

## Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta #2 - Ardently

A talk offered by Philip Jones to the Silent Mind-Open Heart Sangha on 11/17/13.

Today I want to continue exploring the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the Buddha's discourse on the ways of establishing mindfulness. It has been described as "the heart of Buddhist meditation."<sup>1</sup>

Last week we explored the [first two paragraphs](#) which gave us a sense of the location for the teaching and that this teaching describes a direct and inevitable way leading to freedom from *dukkha*, freedom from unsatisfactoriness, stress and suffering and that it is a way leading towards wisdom, open-heartedness and a quality of ease in relation to all of life's ups and downs. The Buddha ended that preamble by stating that the four satipaṭṭhānas, the four ways of establishing mindfulness, were this direct path.

In the next paragraph, the Buddha defines the four fields for mindfulness, but also four qualities of mind that are key to establishing mindfulness of these four fields. The Buddha said:

*What are the four? Here, bhikkhus, in regard to the body one 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.<sup>2</sup>*

So first, brief comments on the four fields for establishing mindfulness. We have the body - all the physical experiences associated with the five sense organs. We have feelings - the pleasant, unpleasant and neutral qualities or tones associated with every moment of experience. We have the mind - all mental phenomenon,

though it is defined more narrowly as the sutta explores this field. And we have "*dhammas*" - a Pāli word, with a small "d" which differentiates it from Dhamma with a capital "D", that refers to the Buddha's teaching or the Truth of the Way things are. A literal translation of this small "d" dhamma is "phenomenon." But the sutta actually specifies certain categories of dhammas, of phenomena, that are most fruitful for establishing mindfulness. So perhaps because of this Joseph Goldstein refers to this field for mindfulness as "categories of experience".<sup>3</sup>

Before we get into these fields of experience, it will be helpful to explore the qualities of mind and heart involved in establishing mindfulness. The first of these qualities of mind is expressed in the Pāli word *ātāpi*.

Anālayo Bhikkhu translates it as "diligent" which my dictionary says means "having or showing care or conscientiousness in one's work or duties."<sup>4</sup> So bringing diligence to a field of mindfulness means bringing a quality of care to what we're giving attention to. But there's more to *ātāpi*. Digging a little deeper, it turns out that diligence is derived from the Latin *diligere* which means to "love, take delight in."<sup>4</sup> This gives a totally different sense to diligence, doesn't it?

This idea of "loving and taking delight in" is supported by all of the other translations I've looked at which translate *ātāpi* as "ardent" or "ardently".<sup>5</sup> My dictionary<sup>4</sup> says that ardent means "passionate" or "enthusiastic" and notes that it is derived from the Latin "ardere" which means "to burn."

So the Buddha is telling us to bring a quality of delight, of love, of passionate interest to each of these fields of mindfulness. This is about the kind of effort or energy we bring to the fields of mindfulness. It's not just a matter of passively "observing" or "witnessing" what is occurring, it is having a passionate interest in seeing, in knowing, in experiencing what is happening in the body, or with the feelings or the mind or a category of experience. When we relate to a moment of experience with this kind of passionate, burning interest it takes us deeply into the actual experience of what is happening right now. And this is quite a bit different from the sort of distant, detached observation that is often regarded as a key part of mindfulness.

But, if we get too ardent, too passionate, make too much effort, this can interfere with our ability to establish mindfulness, just as a lack of effort can. Keeping this in mind, Anālayo Bhikkhu tells us: "the quality of 'diligence' is best understood as a balanced but sustained application of energy."<sup>6</sup>

In the Numerical Discourses, the Buddha teaches a monk named Soṇa about balanced effort. Soṇa hadn't awakened but really wanted to. He was quite passionate about the practice and tried really, really hard. Like many of us, though, he would look around at his fellow monks who did seem to be making a lot more progress than he was, and he became discouraged. He began to doubt himself and began to think about giving up and going back to being a layperson.

The Buddha became aware of Soṇa's frustrations and doubts. So he approached Soṇa and said:

*"Tell me, Soṇa, in the past when you lived at home, weren't you skilled at the lute?"*

*"Yes, Bhante."*

*"What do you think, Soṇa? When its strings were too tight, was your lute well tuned and easy to play?"*

*"No, Bhante."*

*"When its strings were too loose, was your lute well tuned and easy to play?"*

*"No, Bhante."*

*"But, Soṇa, when its strings were neither too tight nor too loose but adjusted to a balanced pitch, was your lute well tuned and easy to play?"*

*"Yes, Bhante."*

*"So too, Soṇa, if energy is aroused too forcefully this leads to restlessness, and if energy is too lax this leads to laziness. Therefore, Soṇa, resolve on a balance of energy, achieve evenness of the spiritual faculties, and take up the object [of meditation] there."<sup>7</sup>*

I'll give Anālayo Bhikkhu the last word on this question of balance: "... to be 'diligent' then amounts to keeping up one's contemplation with balanced but dedicated continuity, returning to the object of meditation as soon as it is lost."<sup>8</sup>

I don't know about you, but for me it isn't always so easy to maintain that quality of interest. Sometimes there's a sense of boredom, sometimes a desire to escape, or if there is something pleasant, just a desire to enjoy the pleasantness and nothing beyond that. So what helps us to bring passionate interest to our actual moment-to-moment experience?

The thing that helps me, more than any other, is looking at experience through the framework or the viewpoint of the Four Noble Truths. Looking through the lens of the First Noble Truth: Is there suffering or even just a sense of dissatisfaction involved with this? Recognizing that there is some form of suffering gets me to pay attention pretty quickly. I don't like to suffer, so when I recognize it that captures my attention. What is this? What's going on here? Can I deeply know it? Can I be present for it?

The lens of the Second Noble Truth: If there is *dukkha* - dissatisfaction/suffering - how am I relating to it? Am I trying to hold on, to push away? Am I identifying with it in some way, taking it to be who or what I am, taking it to be mine in some way?

And the lens of the Third Noble Truth: What happens if I let go, what is the experience then? Is there a cessation of suffering? If so, what is that like? Can I see it, know this cessation clearly? If not, maybe I should look more closely, more deeply at what is going on. And so the energy, the effort flows out of the curiosity and the desire to be free of the agitation and discontent.

So we have a paradox right here at the beginning of this teaching: in order to find a quality of ease, of contentment with life, we need to bring a passionate or burning commitment to paying attention, to experientially knowing what is happening right now.

1. Nyanaponika Thera, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, 1962/1988
2. translation by Anālayo Bhikkhu, *satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization*, Birmingham, England: Windhorse Publications, 2003. (Note: I have substituted the Pāli "bhikkhus" for "monks" and the gender neutral "one" for "he")
3. — Goldstein, Joseph. *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening*, Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2013, p. 3
4. - Apple Dictionary, Mac OS 10.6.8
5. - Bhikkhu Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words*, Somerville, MA; Wisdom Publications, 2005, p. 281;
  - Bhikkhus Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, MN 10.3, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995;
  - Nyanaponika Thera, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser Publishing, 1962/1988, p. 117;
  - Nyanasatta Thera, "The Foundations of Mindfulness," 1994, Access to Insight, 14 June 2010, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.010.nysa.html> . Retrieved on 12 November 2013;
  - U Sīlānanda, *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1990, p. 177;
  - Soma Thera, *The Way of Mindfulness*, Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1941/1981, p. 1;
  - Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, *Satipatthana Sutta: Frames of Reference*, 2008, Access to Insight, 11 October 2010, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.010.than.html> . Retrieved on 14 November 2013
6. Anālayo Bhikkhu, *satipaṭṭhāna*, p. 37-38.
7. Aṅguttara Nikāya 6.55, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2012.
8. Anālayo Bhikkhu, *satipaṭṭhāna*, p. 39.