

Right Mindfulness

What, now, is Right Mindfulness?

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipatthana*)

The only way that leads to the attainment of purity, to the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, to the end of pain and grief, to the entering upon the right path and the realization of Nibbana, is by the 'Four Foundations of Mindfulness'. And which are these four?

Herein the disciple dwells in contemplation of the Body, in contemplation of Feeling, in contemplation of the Mind, in contemplation of the Mind-Objects; ardent, clearly comprehending them and mindful, after putting away worldly greed and grief.

1. Contemplation of the Body (*kayanupassana*)

But how does the disciple dwell in contemplation of the body?

Watching Over In- and Out-Breathing (*anapana-sati*)

Herein the disciple retires to the forest, to the foot of a tree, or to a solitary place, seats himself with legs crossed, body erect, and with mindfulness fixed before him, mindfully he breathes in, mindfully he breathes out. When making a long inhalation, he knows: 'I make a long inhalation'; when making a long exhalation, he knows: 'I make a long exhalation'. When making a short inhalation, he knows: 'I make a short inhalation'; when making a short exhalation, he knows: 'I make a short exhalation'. 'Clearly perceiving the entire (breath-) body, I shall breathe in': thus he trains himself; 'clearly perceiving the entire (breath-) body, I shall breathe out': thus he trains himself. 'Calming this bodily function (*kaya-sankhara*), I shall breathe in': thus he trains himself; 'calming this bodily function, I shall breathe out': thus he trains himself.

Thus he dwells in contemplation of the body, either with regard to his own person, or to other persons, or to both, he beholds how the body arises; beholds how it passes away; beholds the arising and passing away of the body. A body is there—

'A body is there, but no living being, no individual, no woman, no man, no self, and nothing that belongs to a self; neither a person, nor anything belonging to a person.' (Commentary)

This clear awareness is present in him, to the extent necessary for knowledge and mindfulness, and he lives independent, unattached to anything in the world. Thus does the disciple dwell in contemplation of the body.

'Mindfulness of Breathing' (anapana-sati) is one of the most important meditative exercises. It may be used for the development of Tranquillity (samatha-bhavana), i.e. for attaining the four Absorptions (jhana), for the development of Insight (vipassana-bhavana), or for a combination of both practices. Here, in the context of satipatthana, it is principally intended for tranquillization and concentration preparatory to the practice of Insight, which may be undertaken in the following way.

After a certain degree of calm and concentration, or one of the Absorptions, has been attained through regular practice of mindful breathing, the disciple proceeds to examine the origin of breath. He sees that the inhalations and exhalations are conditioned by the body consisting of the four material elements and the various corporeal phenomena derived from them, e.g. the five sense organs, etc. Conditioned by fivefold sense-impression arises consciousness, and together with it the three other 'Groups of Existence', i.e. Feeling, Perception, and mental Formations. Thus the meditator sees clearly: 'There is no ego-entity or self in this so called personality, but it is only a corporeal and mental process conditioned by various factors'. Thereupon he applies the Three Characteristics to these phenomena, understanding them thoroughly as impermanent, subject to suffering, and impersonal.

For further details about Ânapana-sati, see Majjhima-Nikaya 118.62, and Visuddhi-Magga VIII, 3.

The Four Postures

And further, whilst going, standing, sitting, or lying down, the disciple understands (according to reality) the expressions; 'I go'; 'I stand'; 'I sit'; 'I lie down'; he understands any position of the body.

'The disciple understands that there is no living being, no real Ego, that goes, stands, etc., but that it is by a mere figure of speech that one says: "I go", "I stand" and so forth'. (Commentary)

Mindfulness and Clear Comprehension (*sati-sampajañña*)

And further, the disciple acts with clear comprehension in going and coming; he acts with clear comprehension in looking forward and backward; acts with clear comprehension in bending and stretching (any part of his body); acts with clear comprehension in carrying alms bowl and robes; acts with clear comprehension in eating, drinking, chewing and tasting; acts with clear comprehension in discharging excrement and urine; acts with clear comprehension in walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, awakening; acts with clear comprehension in speaking and keeping silent.

In all that the disciple is doing, he has a clear comprehension: 1. of his intention, 2. of his advantage, 3. of his duty, 4. of the reality.
(Commentary)

Contemplation of Loathsomeness (*patikula-sañña*)

And further, the disciple contemplates this body from the sole of the foot upward, and from the top of the hair downward, with a skin stretched over it, and filled with manifold impurities: 'This body has hairs of the head and of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, stomach, bowels, mesentery, and excrement; bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, lymph, tears, skin-grease, saliva, nasal mucus, oil of the joints, and urine.'

Just as if there were a sack, with openings at both ends, filled with various kinds of grain—with paddy, beans, sesamum and husked rice—and a man not blind opened it and examined its contents, thus: 'That is paddy, these are beans, this is sesamum, this is husked rice': just so does the disciple investigate this body.

Analysis of Four Elements (*dhatu*)

And further, the disciple contemplates this body, however it may stand or move, with regard to the elements; 'This body consists of the solid element, the liquid element, the heating element and the vibrating element'. Just as if a skilled butcher or butcher's apprentice, who had slaughtered a cow and divided it into separate portions, were to sit down at the junction of four highroads: just so does the disciple contemplate this body with regard to the elements.

In Visuddhi Magga XIII, 2 this simile is explained as follows: When a butcher rears a cow, brings it to the place of slaughter, binds it to a post, makes it stand up, slaughters it and looks at the slaughtered cow, during all that time he has still the notion 'cow'. But when he has cut up the slaughtered cow, divided it into pieces, and sits down near it to sell the meat, the notion, 'cow' ceases in his mind, and the notion 'meat' arises. He does not think that he is selling a cow or that people buy a cow, but that it is meat that is sold and bought. Similarly, in an ignorant worldling, whether monk or layman, the concepts 'being', 'man', 'personality', etc., will not cease until he has mentally dissected this body of his, as it stands and moves, and has contemplated it according to its component elements. But when he has done so, the notion 'personality', etc., will disappear, and his mind will become firmly established in the Contemplation of the Elements.

Cemetery Meditations

1. And further, just as if the disciple were looking at a corpse thrown on a charnel-ground, one, two, or three days dead, swollen up, blue-black in color, full of corruption—so he regards his own body: 'This body of mine also has this nature, has this destiny, and cannot escape it.'
2. And further, just as if the disciple were looking at a corpse thrown on a charnel-ground, eaten by crows, hawks or vultures, by dogs or jackals, or devoured by all kinds of worms—so he regards his own body; 'This body of mine also has this nature, has this destiny, and cannot escape it.'
3. And further, just as if the disciple were looking at a corpse thrown on a charnel-ground, a framework of bones, flesh hanging from it, bespattered with blood, held together by the sinews;
4. A framework of bone, stripped of flesh, bespattered with blood, held together by the sinews;
5. A framework of bone, without flesh and blood, but still held together by the sinews;
6. Bones, disconnected and scattered in all directions, here a bone of the hand, there a bone of the foot, there a shin bone, there a thigh bone, there a pelvis, there the spine, there the skull—so he regards his own body: 'This body of mine also has this nature, has this destiny, and cannot escape it.'

7. And further, just as if the disciple were looking at bones lying in the charnel-ground, bleached and resembling shells;

8. Bones heaped together, after the lapse of years;

9. Bones weathered and crumbled to dust—so he regards his own body: 'This body of mine also has this nature, has this destiny, and cannot escape it.' Thus he dwells in contemplation of the body, either with regard to his own person, or to other persons, or to both. He beholds how the body arises; beholds how it passes away; beholds the arising and passing away of the body. 'A body is there': this clear awareness is present in him, to the extent necessary for knowledge and mindfulness; and he lives independent, unattached to anything in the world. Thus does the disciple dwell in contemplation of the body. (*Dīgha Nikaya*, 22)

Assured of Ten Blessings

Once the contemplation of the body is practised, developed, often repeated, has become one's habit, one's foundation, is firmly established, strengthened and perfected; the disciple may expect ten blessings:

1. Over delight and discontent he has mastery; he does not allow himself to be overcome by discontent; he subdues it, as soon as it arises.

2. He conquers fear and anxiety; he does not allow himself to be overcome by fear and anxiety; he subdues them, as soon as they arise.

3. He endures cold and heat, hunger and thirst; wind and sun, attacks by gadflies, mosquitoes and reptiles; patiently he endures wicked and malicious speech, as well as bodily pains that befall him, though they be piercing, sharp, bitter, unpleasant, disagreeable, and dangerous to life.

4. The four Absorptions' (*jhana*) which purify the mind, and bestow happiness even here, these he may enjoy at will, without difficulty, without effort.

Six 'Psychical Powers' (*Abhiñña*)

5. He may enjoy the different 'Magical Powers' (*iddhi-vidha*).

6. With the 'Heavenly Ear' (*dibba-sota*), the purified, the superhuman, he may hear both kinds of sounds, the heavenly and the earthly, the distant and the near.

7. With the mind he may obtain 'Insight into the Hearts of Other Beings' (*parassa-cetopariya-ñāna*), of other persons.

8. He may obtain 'Remembrances of many Previous Births' (*pubbe-nivasanussati-ñāna*).

9. With the 'Heavenly Eye' (*dibba-cakkhu*), purified and superhuman, he may see beings vanish and reappear, the base and the noble, the beautiful and the ugly, the happy and the unfortunate; he may perceive how beings are reborn according to their deeds.

10. He may, through the 'Cessation of Passions' (*asavakkhaya*), come to know for himself, even in this life, the stainless deliverance of mind, the deliverance through wisdom.

The last six blessings (5-10) are the 'Psychical Powers' (abhiñña). The first five of them are mundane (lokiya) conditions, and may therefore be attained even by a 'worldling' (puthujjana), whilst the last Abhiñña is super-mundane (lokuttara) and exclusively the characteristic of the Arahāt, or Holy One. It is only after the attainment of all the four Absorptions (jhana) that one may fully succeed in acquiring the five worldly 'Psychical Powers'. There are four iddhipada, or 'Bases for obtaining Magical Powers', namely: concentration of Will, concentration of Energy, concentration of Mind, and concentration of Investigation. (Majjhima-Nikaya, 119)

2. Contemplation of the Feelings (*vedananupassana*)

But how does the disciple dwell in contemplation of the feelings? In experiencing feelings, the disciple knows: 'I have an agreeable feeling'; or: 'I have a disagreeable feeling', or: 'I have an indifferent feeling'; or: 'I have a worldly agreeable feeling', or: 'I have an unworldly agreeable feeling', or: 'I have a worldly disagreeable feeling', or: 'I have an unworldly disagreeable feeling', or: 'I have a worldly indifferent feeling', or: 'I have an unworldly indifferent feeling'.

Thus he dwells in contemplation of the feelings, either with regard to his own person, or to other persons, or to both. He beholds how the feelings arise; beholds how they pass away; beholds the arising and passing away of the feelings. 'Feelings are there': this clear awareness is present in him, to the extent necessary for knowledge and mindfulness; and he lives independent, unattached to anything in the world. Thus does the disciple dwell in contemplation of the feelings.

The disciple understands that the expression 'I feel' has no validity except as a conventional expression (voharavacana); he understands that, in the absolute sense (paramattha), there are only feelings, and that there is no Ego, no experiencer of the feelings.

3. Contemplation of the Mind (*cittanupassana*)

But how does the disciple dwell in contemplation of the mind? Herein the disciple knows the greedy mind as greedy, and the not greedy mind as not greedy; knows the hating mind as hating, and the not hating mind as not hating; knows the deluded mind as deluded and the undeluded mind as undeluded. He knows the cramped mind as cramped, and the scattered mind as scattered; knows the developed mind as developed, and the undeveloped mind as undeveloped; knows the surpassable mind as surpassable and the unsurpassable mind as unsurpassable; knows the concentrated mind as concentrated, and the unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated; knows the freed mind as freed, and the unfreed mind as unfreed.

Citta (mind) is here used as a collective term for the cittas, or moments of consciousness. Citta being identical with viññana, or consciousness, should not be translated by 'thought'. 'Thought' and 'thinking' correspond rather to the 'verbal operations of the mind': vitakka (thought-conception) and vicara (discursive thinking), which belong to the Sankhara-kkhandha.

Thus he dwells in contemplation of the mind, either with regard to his own person, or to other persons, or to both. He beholds how consciousness arises; beholds how it passes away; beholds the arising and passing away of consciousness. 'Mind is there'; this clear awareness is present in him, to the extent necessary for knowledge and mindfulness; and he lives independent, unattached to anything in the world. Thus does the disciple dwell in contemplation of the mind.

4. Contemplation of the Mind-Objects (*dhammanupassana*)

But how does the disciple dwell in contemplation of mind-objects? Herein the disciple dwells in contemplation of the mind-objects, namely of the 'Five Hindrances.'

The Five Hindrances (*nivarana*)

He knows when there is 'Lust' (*kamacchanda*) in him: 'In me is lust'; knows when there is 'Anger' (*vyapada*) in him: 'In me is anger'; knows when there is 'Torpor and Sloth' (*thinamiddha*) in him: 'In me is torpor and sloth'; knows when there is 'Restlessness and Mental Worry' (*uddhacca-kukkucca*) in him: 'In me is restlessness and mental worry'; knows when there are 'Doubts' (*vicikiccha*) in him: 'In me are doubts'. He knows when these hindrances are not in him: 'In me these hindrances are not'. He knows how they come to arise; knows how, once arisen, they are overcome; and he knows how they do not rise again in the future.

For example, 'Lust' arises through unwise thinking on the agreeable and delightful. It may be suppressed by the following six methods: fixing the mind upon an idea that arouses disgust; contemplation of the loathsomeness of the body; controlling one's six senses; moderation in eating; friendship with wise and good men; right instruction. Lust and anger are forever extinguished upon attainment of Anagamiship; 'Restlessness' is extinguished by reaching Arahathship; 'Mental Worry', by reaching Sotapanship.

The Five Groups of Existence (*khandha*)

And further: the disciple dwells in contemplation of the mind-objects, namely of the five 'Groups of Existence'. He knows what 'Corporeality' (*rupa*) is, how it arises, how it passes away; knows what 'Feeling' (*vedana*) is, how it arises, how it passes away; knows what 'Perception' (*sañña*) is, how it arises, how it passes away; knows what the 'Mental Formations' (*sankhara*) are, how they arise, how they pass away; knows what 'Consciousness' (*viññana*) is, how it arises, how it passes away.

The Sense-Bases (*ayatana*)

And further: the disciple dwells in contemplation of the mind-objects, namely of the six 'Subjective-Objective Sense-Bases'. He knows the eye and visual objects, ear and sounds, nose and odors, tongue and tastes, body and bodily impressions, mind and mind-objects; and the fetter that arises in dependence on them, he also knows. He knows how the fetter comes to arise, knows how the fetter is overcome, and how the abandoned fetter does not rise again in future.

The Seven Elements of Enlightenment (*bojjhanga*)

And further: the disciple dwells in contemplation of the mind-objects, namely of the seven 'Elements of Enlightenment', he knows when there is in him 'Mindfulness' (*sati*), 'Investigation of the Law' (*dhammavicaya*), 'Energy' (*viriya*), 'Enthusiasm' (*piti*), 'Tranquillity' (*passaddhi*), 'Concentration' (*samadhi*), and 'Equanimity' (*upekkha*). He knows when it is not in him, knows how it comes to arise, and how it is fully developed.

The Four Noble Truths (*ariya-sacca*)

And further: the disciple dwells in contemplation of the mind-objects, namely of the 'Four Noble Truths'. He knows according to reality, what Suffering is; knows according to reality, what the Origin of suffering is; knows according to reality what the Extinction of suffering is; knows according to reality, what the Path is that leads to the extinction of suffering.

Thus he dwells in contemplation of the mind-objects either with regard to his own person, or to other persons or to both. He beholds how the mind-objects arise, beholds how they pass away, beholds the arising and passing away of the mind-objects. 'Mind-objects are there': this clear awareness is present in him, to the extent necessary for knowledge and mindfulness; and he lives independent, unattached to anything in the world. Thus does the disciple dwell in contemplation of the mind-objects.

The only way that leads to the attainment of purity, to the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, to the end of pain and grief, to the entering upon the right path, and the realization of Nibbana, is by these four foundations of mindfulness.

These four contemplations of Satipatthana relate to all the five Groups of Existence, namely: 1. The contemplation of corporeality relates to rupakkhandha; 2. the contemplation of feeling, to vedanakkhandha; 3. the contemplation of mind, to viññanakkhandha; 4. the contemplation of mind-objects, to sañña- and sankhara-kkhandha.

For further details about Satipatthana see the Commentary to the discourse of that name, translated in The Way of Mindfulness, by Bhikkhu Soma (Kandy 1967, Buddhist Publication Society). (Dīgha Nikaya, 22)

Nibbana Through Anapana-Sati

Watching over In - and Out-breathing (*anapana-sati*), practised and developed, brings the Four 'Foundations of Mindfulness' to perfection; the four foundations of mindfulness, practised and developed, bring the seven 'Elements of Enlightenment' to perfection; the seven elements of enlightenment, practised and developed, bring 'Wisdom and Deliverance' to perfection.

But how does Watching over In- and Out-breathing, practised and developed, bring the four 'Foundations of Mindfulness' (*satipatthana*) to perfection?

I. Whenever the disciple (1) mindfully makes a long inhalation or exhalation, or (2) makes a short inhalation or exhalation, or (3) trains himself to inhale or exhale whilst experiencing the whole (breath-) body, or (4) whilst calming down this bodily function (i.e. the breath)—at such a time the disciple dwells in 'contemplation of the body', full of energy, comprehending it, mindful, after subduing worldly greed and grief. For, inhalation and exhalation I call one amongst the corporeal phenomena.

II. Whenever the disciple trains himself to inhale or exhale (1) whilst feeling rapture (*piti*), or (2) joy (*sukha*), or (3) the mental functions (*cittasankhara*), or (4) whilst calming down the mental functions—at such a time he dwells in 'contemplation of the feelings', full of energy, clearly comprehending them, mindful, after subduing worldly greed and grief. For, the full awareness of In- and Out-breathing I call one amongst the feelings.

III. Whenever the disciple trains himself to inhale or exhale (1) whilst experiencing the mind, or (2) whilst gladdening the mind, or (3) whilst concentrating the mind, or (4) whilst setting the mind free—at such a time he dwells in 'contemplation of the mind', full of energy, clearly comprehending it, mindful, after subduing worldly greed and grief. For, without mindfulness and clear comprehension, I say, there is no Watching over In- and Out-breathing.

IV. Whenever the disciple trains himself to inhale or exhale whilst contemplating (1) impermanence, or (2) the fading away of passion, or (3) extinction, or (4) detachment—at such a time he dwells in 'contemplation of the mind-objects', full of energy, clearly comprehending them, mindful, after subduing worldly greed and grief. Having seen, through understanding, what is the abandoning of greed and grief, he looks on with complete equanimity.

Watching over In- and Out-breathing, thus practised and developed, brings the four Foundations of Mindfulness to perfection.

But how do the four Foundations of Mindfulness, practised and developed, bring the seven 'Elements of Enlightenment' (*bojjhanga*) to full perfection?

1. Whenever the disciple dwells in contemplation of body, feelings, mind and mind-objects, strenuous, clearly comprehending them, mindful, after subduing worldly greed and grief—at such a time his mindfulness is undisturbed; and whenever his mindfulness is present and undisturbed, at such a time he has gained and develops the Element of Enlightenment 'Mindfulness' (*sati-sambojjhanga*); and thus this element of enlightenment reaches fullest perfection.
2. And whenever, whilst dwelling with mindfulness, he wisely investigates, examines and thinks over the 'Law' (*dhamma*)—at such a time he has gained and develops the Element of Enlightenment 'Investigation of the Law' (*dhammavicaya-sambojjhanga*); and thus this element of enlightenment reaches fullest perfection.
3. And whenever, whilst wisely investigating, examining and thinking over the law, his energy is firm and unshaken—at such a time he has gained and develops the Element of Enlightenment 'Energy' (*viriya-sambojjhanga*); and thus this element of enlightenment reaches fullest perfection.
4. And whenever in him, whilst firm in energy, arises super-sensuous rapture—at such a time he has gained and develops the Element of Enlightenment 'Rapture' (*piti-sambojjhanga*); and thus this element of enlightenment reaches fullest perfection.
5. And whenever, whilst enraptured in mind, his spiritual frame and his mind become tranquil—at such a time he has gained and develops the Element of Enlightenment 'Tranquillity' (*passaddhi-sambojjhanga*); and thus this element of enlightenment reaches fullest perfection.
6. And whenever, whilst being tranquillized in his spiritual frame and happy, his mind becomes concentrated—at such a time he has gained and develops the Element of Enlightenment 'Concentration' (*samadhi-sambojjhanga*); and thus this element of enlightenment reaches fullest perfection.

7. And whenever he looks with complete indifference on his mind thus concentrated—at such a time he has gained and develops the Element of Enlightenment 'Equanimity' (*upekkha-sambojjhanga*); and thus this element of enlightenment reaches fullest perfection.

The four Foundations of Mindfulness, thus practised and developed, bring the seven elements of enlightenment to full perfection.

And how do the seven elements of enlightenment, practised and developed, bring Wisdom and Deliverance (*vijja-vimutti*) to full perfection?

Herein the disciple develops the elements of enlightenment: Mindfulness, Investigation of the Law, Energy, Rapture, Tranquillity, Concentration and Equanimity, based on detachment, on absence of desire, on extinction and renunciation.

The seven elements of enlightenment thus practised and developed, bring wisdom and deliverance, to full perfection. (*Majjhima-Nikaya, 118*)

Just as the elephant hunter drives a huge stake into the ground and chains the wild elephant to it by the neck, in order to drive out of him his wonted forest ways and wishes, his forest unruliness, obstinacy and violence, and to accustom him to the environment of the village, and to teach him such good behavior as is required amongst men: in like manner also should the noble disciple fix his mind firmly to these four Foundations of Mindfulness, so that he may drive out of himself his wonted worldly ways and wishes, his wonted worldly unruliness, obstinacy and violence, and win to the True, and realize Nibbana. (*Majjhima-Nikaya, 125*)

Source: Nyanatiloka (compiler, translator). *The Word of the Buddha: An Outline of the Teaching of the Buddha in the Words of the Pali Canon*. 14th edition. Kandy, Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society, 1967. (Pages 58-72) [This format has been produced by Alexander Peck.]