts; and
- (6) most important, is useful for practice of Dhamma-Vinaya.

I believe this analysis fulfils these criteria. This, at the very least, should be enough to shift the burden of proof.

It would certainly be unjustified to claim that this reconstruction of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta offers an exposition of satipatthana that is complete and exclusive. Only in the later developed versions do we see attempts to assemble in one coherent system all of the chief teachings on satipatthana. It is clear that **the Buddha taught satipatthana very often in brief**. The detailed meaning would no doubt have been interpreted in [the] light of the other discourses on the relevant topics.

3 Common ideas

Probably any of the discourses dealing with **body contemplation** could be brought in under the umbrella of satipatthana, and so with the remaining three [satipatthanas], too. All of the available traditions, while differing on the detailed content, agree in treating satipatthana, especially body contemplation, in this way. It is obviously not at all implausible to suppose that, say, the elements and charnel ground contemplations were also authentic, but as I stated above, I do not see the inclusion or exclusion of such specific exercises as significantly affecting the doctrinal orientation of the discourse.

The *Satipaṭṭhāna Mūla should be seen as **pointing to certain core aspects of satipatthana accepted among the pre-sectarian community**, rather than as definitive and final. As such, it remains relevant as a way of highlighting these common features whether or not there was ever an actual closely corresponding text. I present my postulated reconstruction in full, without the customary elisions, in order to make it as explicit as possible.

First, though, I will briefly run over my reasons for inclusion or exclusion of some particular sections.

Setting: I think the original setting was at Kammassadamma, but I leave the setting out of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Mūla to emphasize that this material is not really part of the discourse, but was added by redactors.

Audience: I follow the lead of the Sarvāstivāda and have the discourse addressed to monks and nuns. While the textual support for this is admittedly slim, this is my little effort to redress the balance of 2500 years of male redactors. However, for convenience I retain the male pronoun, despite the slight incongruity that results.

Path to Convergence [ekāyana]: I have my doubts about this, as I think the evidence of the Saṃyuttas implies that it was meant for a specifically Brahmanical context, and that is lacking in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Mūla. However, I bow to the agreement of the three main Suttas and include it.

Auxiliary formula:³ Although absent from two of the Suttas, I include it because of the agreement of the Abhidhamma texts and the Prajñāpāramitā, and assume that its loss in the Sarvāstivāda and Mahāsaṅghika Suttas was through abridgement, as indicated in the Sarvāstivāda Saṃyukta.

Internal/external: I bow to the weight of sources and present the integrated version, rather than following each exercise.

Body contemplation: I include the simile, which is found consistently in the Sutta versions, including the Prajñāpāramitā, and assume its absence from the Ekāyana is accidental.

Refrain: I think all the refrains have their problems, but there is sufficient agreement among the Sutta versions to point to a common ancestor, though perhaps none exactly reflect that source. The

³ That is, “Here, monks, a monk, having put away covetousness and displeasure for the world, dwells exertive [ardent], clearly knowing, mindful ,... ” See Introd 3.6.

most distinctive common elements seem to be that one establishes mindfulness for knowledge and vision; and one dwells independent. I think there is some relationship between the *patissati* of the Theravada and the “vision” of the Chinese versions, but am not sure if the Theravada changed “vision” into “mindfulness,” or the Chinese mistook *patissati* for *passati* (or whatever the exact dialectical reading was).

Ending: I repeat the “path to convergence,” but omit the guarantee of attainment, which is only found in two versions, and could easily have been imported from elsewhere in the canon. □

Satipaṭṭhāna Mūla

[The Root Satipatthana]⁴

[Preamble]

1 This is the path to convergence, monks & nuns, for the purification of beings, for surmounting sorrow & lamentation, for ending bodily & mental suffering, for understanding the way, for witnessing Nibbana: that is, the four satipatthanas.

What four?

[The 4 satipatthanas]

2 Here, a monk or nun abides contemplating a body in the body internally,
he abides contemplating a body in the body externally,
he abides contemplating a body in the body internally & externally—
ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed desire & aversion for the world.

3 He abides contemplating a feeling in the feelings internally,
he abides contemplating a feeling in the feelings externally,
he abides contemplating a feeling in the feelings internally & externally—
ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed desire & aversion for the world.

4 He abides contemplating a mind in the mind internally,
he abides contemplating a mind in the mind externally,
he abides contemplating a mind in the mind internally & externally—
ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed desire & aversion for the world.

5 He abides contemplating a dhamma in the dhammas internally,
he abides contemplating a dhamma in the dhammas externally,
he abides contemplating a dhamma in the dhammas internally & externally—
ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed desire & aversion for the world.

[(A) Contemplation of the body]

6 And how, monks & nuns, does a monk or nun abide **contemplating a body in the body?**

7 **[MINDFULNESS OF THE IMPURITIES.]** Here, a monk or nun reviews this very body up from the soles of the feet and down from the tips of the hair, bounded by skin and full of many kinds of impurities thus:

7.2 “In this body there are
head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin,
flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys,
heart, liver, spleen, lungs,

⁴ All headings within [parentheses] and the numbering system have been added by Piya Tan and is not part of Sujato’s original text, all done with his permission.

large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, faeces,
bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat,
tears, grease, spit, snot, oil of the joints, and urine.”

8 Just as if there was a bag with an opening at both ends, full of various sorts of grain, such as hill rice, red rice, mung beans, peas, millet, and white rice, a man with good eyes were to open it up and review it thus:

“This is hill rice, this is red rice, these are mung beans, these are peas, this is millet, this is white rice.” In just the same way, a monk or nun reviews this very body up from the soles of the feet and down from the tips of the hair, bounded by skin and full of many kinds of impurities thus:

8.2 “In this body there are
head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin,
flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys,
heart, liver, spleen, lungs,
large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, faeces,
bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat,
tears, grease, spit, snot, oil of the joints, and urine.”

9 Mindfulness on the body is well established for the sake of knowledge & vision. One abides independent, not grasping at anything in the world.

That is how a monk or nun abides contemplating a body in the body.

[(B) Contemplation of feelings]

10 And further, monks and nuns, how does a monk or nun abide contemplating a feeling in the feelings?

11 Here, when feeling a pleasant feeling a monk or nun understands: “I feel a pleasant feeling.”
When feeling an unpleasant feeling he understands: “I feel an unpleasant feeling.”

When feeling a neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling he understands: “I feel a neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling.”

11.2 When feeling a carnal pleasant feeling he understands: “I feel a carnal pleasant feeling.”

When feeling a spiritual pleasant feeling he understands: “I feel a spiritual pleasant feeling.”

When feeling a carnal unpleasant feeling he understands: “I feel a carnal unpleasant feeling.”

11.3 When feeling a spiritual unpleasant feeling he understands: “I feel a spiritual unpleasant feeling.”

When feeling a carnal neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling he understands: “I feel a carnal neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling.”

When feeling a spiritual neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling he understands: “I feel a spiritual neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling.”

12 Mindfulness on feelings is well established for the sake of knowledge & vision. One abides independent, not grasping at anything in the world.

That is how a monk or nun abides contemplating a feeling in the feelings.

[(C) Contemplation of the mind]

13 And further, monks and nuns, how does a monk or nun abide contemplating a mind in the mind?

14 Here a monk or nun understands mind with lust as “mind with lust.”

He understands mind without lust as “mind without lust.”

14.2 He understands mind with anger as “mind with anger.”

He understands mind without anger as “mind without anger.”

14.3 He understands mind with delusion as “mind with delusion.”

He understands mind without delusion as "mind without delusion."

14.4 He understands contracted mind as "contracted mind."

He understands distracted mind as "distracted mind."

14.5 He understands exalted mind as "exalted mind."

He understands unexalted mind as "unexalted mind."

14.6 He understands surpassed mind as "surpassed mind."

He understands unsurpassed mind as "unsurpassed mind."

14.7 He understands mind in samadhi as "mind in samadhi."

He understands mind not in samadhi as "mind not in samadhi."

14.8 He understands released mind as "released mind."

He understands unreleased mind as "unreleased mind."

15 Mindfulness on the mind is well established for the sake of knowledge & vision. One abides independent, not grasping at anything in the world.

That is how a monk or nun abides contemplating a mind in the mind.

[(D) Contemplation of dhammas]

16 And further, monks and nuns, how does a monk or nun abide contemplating a dhamma in the dhammas?

17 [THE MENTAL HINDRANCES.] (1) Here, when there is **sensual desire** in him, a monk or nun understands: "There is sensual desire in me."

When there is no sensual desire in him, he understands: "There is no sensual desire in me."

And he understands how the arising of the unarisen sensual desire comes to be.

And he understands how the abandoning of the arisen sensual desire comes to be.

And he understands how the non-arising in the future of the unarisen sensual desire comes to be.

(2) When there is **anger** in him, he understands: "There is anger in me."

When there is no anger in him, he understands: "There is no anger in me."

And he understands how the arising of the unarisen anger comes to be.

And he understands how the abandoning of the arisen anger comes to be.

And he understands how the non-arising in the future of the unarisen anger comes to be.

(3) When there is **sloth & torpor** in him, he understands: "There is sloth & torpor in me."

When there is no sloth & torpor in him, he understands: "There is no sloth & torpor in me."

And he understands how the arising of the unarisen sloth & torpor comes to be.

And he understands how the abandoning of the arisen sloth & torpor comes to be.

And he understands how the non-arising in the future of the unarisen sloth & torpor comes to be.

(4) When there is **restlessness & worry** in him, he understands: "There is restlessness & worry in me."

When there is no restlessness & worry in him, he understands: "There is no restlessness & worry in me."

And he understands how the arising of the unarisen restlessness & worry comes to be. And he understands how the abandoning of the arisen restlessness & worry comes to be.

And he understands how the non-arising in the future of the unarisen restlessness & worry comes to be.

(5) When there is **doubt** in him, he understands: "There is doubt in me."

When there is no doubt in him, he understands: "There is no doubt in me."

And he understands how the arising of the unarisen doubt comes to be.

And he understands how the abandoning of the arisen doubt comes to be.

And he understands how the non-arising in the future of the unarisen doubt comes to be.

18 [THE ENLIGHTENMENT-FACTORS.] (1) When there is **the enlightenment-factor of mindfulness** in him, he understands: “There is the enlightenment-factor of mindfulness in me.”

When there is no enlightenment-factor of mindfulness in him, he understands: “There is no enlightenment-factor of mindfulness in me.”

And he understands how the arising of the unarisen enlightenment-factor of mindfulness comes to be. And he understands how the fulfilment through development of the arisen enlightenment-factor of mindfulness comes to be.

(2) When there is **the enlightenment-factor of investigation of dhammas** in him, he understands: “There is the enlightenment-factor of investigation of dhammas in me.”

When there is no enlightenment-factor of investigation of dhammas in him, he understands: “There is no enlightenment-factor of investigation of dhammas in me.”

And he understands how the arising of the unarisen enlightenment-factor of investigation of dhammas comes to be.

And he understands how the fulfilment through development of the arisen enlightenment-factor of investigation of dhammas comes to be.

(3) When there is **the enlightenment-factor of energy** in him, he understands: “There is the enlightenment-factor of energy in me.”

When there is no enlightenment-factor of energy in him, he understands: “There is no enlightenment-factor of energy in me.”

And he understands how the arising of the unarisen enlightenment-factor of energy comes to be.

And he understands how the fulfilment through development of the arisen enlightenment-factor of energy comes to be.

(4) When there is **the enlightenment-factor of rapture** in him, he understands: “There is the enlightenment-factor of rapture in me.”

When there is no enlightenment-factor of rapture in him, he understands: “There is no enlightenment-factor of rapture in me.”

And he understands how the arising of the unarisen enlightenment-factor of rapture comes to be.

And he understands how the fulfilment through development of the arisen enlightenment-factor of rapture comes to be.

(5) When there is **the enlightenment-factor of tranquillity** in him, he understands: “There is the enlightenment-factor of tranquillity in me.”

When there is no enlightenment-factor of tranquillity in him, he understands: “There is no enlightenment-factor of tranquillity in me.”

And he understands how the arising of the unarisen enlightenment-factor of tranquillity comes to be. And he understands how the fulfilment through development of the arisen enlightenment-factor of tranquillity comes to be.

(6) When there is **the enlightenment-factor of samadhi** in him, he understands: “There is the enlightenment-factor of samadhi in me.”

When there is no enlightenment-factor of samadhi in him, he understands: “There is no enlightenment-factor of samadhi in me.”

And he understands how the arising of the unarisen enlightenment-factor of samadhi comes to be.

And he understands how the fulfilment through development of the arisen enlightenment-factor of samadhi comes to be.

(7) When there is **the enlightenment-factor of equanimity** in him, he understands: “There is the enlightenment-factor of equanimity in me.”

When there is no enlightenment-factor of equanimity in him, he understands: “There is no enlightenment-factor of equanimity in me.”

And he understands how the arising of the unarisen enlightenment-factor of equanimity comes to be. And he understands how the fulfilment through development of the arisen enlightenment-factor of equanimity comes to be.

19 Mindfulness on dhammas is well established for the sake of knowledge & vision. One abides independent, not grasping at anything in the world.

That is how a monk or nun abides contemplating a dhamma in the dhammas.

20 This is the path leading to convergence, monks & nuns, for the purification of beings, for surmounting sorrow & lamentation, for ending bodily & mental suffering, for understanding the way, for witnessing Nibbana; that is, the four satipatthanas.

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Mūla Satipaṭṭhāna

[The Basic Satipatthana]

A paraphrased version by Piya Tan

Inspired by Sujato Bhikkhu’s Satipaṭṭhāna Mūla

Preamble

1 This is the *ekāyana* path [the direct path where only one goes by oneself to the one-pointedness of mind], bhikshus and bhikshunis, for the purification of beings, for overcoming sorrow and lamentation, for ending bodily and mental pain, for understanding the way, for seeing nirvana, that is, the four focuses of mindfulness.

What are the four?

The 4 satipatthanas

2 Here, a monk or nun abides contemplating a body in the body internally,
he abides contemplating a body in the body externally,
he abides contemplating a body in the body internally and externally—
exertive, clearly knowing, mindful, putting away desire and aversion for the world.

3 He abides contemplating a feeling in the feelings internally,
he abides contemplating a feeling in the feelings externally,
he abides contemplating a feeling in the feelings internally and externally—
exertive, clearly knowing, mindful, putting away desire and aversion for the world.

4 He abides contemplating a mind in the mind internally,
he abides contemplating a mind in the mind externally,
he abides contemplating a mind in the mind internally and externally—
exertive, clearly knowing, mindful, putting away desire and aversion for the world.

5 He abides contemplating a dharma in the dharmas internally,
he abides contemplating a dharma in the dharmas externally,
he abides contemplating a dharma in the dharmas internally and externally—
exertive, clearly knowing, mindful, putting away desire and aversion for the world.

(A) Contemplation of the body

6 And how, bhikshus and bhikshunis, does a monk or nun abide **contemplating a body in the body**?

7.1 **MINDFULNESS OF THE IMPURITIES.** Here, a monk or nun reviews this very body bounded by skin and full of many kinds of impurities, up from the soles of the feet and down from the crown of the head, thus:

7.2 “In this body there are
head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin,
flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys,
heart, liver, membranes (around the lungs), spleen, lungs,
large intestines, small intestines, stomach-contents, faeces,
bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat,
tears, grease, saliva, snot, oil of the joints, urine.”

8.1 Just as if there were a bag with an opening at both ends, full of various sorts of grain, such as hill rice, paddy, green gram, kidney-beans, sesame, husked rice, and a man with good sight were to open the bag and examine them, saying: “This is hill-rice; this is paddy; this is green gram; this is kidney-bean; this is sesame; this is husked rice,”

In just the same way, a monk or nun reviews this very body bounded by skin and full of many kinds of impurities, up from the soles of the feet and down from the crown of the head, thus:

8.2 "In this body there are

head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin,
flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys,
heart, liver, membranes (around the lungs), spleen, lungs,
large intestines, small intestines, stomach-contents, faeces,
bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat,
tears, grease, saliva, snot, oil of the joints, urine."

9 Mindfulness of the body is well established for the sake of knowledge and vision. He abides independent, not grasping at anything in the world.

That is how a monk or nun abides contemplating a body in the body.

(B) Contemplation of feelings

10 And further, bhikshus and bhikshunis, how does a monk or nun abide contemplating a feeling in the feelings?

11.1 Here, when feeling a pleasant feeling a monk or nun knows: "I feel a pleasant feeling."

When feeling a painful feeling he knows: "I feel a painful feeling."

When feeling a neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling he knows: "I feel a neutral feeling."

11.2 When feeling a carnal pleasant feeling he knows: "I feel a carnal pleasant feeling."

When feeling a spiritual pleasant feeling he knows: "I feel a spiritual pleasant feeling."

When feeling a carnal unpleasant feeling he knows: "I feel a carnal unpleasant feeling."

11.3 When feeling a spiritual unpleasant feeling he knows: "I feel a spiritual painful feeling."

When feeling a carnal neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling he knows: "I feel a carnal neutral feeling."

When feeling a spiritual neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling he knows: "I feel a spiritual neutral feeling."

12 Mindfulness of feelings is well established for the sake of knowledge and vision. He abides independent, not grasping at anything in the world.

That is how a monk or nun abides contemplating a feeling in the feelings.

(C) Contemplation of the mind

13 And further, bhikshus and bhikshunis, how does a monk or nun abide contemplating a mind in the mind?

14 Here a monk or nun knows mind with lust as "mind with lust."

He knows mind without lust as "mind without lust."

14.2 He knows mind with anger as "mind with anger."

He knows mind without anger as "mind without anger."

14.3 He knows mind with delusion as "mind with delusion."

He knows mind without delusion as "mind without delusion."

14.4 He knows contracted mind as "contracted mind."

He knows distracted mind as "distracted mind."

14.5 He knows exalted mind as "exalted mind."

He knows unexalted mind as "unexalted mind."

14.6 He knows surpassed mind as "surpassed mind."

He knows unsurpassed mind as "unsurpassed mind."

14.7 He knows mind in samadhi as "mind in samadhi."

He knows mind not in samadhi as “mind not in samadhi.”

14.8 He knows released mind as “released mind.”

He knows unreleased mind as “unreleased mind.”

14.9 Mindfulness of the mind is well established for the sake of knowledge and vision.

He abides independent, not grasping at anything in the world.

That is how a monk or nun abides contemplating a mind in the mind.

(D) Contemplation of dharmas

16 And further, bhikshus and bhikshunis, how does a monk or nun abide contemplating a dharma in the dharmas?

17 THE MENTAL HINDRANCES. (1) Here, when there is **sensual desire** in him, a monk or nun knows: “There is sensual desire in me.”

When there is no sensual desire in him, he knows: “There is no sensual desire in me.”

And he knows how the arising of the unarisen sensual desire comes to be.

And he knows how the abandoning of the arisen sensual desire comes to be.

And he knows how the non-arising in the future of the unarisen sensual desire comes to be.

(2) When there is **anger** in him, he knows: “There is anger in me.”

When there is no anger in him, he knows: “There is no anger in me.”

And he knows how the arising of the unarisen anger comes to be.

And he knows how the abandoning of the arisen anger comes to be.

And he knows how the non-arising in the future of the unarisen anger comes to be.

(3) When there is **sloth and torpor** in him, he knows: “There is sloth and torpor in me.”

When there is no sloth and torpor in him, he knows: “There is no sloth and torpor in me.”

And he knows how the arising of the unarisen sloth and torpor comes to be.

And he knows how the abandoning of the arisen sloth and torpor comes to be.

And he knows how the non-arising in the future of the unarisen sloth and torpor comes to be.

(4) When there is **restlessness and worry** in him, he knows: “There is restlessness and worry in me.”

When there is no restlessness and worry in him, he knows: “There is no restlessness and worry in me.”

And he knows how the arising of the unarisen restlessness and worry comes to be.

And he knows how the abandoning of the arisen restlessness and worry comes to be.

And he knows how the non-arising in the future of the unarisen restlessness and worry comes to be.

(5) When there is **doubt** in him, he knows: “There is doubt in me.”

When there is no doubt in him, he knows: “There is no doubt in me.”

And he knows how the arising of the unarisen doubt comes to be.

And he knows how the abandoning of the arisen doubt comes to be.

And he knows how the non-arising in the future of the unarisen doubt comes to be.

18 THE AWAKENING-FACTORS. (1) When there is **the awakening-factor of mindfulness** in him, he knows: “There is the awakening-factor of mindfulness in me.”

When there is no awakening-factor of mindfulness in him, he knows:

“There is no awakening-factor of mindfulness in me.”

And he knows how the arising of the unarisen awakening-factor of mindfulness comes to be.

And he knows how the fulfilment through development of the arisen awakening-factor of mindfulness comes to be.

(2) When there is **the awakening-factor of dharma-discernment** in him, he knows:

“There is the awakening-factor of dharma-discernment in me.”

When there is no awakening-factor of dharma-discernment in him, he knows:

“There is no awakening-factor of dharma-discernment in me.”

And he knows how the arising of the unarisen awakening-factor of dharma-discernment comes to be.

And he knows how the fulfilment through development of the arisen awakening-factor of dharma-discernment comes to be.

(3) When there is **the awakening-factor of energy** in him, he knows:

“There is the awakening-factor of energy in me.”

When there is no awakening-factor of energy in him, he knows:

“There is no awakening-factor of energy in me.”

And he knows how the arising of the unarisen awakening-factor of energy comes to be.

And he knows how the fulfilment through development of the arisen awakening-factor of energy comes to be.

(4) When there is **the awakening-factor of rapture** in him, he knows:

“There is the awakening-factor of rapture in me.”

When there is no awakening-factor of rapture in him, he knows:

“There is no awakening-factor of rapture in me.”

And he knows how the arising of the unarisen awakening-factor of rapture comes to be.

And he knows how the fulfilment through development of the arisen awakening-factor of rapture comes to be.

(5) When there is **the awakening-factor of tranquillity** in him, he knows:

“There is the awakening-factor of tranquillity in me.”

When there is no awakening-factor of tranquillity in him, he knows:

“There is no awakening-factor of tranquillity in me.”

And he knows how the arising of the unarisen awakening-factor of tranquillity comes to be. And he knows how the fulfilment through development of the arisen awakening-factor of tranquillity comes to be.

(6) When there is **the awakening-factor of samadhi** in him, he knows:

“There is the awakening-factor of samadhi in me.”

When there is no awakening-factor of samadhi in him, he knows:

“There is no awakening-factor of samadhi in me.”

And he knows how the arising of the unarisen awakening-factor of samadhi comes to be. And he knows how the fulfilment through development of the arisen awakening-factor of samadhi comes to be.

(7) When there is **the awakening-factor of equanimity** in him, he knows:

“There is the awakening-factor of equanimity in me.”

When there is no awakening-factor of equanimity in him, he knows:

“There is no awakening-factor of equanimity in me.”

And he knows how the arising of the unarisen awakening-factor of equanimity comes to be. And he knows how the fulfilment through development of the arisen awakening-factor of equanimity comes to be.

19 Mindfulness of dharmas is well established for the sake of knowledge and vision. He abides independent, not grasping at anything in the world.

That is how a monk or nun abides contemplating a dharma in the dharmas.

20 This is the *ekāyana* path [the direct path where only one goes by oneself to the one-pointedness of mind], for the purification of beings, for overcoming sorrow and lamentation, for the ending of bodily and mental pain, for understanding the way, for seeing nirvana, that is, the four focuses of mindfulness.

— evaṃ —

Practising breath meditation⁵ (Analayo Bhikkhu)

Looking back on these three mindfulness exercises [mindfulness of breathing, of the four postures, of bodily activities], another difference between the *Madhyama āgama* and Pali versions is a matter of sequence, since the *Madhyama āgama* discourse presents mindfulness of breathing after awareness of postures and bodily activities, while the Pali discourses follow the opposite sequence. Since the mindfulness exercises listed under the four *satipaṭṭhānas* seem to follow a sequence from relatively more simple and foundational practices to increasingly subtle and advanced meditations, this difference in sequence merits closer attention.

A point in favour of the *Madhyama āgama* presentation is that mindfulness **of the four postures and clear comprehension of the activities of the body** are relatively rudimentary forms of contemplation. Due to their more elementary character, it seems reasonable to place them at the beginning of an exposition of *satipaṭṭhāna* practice. From a practical perspective, these two types of mindfulness practices would constitute convenient ways for building up a foundation in mindfulness, thereby enabling the meditator to better undertake the more sophisticated exercises listed later on.

Another point in favour of the *Madhyama āgama* sequence is that mindfulness of postures and of activities is predominantly concerned with the body in action. In contrast, the Pali instructions for mindfulness of breathing describe the practitioner sitting down cross-legged in order to carry out this exercise. The same requirement may well apply to the remaining exercises for mindfulness of the body, exercises whose comparative subtlety would benefit from the deeper degrees of concentration facilitated by a stable meditation posture.

By shifting mindfulness of breathing to the third position, after mindfulness of postures and activities, the description of the sitting posture would also move to the most convenient position within the Pali list of exercises for mindfulness of the body. Such a shift of position can moreover claim for support the *Pañcavimśati, sāhaśrikā Prajñā, pāramitā* and the *Śāriputrābhidharma*, both of which similarly have mindfulness of postures and activities precede mindfulness of breathing.⁶

(Analayo, 2005: M 10 (draft), 6 f; emphases added and diacritics are normalized)

⁵ This is only an excerpt from Analayo’s interesting study, for the full version of which see his *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima Nikāya* (2011): M 10 (**Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta**).

⁶ The *Pañcavimśati, sāhaśrikā* in Dutt 1934:204, tr in Conze 1990:153; the *Śāriputrābhidharma* in T1548/28.613b-3.

Practising Satipatthana⁷ (Sujato Bhikkhu)

Based on the above reconstruction, what can we say about the satipatthana method? Here I beg leave to depart for a time from the rigorous strictures of textual analysis to offer a more interpretive and personal reflection on what this text means for meditation.

Contemplation of the body

Start with the body. The body is our primary object of attachment and identification, deeply bound up with our most basic biological drives: sexual reproduction and the assimilation of food. Our thoughts and concerns, our worries and plans are for the large proportion of our time occupied with it—how to feed it, cloth it, house it, keep it comfortable. Any spiritual tradition worthy of the name must recognize the limitations of corporeal existence; and yet some overstep the mark, following the dangerous and unbalanced path of rejecting, ignoring, or repressing the body and its desires.

The distinctively Buddhist approach is to walk fearlessly into the lion’s den. We plunge into the guts and sinews, the blood and the bones, making the body itself the prime object of our meditation. This is not from gruesome morbidity, but from the wish to truly understand, accept, and let go of this our fleshly home. We contemplate both the principle of life—the fragile, delicate breath—and the principle of death—a decomposing corpse.

Mindfulness of the breath

The body is a solid and familiar roosting-place of consciousness, less changeable than thought, and hence forms an ideal basis for stabilizing the mind. **Attention is brought to the breath**, to an image of the parts of the body, or to the inner experience of physical properties such as hardness, softness, heat, and cold. As awareness is continually refocused and refined, the mind sinks deeper and deeper into the chosen object. We gain a direct and quite amazing apprehension of this body that is habitually obscured beneath our desires, aversions, and fears. The more clearly we see a particular aspect of the body, the more apparent it becomes that our everyday perception of the body as an entity is largely an illusion concocted in our minds.

Contemplation of feelings

The image of the body in our mind becomes very subtle; so subtle that the mental aspect of physical experience becomes prominent. We are moving into **the contemplation of feelings**. Feeling in Buddhist context may be defined as the hedonic tone of experience that stimulates reactions of attraction, aversion, or indifference. Normally feelings are somewhat dimly perceived concomitants of experience that manipulate our attention into patterns of desire and denial. We devote our lives to seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, but rarely do we take the opportunity to acquaint ourselves more deeply with these processes. Feelings are notoriously nebulous and changeable: physical feelings tend to be overpowered by the accompanying physical impact, and mental feelings are enigmatic and complex. But by treating the contemplation of feelings primarily as emerging from the tranquillising process of body contemplation these problems are minimized. For a time our feelings become more stable, simple, and clear: a subtle and cool sense of rapture and bliss welling up from within the meditation subject.

⁷ I have here (and elsewhere) retained Sujato’s spelling of what he regards as common Pali terms adopted into English, and as such we can dispense with the diacritics. (Piya)

Contemplation of mind

One of the most astounding revelations for any meditator is the changeability of the mind’s capacity to be aware, like an eye that dilates and contracts in response to the environment. Normally this is extremely difficult to see; for we are seeing the seer itself. There is no external measure. In **the contemplation of mind** we see how cognition operates under different conditions: burnt up by lust, withered by bitterness, darkened and compressed by sloth. We see how the mind opens up, blossoms, and expands under wholesome influences, so our knowing has more clarity and focus. We become acutely aware of the mind as awareness itself, soft and tender as a flower or a baby, yet at the same time possessed of incredible strength and resilience. At this level of development the mind becomes an instrument of unparalleled sensitivity.

Contemplation of dhammas

We maintain a clear-eyed awareness of the various contrasting feelings and mind-states that are directly present in consciousness. Contrast sows the seeds of understanding. Here we are cultivating a wonderful garden for the flowering of wisdom; but we have not as yet turned this potential directly to inquiry into causes. In **the contemplation of dhammas** we become aware not just of presence, but also of absence; and this is a deeper matter, for in seeing absence one sees impermanence.

Hindrances and enlightenment factors

But then the practice digs deeper still. Each factor is treated in terms of an investigation into causes —one understands how the hindrances arise, how they are abandoned, how the enlightenment factors are produced, and how they are developed to perfection. **The hindrances obstruct samadhi; the enlightenment-factors produce samadhi.** Understanding through careful investigation the causes of the hindrances and the enlightenment-factors, one understands the causes leading the mind towards or away from jhana. Paying attention by way of root or matrix eradicates the hindrances and arouses the enlightenment factors, while paying attention away from the root does the opposite.

Jhana & samadhi

In body contemplation, we apply ourselves to the meditation object. Here, we are basically just following the meditation instructions. Gradually we see the more subtle feelings and mind-states more clearly, and as the practice matures **one enters jhana**. At first this will be more or less a hit-and-miss affair. But as we repeat the practice over and over we understand why the mind is sometimes peaceful and sometimes not.

As wisdom deepens, **samadhi** becomes more reliable. These are the central, most clearly and powerfully realized processes in our spiritual consciousness, so the meditator will automatically treat this as a paradigm for understanding the nature of conditioned experience in general.

Thus the contemplation of dhammas sees the understanding of samatha maturing almost inevitably into vipassana. The whole process of satipatthana is so exquisitely normal it is almost misleading to call it a “method.” One is not deliberately applying an artificial, preconceived scheme; the various stages simply signpost the unfolding of meditation.

—evam—

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