

Metta *and* Mindfulness

VENERABLE
MAHINDA



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Preface

The main aim of this publication is to reach out to those who are keen to know about Mettā and Mindfulness as taught by the Buddha more than 2,500 years ago – for inner peace, transformation and to meet the challenges of our time.

We hope it will also serve as a useful review for all those who have attended the meditation retreats and Novitiate programmes conducted by Venerable Mahinda and assisted by Sister Sumitra over the years – including the recent Aloka Online Dhamma Course – so that they will be able to take their practice to another level.

In the midst of uncertainties caused by natural and man-made disasters – wars, environmental pollution, climate change and so on – we should reflect on the preciousness of our human life and use it wisely to transform ourselves through Mettā and Mindfulness, and sow the seeds of enlightenment in our hearts.

Foreword

I have had the privilege of knowing Venerable Mahinda (Bhante) since 1999, when I was a student at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. This was way before I became a Clinical Psychologist.

Bhante has always struck me as a teacher with an uncanny ability to convey the teachings of the Buddha and inspire us to go deeper in our spiritual practice. This is not surprising given Bhante's life story, where he has dedicated decades to serious Dhamma practice and with many great Buddhist masters of our time. He has also been living a selfless life of service, as a true ambassador of the Dhamma.

In this day and age, mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation practices have become popular in mainstream society. This is partly a result of the many benefits discovered through scientific studies. Often these practices have been taught in a secular manner to facilitate psychological healing and improve emotional wellbeing. Although a secular approach is appropriate for widespread dissemination, the drawback is that these practices have been taken out of their traditional context within Buddhist teachings.

This book by Bhante is a very welcomed resource that helps practitioners, whether new or advanced, to appreciate the full potential of loving kindness and mindfulness practices within the broader framework of Buddhist teachings.

In the section on Mettā, Bhante has highlighted how the cultivation of loving kindness leads to the development of compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. These four qualities manifest outwardly as generosity, politeness, helpfulness and unbiased actions – the basic principles of service. In this way, the practice of Mettā provides the basis upon which one can fulfill the mission of the Buddha “for the welfare and happiness of the many”.

In the section on mindfulness, Bhante provides an insightful explanation of how craving and attachment can be reduced and overcome by silencing the mind through the systematic cultivation of mindfulness, reflected in the practice of Samatha Vipassanā meditation.

Accordingly, Bhante has given us a set of systematic and specific instructions in this book to progress step by step, all the way to the ultimate Buddhist goal of complete liberation from all pain and suffering. There is no doubt that Bhante's guidance will help and inspire many to deepen their spiritual practice. For this, we are all deeply grateful.

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5th May 2024

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METTĀ & MINDFULNESS

Introduction

Mettā and mindfulness, as taught by the Buddha more than 2,500 years ago, support our mental and physical well-being as well as our final liberation – to go beyond the saṃsāric cycle of birth, old age, sickness and death.

Both are currently the subject of scientific investigation and there are a growing number of studies which demonstrate their benefits – especially in the field of mental health and interpersonal relationships.

Mettā, or loving-kindness, promotes the true spirit of friendliness, derived from the genuine wish for the wellbeing and happiness of all sentient beings. It is the pure and unconditional love which heals the divides among individuals, families and communities, going beyond caste, colour and creed. The cultivation of Mettā paves the way for many great virtues and qualities to develop, both for the individual as well as the community. Being an antidote to anger and aversion, Mettā enables us to remain calm in times of trouble, not reacting to adverse situations.

Mindfulness, when practised systematically through the cultivation of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, will effectively check our craving and grasping tendencies and generate the necessary wisdom and insight to break through the false notion of the self as ‘I, my, me, mine’.

Mettā and mindfulness are powerful means of self-transformation – bringing about peace, harmony and stability within the individual, family, nation and the world.

These two practices complement one another to reduce and overcome the tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion – the root causes of all suffering. They are two important tools that will help us meet the challenges of our time.

METTĀ

The word Mettā in Pāli or MAITRĪ in Sanskrit, literally means ‘friendliness’ (from the word MITTA/MITRA or ‘friend’). It is the kind of friendship that arises through boundless and unconditional love, free from lustful attachment.

Mettā is often translated as ‘loving-kindness’ – a love that comes from the heart, through the genuine wish for all beings to be well and happy. It is a love that goes beyond the boundaries of race, language, nationality, caste, colour and creed. Hence it may also be called ‘universal love’.

In the Karaṇiya Mettā Sutta,¹ Mettā is compared to the love of a mother towards her only child, protecting the child at the risk of her own life:

MĀTĀ YATHĀ NIYAṀ PUTTAM
ĀYUSĀ EKA-PUTTAM ANURAKKHE
EVAṀ PI SABBA-BHŪTESU
MĀNASAM BHĀVAYE APARIMĀNAM

Just as a mother would protect her only child
at the risk of her own life,
even so towards all beings
one should cultivate a boundless heart.

The Pāli commentaries define Mettā as the strong wish for the welfare and happiness of others.² In this sense, the words altruism, goodwill, and benevolence can also be used to describe Mettā.

1 KN Kph 9

2 See for example Sn–A 128: HITĀ–SUKHUPANAYA–KĀMĀTĀ.

Mettā is the antidote for anger, hatred, grudges, resentment and ill-will:

NA HI VERENA VERĀNI, SAMMANTĪDHA KUDĀCANAM
AVERENA CA SAMMANTI, ESA DHAMMO SANANTANŌ

Hatred is not overcome by hatred
But by love and love alone.
This is an eternal law.³

Here, the Buddha points out that this teaching is an eternal law. That is, this principle exists for all times: past, present and future. It is not something which he invented – the Buddha only rediscovered it and promoted it, for peace and harmony within oneself, and within the family, society, nation and the world.

Mettā is the basis for all great virtues. It is the foundation for the cultivation of KARUṆĀ – compassion; MUDITĀ – sympathetic or appreciative joy; and UPEKKHĀ – equanimity. Together, these four qualities are called the Four BRAHMA-VIHĀRAS, the Four ‘Sublime Abodes’, or Four Immeasurables,⁴ and they are important to develop and maintain emotional stability within the individual, and peace and harmony with others.

Mettā promotes gratitude and a forgiving heart. It is thus a great healing force, capable of transmuting negative thoughts and energies, both within ourselves and with those around us and beyond.

3 Dhp 5

4 See page 24

The Benefits of Mettā

The Buddha mentioned eleven benefits of the practice of Mettā.⁵ They are:

1. the ability to sleep well and happily
2. the ability to wake up happily
3. no bad dreams or nightmares
4. one is dear to human beings (i.e. it is easy to make friends with others)
5. one is dear to animals and other non-humans
6. one will be protected by gods or devas
7. one will not be harmed by fire, poisons or weapons
8. concentration develops quickly
9. improved facial expression, good complexion and radiance
10. a peaceful death, with unconfused mind
11. a good rebirth (if the mind is not yet liberated)

The first three benefits relate to our sleep pattern. Sleep is important if we wish to maintain a healthy mind and body. The biological processes of relaxation, detoxification and the release of growth hormones all take place during a good night's sleep. The cultivation of Mettā is very useful for those suffering from insomnia and other sleep-related disorders.

As Mettā promotes the true spirit of friendliness, human beings will be near and dear to you and you will be able to make friends easily. Even wild animals and other non-humans will not harm you. That is how yogis who practise deep in the forest or jungle can live in harmony with all the wild animals.

5 AN 11.15

Moreover, devas or celestial beings, including Bodhisattvas and Dhamma protectors, will associate with you, and you will always be guided and protected. As you vibrate with the frequency of loving-kindness, you will naturally be connected with all those beings who are full of love and compassion. As such, you will also receive the blessings, guidance and protection of great spiritual masters and teachers.

Mettā will also help you to remain calm and composed and you will be able to get into concentration quickly. It will also improve your facial expression, complexion and radiance.

When Mettā is well-established, you will be protected from harm caused by fire, poison or weapons. Furthermore, at the time of death, your mind will be peaceful and unconfused. This will condition a good rebirth, if your mind is not yet liberated.

All these benefits were taught by the Buddha more than 2,500 years ago. Nowadays, the scientific community has also started studying the effects of loving-kindness and compassion meditation practices. They have found multiple benefits from these practices, including stress reduction, increase in positive emotional states, and improvements in interpersonal relationships.⁶

In order for us to reap the full benefits of Mettā, we need to be consistent in our practice. Some of these benefits may be realised more quickly than others. Some benefits may only be experienced when our practice is well established.

In the early stages of practice, we may also experience certain obstacles. Instead of feeling calm and peaceful, we may become restless and

⁶ See for example: Wang, R., Gu, X., Zhang, Y., Luo, K., & Zeng, X. (2024). Loving-kindness and compassion meditations in the workplace: A meta-analysis and future prospects. *Stress and health: journal of the International Society for the Investigation of Stress*, 40(1), e3273; & Zeng, X., Chiu, C. P., Wang, R., Oei, T. P., & Leung, F. Y. (2015). The effect of loving-kindness meditation on positive emotions: a meta-analytic review. *Frontiers in psychology*, 6, 1693. Etc.

agitated, especially when we begin to notice and become more aware of our own defilements. Before practising Mettā, we may not be aware of how angry and hateful we have been all the while. Only when we begin to practise will we become more aware of our own angry nature, and all the aversion, hatred and grudges we hold inside. This may give rise to a sense of restlessness and agitation, even having aversion towards ourselves.

Such experience may seem to be a setback or something negative, but in fact it is an awakening process, as we become more aware of our own defilements. When this happens, we need to persevere and make greater effort to cultivate Mettā. We also need to seek refuge in the Buddha Dhamma Sangha and associate with good Dhamma friends who will provide the necessary encouragement to continue with our practice.

Once initial awareness of the defiling tendencies of anger and aversion has arisen and some effort has been made to overcome them, we will begin to observe certain positive changes, or transformation in our own behaviour. This will encourage us to practise more and more, until Mettā becomes part and parcel of our life.

The Power of Mettā

The power of Mettā is well-illustrated by the Buddha. There is the well-known story of how the Buddha subdued Nālāgiri, the wild intoxicated elephant, through the power of Mettā.⁷

Devadatta, the Buddha's cousin, was angry when he was not appointed as the next successor to the Buddha. So he plotted to kill the Buddha by sending an intoxicated elephant charging before the Buddha.

⁷ KN, Jataka 533: Cūlahamṣa Jātaka

When Ānanda, the Buddha's faithful attendant, tried to shield him, the Buddha told Ānanda that there was no need to do so. The Buddha simply raised his hand and radiated loving-kindness towards the fierce and intoxicated elephant. The elephant was immediately subdued and bowed down before the Buddha.

The Buddha also mentioned about his experience with other wild animals in the forest. He said: "Dwelling on the mountain slopes, I drew to me lions and tigers by the power of Mettā. Surrounded by lions and tigers, by panthers and buffaloes, by antelopes, stags and wild boars, I dwelt in the forest. No creature was terrified of me and neither was I afraid of any creature. The power of loving-kindness was my support. Thus I dwelt upon the mountain-side."⁸

There are also many inspiring stories of people in our contemporary society, even ordinary householders, who were able to confront and overcome their fears and problems through the power of Mettā. Personally, I have encountered devotees with domestic issues, bullying at school or at work, job loss and so on, whom I advised to practise Mettā for at least one session daily, and, after each session, to seek forgiveness from whomever they think is causing the problem, and wish them well and happy. Many returned to inform me that their problems were resolved. I attribute this to the power of Mettā and forgiveness.

In times of crises, when there is lots of suffering in certain places, it is advisable to practise Mettā in groups (such as Mettā Circles), so as to harness the power of collective consciousness. Mettā has the power to transmute negative energies into light, love and harmony.

With regards to the protection of devas or divine beings, there are also many stories of divine interventions, especially amongst refugees

8 The Buddha and His Teachings, p.484 Ven. Narada Maha Thero.

from Tibet, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and other countries, as well as other ordinary people in times of crises and natural disasters. This is a common phenomenon amongst all religious groups.

These blessings, guidance and protection are not just from one god. There are countless dhamma protectors, bodhisattvas, devas, nagas and other celestial beings that are always ready to reach out to Dhamma practitioners in times of need.

How to Practise Mettā

The Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta outlines the practice of Mettā beginning with the cultivation of certain virtues or wholesome qualities. There are 14 qualities mentioned in the sutta for one's own development.⁹ These virtues or wholesome qualities enable us to have some peace of mind, calmness and clarity, so that we will be able to cultivate Mettā more effectively.

The commentaries then explain the meditation on Mettā or loving-kindness in a systematic manner, progressing step by step.

There are different variations or techniques, but the underlying principle is the same. It is centred on the sincere wish for the wellbeing of all sentient beings.

The two common methods are:

1. directing thoughts of loving-kindness towards individuals, and
2. directing our attention in different directions.

⁹ See page 14. There is an additional quality that encompasses all that should be avoided.

Directing thoughts of loving-kindness towards individuals

We should start the practice of Mettā with ourselves so that we are grounded and in the right frame of mind before we radiate to others. We then direct our attention towards someone whom we respect, such as our spiritual teachers, our parents (those who are living), and/or someone who has touched our lives, so that Mettā will flow smoothly and readily. It is always easier to think well of someone whom we respect and have gratitude towards. This will open our hearts and as the momentum of Mettā develops, we can move on to neutral people – those who are less well-known or even unknown to us. Finally, we direct our thoughts of loving-kindness towards those who are more difficult, such as our rivals or enemies, or those with whom we have had quarrels or misunderstandings.

As we radiate loving-kindness in this order towards different individuals, we gradually break the barriers between ourselves and others, starting from our respected teachers and parents, to those who are neutral or even hostile to us. That is how loving-kindness becomes boundless, transcending all boundaries.

Radiating Mettā and merely sending thoughts to others are two different things. When we radiate Mettā, our minds should be grounded as our aura of calmness, peace and wellbeing expands and reaches out to others. When we simply direct our thoughts to others, if we are not properly grounded and at peace within ourselves, then others may also feel what we feel. They may also be affected by our stress and other gross emotions.

There are a few precautions which we should consider. In the early stages of practice, we should be avoid focussing on those to whom we are emotionally attached, as this may lead to lustful attachment. That is why it is recommended to start with those whom we respect and have gratitude towards. We should also avoid radiating to departed ones, as

there will not be any reciprocal response. Owing to our attachment, grief and sorrow may also arise. What we can do is dedicate merits at the end of our practice for the spiritual wellbeing and happiness of all our departed relatives and friends. In the case of those difficult and hostile ones, if anger arises whenever we think of them, then we should also avoid focussing on them until our practice becomes more established.

Directing our attention in different directions

The second common mode of practice involves directing our attention in different directions or spatial dimensions, i.e. directional radiation (DISĀ-PHARAṆĀ). Traditionally, we consider the ten directions: North, North-East, East, South-East, South, South-West, West, North-West, then above (or the upward direction – Zenith) and below (or the downward direction – Nadir).

There are also other methods such as radiating loving-kindness to each of the six realms of existence and enlightened beings, and simply wishing all beings to be well and happy.¹⁰

The instructions given in the Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta say:

METTĀÑ CA SABBA-LOKASMIṀ
MĀNASAM BHĀVAYE APARIMĀṆAM
UDDHAM ADHO CA TIRIYAÑ CA
ASAMBĀDHAM AVERAM ASAPATTAM

Let thoughts of boundless love
pervade the whole world,
above, below and all around –
without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any
enmity.

¹⁰ KN, Paṭisambhidāmagga, Mettākathā. Trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli

As such, we can commence from wherever we are – in our own room, then extending to the whole house, apartment or office; to all the neighbourhood; to the whole village, town or city; reaching out to the whole country. Then beyond this country to all the neighbouring countries and islands; covering the whole world and beyond; to all the different planes of existence, known or unknown to us, seen or unseen.

Whilst directing our minds, either to individuals or to the different directions, we must always keep in mind the object of meditation, which is the wish for all beings to be well and happy.

We may start with ourselves and then progress to others and eventually to all beings – wishing that they be well and happy.

Or, if we are directing our mind to the different directions, we should take one particular direction, say the East. Then we radiate thoughts of loving-kindness for all beings that dwell in the eastern direction to be well and happy. Similarly for the other directions, until we cover all directions: above, below and all around.

The meaning of “Be well and happy”

In order to enjoy a true sense of wellbeing, firstly we need to be free from all forms of hostility, such as anger, enmity, hatred and grudges. This includes anger coming from others as well as from within ourselves.

We often get angry with ourselves because we are not able to achieve our goals or we are not able to progress as well as others. Sometimes there can be a more subtle anger towards ourselves as a result of remorse or guilt due to the ripening of some past unwholesome karma.

Secondly, our mind needs to be free from mental suffering such as fear, worries and anxieties.

Thirdly, we need to be free from physical pain and suffering, from sickness and ill health. It is only when one is free from hostility, from mental and physical suffering that one is able to live happily, with ease and harmony.

The term ‘May you be well and happy’ therefore implies the wish for others’ wellbeing at all levels: mental, emotional and physical. It is not confined to mere worldly happiness or pleasure that is experienced through our physical senses.

Hence the traditional formula:

AHAM AVERO HOMI

May I be free from hostility – from anger, aversion, hatred and grudges.

ABYĀPAJJHO HOMI

May I be free from mental suffering – from fear, worry and anxiety.

ANĪGHO HOMI

May I be free from physical pain – from sickness and ill-health.

SUKHĪ ATTĀNAṂ PARIHARĀMI

May I dwell with ease and happiness.

Just as we have these good wishes for ourselves, so do we wish others:

AVERĀ HONTU

May others be free from hostility – from anger and enmity, hatred and grudges.

ABYĀPAJJHĀ HONTU

May they be free from mental suffering – from fear, worry and anxiety.

ANĪGHĀ HONTU

May they be free from physical pain – from sickness and ill-health.

SUKHĪ ATTĀNAṂ PARIHARANTU

May they dwell with ease and happiness.

The various methods of developing Mettā or loving-kindness meditation are found mainly in the Paṭisambhidāmagga and Visuddhimagga¹¹ (The Path of Purification). There are also effective methods that are practised in Sri Lanka and other places which are not recorded in the commentaries.

However, the origins of the teachings on Mettā are found in the Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta, usually referred to as the ‘Mettā Sutta’ or the Discourse on Loving-kindness. This is contained in the Sutta Nipāta, an early collection of the discourses of the Buddha and his disciples.

The Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta

The Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta is the original instruction given by the Buddha to a group of 500 monks who were practising in the forest, after receiving different objects of meditation according to their own temperament.

When they were disturbed by tree spirits or devas in the forest, they returned to the Buddha to seek advice. The Buddha told them that they should not try to find any other place to practise, but instead they should return to the same place. He told them that if they wanted to be free from fear of the tree spirits, they should safeguard themselves with Mettā, which will act both as a safeguard as well as a meditation object. Then the Buddha gave them the discourse on loving-kindness as contained in the Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta.

¹¹ The Visuddhimagga is a well-known commentary on some fundamental aspects of the teachings of the Buddha.

The Buddha also instructed them to meditate on loving-kindness twice a day, every morning and evening, along with the contemplation on the loathsomeness of the body (ASUBHĀNUSSATI), contemplation on death (MARANĀNUSSATI), and the contemplation on birth, old age, sickness and death. The contemplation on the loathsomeness of the body is to reduce and overcome craving and lustful attachment to form, and the practice of contemplation on death and so on is to provide a sense of urgency and proper motivation for their practice.

Upon receiving these instructions, the monks returned to the forest to spend the Rains Retreat for three months. The spirits in the forest were happy with the loving-kindness radiated by the monks. They became very supportive of the monks and there were no further disturbances during their three-months stay. So the monks were able to meditate well and attain to enlightenment.

The instructions contained in the Mettā Sutta can be divided into three sections, based on the three trainings of SĪLA (good conduct), SAMĀDHI (concentration), and PAÑÑĀ (wisdom).

Verses 1 to 3 refer to the cultivation of fifteen qualities, with regard to avoiding evil and doing good (SĪLA), which provide the basis of concentration (SAMĀDHI).

Verses 3 to 9 provide a distinct technique of meditation, leading to the purification of the mind through the development of SAMĀDHI, or the various levels of JHĀNA (mental absorptions). And the final verse, Verse 10, refers to the attainment of liberation through the development of wisdom (PAÑÑĀ) and insight into the true nature of phenomena, and the overcoming of wrong views and sensual desires.

The first two lines of the opening verse of the Mettā Sutta read:

KARAṆĪYAM ATTHA–KUSALENA

One who is skilled in doing good

YANTAṂ SANTAṂ PADAM ABHISAMECCA

wishing to attain that state of calm (Nibbana), should act thus:...

Who are those ‘skilled in doing good’? As the Mettā Sutta was addressed to forest monks, the commentaries refer to those monks who have renounced worldly life and are leading a righteous way of life, restrained by the moral rules and regulations of the Order, and exerting right effort for the attainment of Nibbāna, through the path and fruition (MAGGA–PHALA).

In the same way, it should also apply to lay practitioners who are leading a simple and contented way of life, well-restrained in thought, speech and action, and determined to gain their final liberation or Nibbāna, the state of calm.

The next two lines of the first verse read:

SAKKO UJŪ CA SŪJŪ CA

He should be able, upright, perfectly upright,

SŪVACO CASSA MUDU ANATIMĀNĪ

amenable, gentle and humble.

SAKKO means being able. This refers not only to one’s physical and mental health, but also to one’s ability to develop the mind. In other words, one’s mental faculties – such as SADDHĀ (faith and confidence in moral and spiritual values), VIRIYA (energy or effort), SATI (mindfulness), SAMĀDHI (concentration) and PAÑÑĀ (wisdom) – should be in good order so as to be able to persevere in the development and purification of the mind.

The terms, UJŪ and SŪJŪ, translated as ‘upright’ and ‘perfectly upright’, are qualities that complement and reinforce one another. They refer to one’s upright and straightforward character, being truly honest and sincere, and not deceitful or hypocritical.

SUVACO CASSA refers to someone who is easy to speak to, someone who is prepared to listen to advice and correct him- or her-self – i.e. having an amenable character.

MUDU means soft and gentle, willing to carry out duties, and easily trained or moulded, like pottery clay that is soft and malleable and easily moulded into a pot, vase or so on.

ANATIMĀNĪ means not proud or arrogant, i.e. humble. It is only through respect and humility that the Dhamma can flow and be properly transmitted from teacher to pupil.

All the qualities mentioned in the first verse are those qualities which are conducive to the training or moulding of one’s conduct and behaviour. They apply equally to monastics as well as to the laity.

The second verse continues with another set of values which provide the conditions conducive to mental cultivation. They are:

SANTUSSAKO CA SUBHARO CA

Contented, easy to support,

APPAKICCO CA SALLAHUKAVUTTI

with few duties, simple in livelihood.

SANTINDRIYO CA NIPAKO CA

controlled in senses, discreet, not impudent,

APPAGABBHO KULESU ANANUGIDDHO

not greedily attached to families.

SANTUSSAKO CA SUBHARO CA – or ‘contented’ and ‘easy to support’. These are qualities which complement one another. When one lives a simple and contented way of life, he or she is naturally easy to support. These qualities also imply leading a frugal way of life, with few needs and wants. The more we want, the more we need to work for it, and the less time we have for our practice.

The life of a forest monk is a good example of how to live with just the basic necessities of life such as food (received by going on alms round, once a day), clothing (just three sets of robes), shelter (a small kuti or meditation hut, or even under an umbrella with a mosquito net) and medicine (natural herbal remedies in times of illness).

While the needs of a householder are understandably more than that of a forest monk, it is still possible to lead a simple and contented way of life – if not all the time, at least for a certain period, such as in retreat conditions.

APPAKICCO CA SALLAHUKAVUTTI – with few duties, simple in livelihood.

These two qualities also complement each other. When one leads a simple and frugal way of life, then naturally one will not be preoccupied with many duties and responsibilities. However, even a forest monk could get very busy with building works, constructing kutis, and having various duties and responsibilities to instruct the younger monks or novices, attendants and so on. Hence the need for such a reminder to avoid having too many duties and responsibilities, especially during meditation retreats. Important tasks should be undertaken before or after the period of retreat.

Lay people, including religious leaders, those in public service and busy professionals should take time off to go for retreats. It is difficult

to effectively train the mind when one is holding various important responsibilities and is involved in planning and organising activities.

SANTINDRIYO means controlled in senses. It refers to one who practises sense restraint – the restraint of our six sense bases: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and the mind. Sense restraint naturally involves the cultivation of mindfulness and prevents distraction and the proliferation of thoughts. It leads to calmness and tranquillity and paves the way for the attainment of higher knowledges and insights.

The next quality is NIPAKO which implies intelligence, prudence and knowledge. It refers to one who is prudent and has the discriminating wisdom to weigh and consider the pros and cons of difficult situations, and who acts in a discreet or careful manner, avoiding mistakes and always guarding one's virtues and wholesome qualities.

APPAGABBHO means 'not impudent', or modest. One does not act in a bold or rash manner that offends others, whether through body, speech or mind.

KULESU ANANUGIDDHO means not greedily attached to families. Forest monks who go out on almsround in the villages can get attached to certain families who usually provide them with their necessities. Those leading an ordinary household life are more inclined to be attached to their family members. That is why the practice of attending short meditation retreats away from home is a good way for them to develop a sense of detachment. Those who are strongly attached to their families tend to find various excuses for not attending retreats.

Whilst the first two verses outline all the skilful actions or qualities which should be developed, the next two lines of the third verse outline all the unskilful actions that should be avoided, in an all-encompassing manner:

NA CA KHUDDAṀ SAMĀCARE KIÑCI

He should not commit any slight wrong,

YENA VINÑŪ PARE UPAVADEYYUṀ

for which the wise may find fault with him.

On this basis of morality – i.e. avoiding evil and doing good – one then commences to develop concentration, focusing on a particular meditation object, which in this case is the cultivation of loving-kindness – the wish for all beings to be well and happy:

SUKHINO VĀ KHEMINO HONTU

May all beings be happy and secure,

SABBE SATTĀ BHAVANTU SUKHITATTĀ

may their hearts be happy.

After establishing the fourteen qualities or virtues to be cultivated and one extra quality that encompasses all that should be avoided, the Mettā Sutta outlines the technique of meditation on loving-kindness and how to sustain one's attention by considering all the different kinds of beings.

The next two verses set out the object of meditation in very general terms to cover all beings.

YE KECI PĀṆA BHŪTATTHI

Whatever living beings there may be,

TASĀ VĀ THĀVARĀ VĀ ANAVA SESĀ

weak or strong, without exception,

DĪGHĀ VĀ YE MAHANTĀ VĀ

long or short, large,

MAJJHIMĀ RASSAKĀṆUKATHŪLĀ

medium or small, subtle or gross...

DIṬṬHĀ VĀ YEVA ADIṬṬHĀ

Visible or invisible,

YE CA DŪRE VASANTI AVIDŪRE

those dwelling far or near,

BHŪTĀ VĀ SAMBHAVESĪ VĀ

those born or yet to be born –

SABBE SATTĀ BHAVANTU SUKHITATTĀ

May all beings, without exception, be happy!

The next four verses outline the total commitment to the cultivation of Mettā in terms of interpersonal relationships, avoiding any form of conflict or malevolent feelings.

After mentioning the various categories or groups of beings to be included in the practice of Mettā, the following verse extends this further by wishing that all abstain from harming, or wishing harm on one another:

NA PARO PARAM NIKUBBETHA

Let none deceive another,

NĀTIM AÑÑETHA KATTHACI NAṃ KAÑCI

nor despise anyone anywhere.

BYĀROSANĀ PAṬIGHA-SAÑÑĀ

In anger or ill will,

NĀÑÑAM AÑÑASSA DUKKHAM ICCHHEYA

Let them not wish each other harm.

The next verse clearly defines Mettā, comparing it to the attitude that a mother would have towards her only child, protecting him at the risk of her own life:

MĀTĀ YATHĀ NIYAṀ PUTTAṀ

Just as a mother would protect her only child

ĀYUSĀ EKA-PUTTAṀ ANURAKKHE

at the risk of her own life,

EVAM PI SABBA-BHŪTESU

even so towards all beings

MĀNASAṀ BHĀVAYE APARIMĀNAṀ

one should cultivate a boundless heart.

The Mettā Sutta then goes on to define the nature of this all-embracing loving-kindness as boundless in terms of all spatial dimensions:

METTĀÑ CA SABBA-LOKASMIṀ

Let thoughts of boundless love

MĀNASAṀ BHĀVAYE APARIMĀNAṀ

pervade the whole world,

UDDHAM ADHO CA TIRIYAÑ CA

above, below and all around –

ASAMBĀDHAM AVERAM ASAPATTAṀ

without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity.

The next verse explains when and how to meditate:

TITṬHAṀ CARAM NISINNO VĀ

Whether standing, walking, sitting

SAYĀNO VĀ YĀVATĀSSA VIGATA-MIDDHO

or lying down, as long as one is awake,

ETAṀ SATIM ADITṬHEYYA

one should develop this mindfulness.

BRAHMAM ETAṂ VIHĀRAM IDHAM ĀHU

This, they say, is the divine abiding here.

Following these instructions on cultivating loving-kindness, you will have no time wasted because you can always meditate in all the different postures, even if you are sick and bedridden.

This discourse on Mettā provides a very comprehensive account of what, how and when to practise. It defines the nature of Mettā, and provides for all conceivable beings – living near and far, in all directions; beings of all sizes and all grades – radiating loving-kindness in a boundless and immeasurable manner.

It also shows how this perfectly pure, boundless loving-kindness, also known as ‘divine love’, may be practised at all times of the day, while standing, walking, sitting or lying down.

Mettā, when practised with mindfulness throughout the day, even for a short period of time, can bring about the transformation of an ordinary worldly human being into a good human being, and from a good human being into a noble one, who has distanced themselves from the tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion, thereby attaining the path and fruition (MAGGA-PHALA) and realising the ultimate goal of Nibbāna.

The final verse of the Mettā Sutta reads:

DITṬHIŃ CA ANUPAGAMMA SĪLAVĀ

Not falling into (wrong) views,

DASSANENA SAMPANNO

virtuous and endowed with insight,

KĀMESU VINEYYA GEDHAM

discarding attachment to sensual desires –

NA HI JĀTU GABBHA–SEYYAṂ PUNAR–ETĪ TI

Truly, he does not come again to be conceived in a womb.

The Buddha recommended the practice of Mettā even to his arahant disciples – who had freed themselves from greed, hatred and delusion – so that they could work for the welfare and happiness of the many (BAHUJANA–HITĀYA BAHUJANA–SUKHĀYA), out of compassion for the world (LOKĀNUKAMPĀYA).¹²

The Four BRAHMA–VIHĀRAS

The cultivation of Mettā will naturally lead to the development of three other qualities: KARUṆĀ (compassion), MUDITĀ (sympathetic or appreciative joy) and UPEKKHĀ (equanimity). These four qualities are known as the BRAHMA–VIHĀRA, or the four ‘sublime abodes’ – states of mind which we should always dwell in.

As we cultivate Mettā by radiating thoughts of loving-kindness – ‘May all beings be well and happy’ – we will naturally become more aware of the suffering around us. This will prompt the thought of compassion (KARUṆĀ) to arise – ‘May all suffering beings be free from suffering’. As KARUṆĀ or compassion develops in the mind, it will manifest in our speech and bodily actions.

When others respond to our kind words and actions and overcome their problems, we will naturally feel happy and joyful. This is what we call MUDITĀ, sympathetic or appreciative joy – rejoicing with the joy and happiness, the goodness and success of others. In other words, we are happy when we see others are happy and successful. It is this kind of joy, coming from a heart of compassion, that will provide us

¹² The Buddha’s admonishment to the first 60 arahants. Sāsanavagghana II.17, Mahākhanda, Vinaya Mahāvagga.

with the strength and courage to face various challenges experienced in the course of serving others.

Although MUDITĀ is the natural outcome of KARUNĀ, there are times when our acts of kindness may not be appreciated by others. Some people may even be suspicious of our actions and may blame or criticise us. When this happens, instead of becoming disillusioned and give up helping others, we should develop patience and try to understand the cause of such negative behaviour.

It is when we are challenged again and again that we will become stronger and more resilient. We will eventually become more equanimous when we begin to understand the characters and behavioural patterns of different individuals. Some people may not be very refined in their speech, but they may be kind and caring. Others may appear to be polite and well-mannered, but they may not be reliable and caring. Individuals at different levels of development and understanding will tend to speak, think and act accordingly. It is through such encounters and observations that we will have a better understanding of how karma operates, thereby paving the way for equanimity to develop.

Equanimity or UPEKKHĀ is born out of wisdom. We become truly equanimous when we are able to go beyond the false notion of the self as ‘I, my, me, mine,’ and are no longer affected by the worldly conditions of profit and loss; praise and blame; fame and ill-fame; and happiness and sorrow.

The four sublime states of mind – METTĀ, KARUNĀ, MUDITĀ, UPEKKHĀ – will naturally give rise to their outer manifestations, the four principles of service¹³: generosity (DĀNA), polite or courteous speech (PIYAVĀCĀ), helpful action (ATTHACARIYĀ) and unbiased

13 SAṄGAHA-VATTHU – there are varied translations of this term, including the four means of support, or four principles of social integration. (Sangahavatthu Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya IV.32)

action (SAMĀNATTATĀ). In other words, when we are engaged in serving others, we should do so with a generous heart and courteous speech, and we should provide assistance to others in an unbiased manner.

METTĀ begins with thoughts of goodwill to all;

KARUNĀ manifests into acts of kindness;

MUDITĀ provides the joy and the energy to face challenges; and

UPEKKHĀ enables us to reach out to all irrespective of race, language, nationality, caste, colour or creed.

This is how we will be able to work towards fulfilling the Buddha's mission:

CĀRATHA BHIKKHAVE CĀRIKAṀ
BAHUJANĀ-HITĀYA BAHUJANĀ-SUKHĀYA
LOKĀNUKAMPĀYA ATTHĀYA HITĀYA SUKHĀYA
DEVĀ-MANUSSĀNAṀ

Wander forth, O monks,
For the welfare and happiness of the many,
Out of compassion for the world,
For the benefit, the welfare and the happiness
Of gods and humans.¹⁴

¹⁴ Sāsanaavadāhana II.17, Mahākhandaṅga, Vinaya Mahāvagga.

The Significance of Practising Mettā

Just as we wish to be well and happy, others too wish to be well and happy. There is not a single being in this world that does not wish to be well and happy. Some people only care for themselves, their own family members and friends. Some only care for others without caring for themselves. Some neither care for themselves nor others.

With the cultivation of Mettā, we learn to care for all – ourselves and others. This is how we overcome selfishness, the root cause of suffering in the world. The practice of Mettā involves the radiation of thoughts of loving kindness to everyone: in all directions; big, small or medium size; weak or strong; living far or near, and so on.

In the long rounds of saṃsāric existence, it is difficult to know who our friends or enemies are. Our loved ones could have been our enemies at some point in time, and our enemies in this lifetime could have been our loved ones. Couples marry because of their love and affection for one another. When they separate or divorce, they often become enemies to one another.

This phenomenon may be repeated from life to life until one comes in contact with the Dhamma. The Buddha–Dhamma, or teachings of the Buddha, show us how to progress from the worldly love or affection of a householder, to the sublime or spiritual love of those on the quest for Truth. It is through the systematic cultivation of Mettā that we will learn how to develop the pure, unconditional love that goes beyond the self... beyond ‘I, my, me, mine.’

The seeds of hatred, resentment, grudges and discrimination have been sown either in this lifetime (in our younger days) or in our past lives. The vicious cycle of hate and revenge goes on from life to life as long as it is not checked. Even a single moment of anger is enough to obscure all the goodness and merits we have done in our lives.

When we are angry with our parents, teachers or loved ones, we totally forget all the good things they have done for us. Similarly, when we get angry with others, they too forget all our goodness. That is often why we part company with parents, teachers and good friends. Recognising the dangers of anger, we should resolve to always cultivate Mettā. Hatred is never overcome by hatred, but by love and love alone.

At some stage in our journey towards final liberation, we need to become aware of this defilement and make the necessary effort to clear our underlying saṃsāric anger – the hatred and grudges that we have carried on from life to life – by developing a forgiving heart. The cultivation of Mettā will open our hearts and pave the way for genuine forgiveness that will cleanse saṃsāric anger. In clearing the anger which obscures the mind from all merits and goodness, Mettā also serves as a maturing force for the ripening of our past merits.

The underlying cause of anger is craving or attachment. We are attached not only to our worldly possessions, but also to our views. Anger and aversion arise when we are unable to get what we want or when others challenge the views which we cling to.

Quarrels and arguments often arise at home or at work due to difference in opinions, resulting in unpleasant and unskilful speech and bodily actions that lead to suffering for oneself and others. When no effort is made to overcome our anger and aversion, it will develop into hatred, grudges and ill-will. This unwholesome tendency will continue from life to life. This explains why even when meeting people for the first time, we may have a strong sense of like or dislike for them.

Our strong likes and dislikes lead to discrimination. This is the result of saṃsāric craving and aversion. It is only through mindfulness that we will become more aware of our own thoughts, speech and bodily actions, thereby prompting us to cultivate the necessary insights and wisdom to overcome craving and aversion.

When we first begin to practise Mettā, it is the idea of ‘I’ and ‘my’, which creates a boundary between ourselves and others. As long as we are practising Mettā with the self-idea, we are bound to be disappointed from time to time (e.g. ‘I’ give Mettā to ‘you’ and ‘you’ let ‘me’ down). That is why we need to take Mettā to another level by developing mindfulness meditation that will lead us to develop the wisdom and insight to go beyond self. As we cultivate mindfulness and begin to understand the empty nature of our being, our self-idea begins to diminish and our cultivation of Mettā will become more natural and boundless.



Benefits of Metta



One sleeps
happily



One wakes
happily



One does not
suffer bad dreams



One is dear to
human beings



One is dear to
non-human
beings



The gods
protect one



No fire or poison or
weapon harms one



One develops
concentration
quickly



The expression of
one's face is
serene



One dies
unconfused



One will have a
good rebirth

MINDFULNESS

Prologue

On the night of his enlightenment, more than 2,500 years ago, the Buddha sat in meditation beneath a pipal tree¹⁵ determined to realise the truth that would release himself and all other beings from suffering.

He first developed the different levels of mental absorption, silencing his mind until three profound knowledges or insights arose in him. In the first watch¹⁶ of the night, he saw his own past lives, one after another, recollecting all the events and experiences of his past existences.

In the second watch of the night, he turned his attention to the past lives of other beings. He saw clearly how beings die and are reborn in various existences according to their actions or karma; how evil deeds led to rebirth in suffering states, and how good deeds led to rebirth in fortunate states. Seeing the suffering in his own past lives and in the lives of others, he was determined to find out the true cause of suffering and how to put an end to old age, sickness and death.

In the third watch of the night, he perceived the law of dependent origination – how things arise dependent on causes and conditions. This led to profound insight into ANICCA DUKKHA ANAT'TĀ – impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self – and he realised the rising-falling nature of all mental and physical phenomena.

In this way, the Buddha realised how suffering arises and how suffering ceases. The supramundane knowledge of the Four Noble Truths arose in him and his mind was completely liberated.

15 *Ficus religiosa* – which became known as the Bodhi tree (the tree of enlightenment).

16 The night being divided into three periods or watches: 6pm – 10pm, 10pm – 2am, 2am – 6am.

The whole teaching of the Buddha is about how to overcome suffering – the suffering that accompanies birth, old age, sickness and death – which is conditioned by greed, hatred and delusion. The true understanding and realisation of these teachings depends on how mindful we are of our own thoughts, speech, and bodily actions. It is only through mindfulness and clear awareness that we will be able to recognise the true cause of all the suffering we have created for ourselves and for others, and experience for ourselves how this suffering can be ended.

What is Mindfulness?

‘Mindfulness’ is generally understood as bare attention of the present moment or ‘the here and now’. In Pali, the word is SATI, which is related to the verb SARATI, meaning ‘to remember’, and ANUSSATI or ‘recollection’.

The presence of SATI enables us to remember to keep the mind always in the present and not dwelling in the past or the future.

From the perspective of Buddhist practice, we can say that SATI combines two things: present moment awareness as well as remembering what the Buddha taught, the teachings that lead to Nibbāna, or liberation from all suffering.

Five Functions of Mindfulness

The teachings on mindfulness taught by the Buddha more than 2,500 years ago are found in the discourses known as the Mahā–Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta,¹⁷ and the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta.¹⁸ These discourses explain the development of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. They are

¹⁷ Digha Nikaya, No. 22.

¹⁸ Majjhima Nikaya, No. 10. Contains less detail than the Digha Nikaya sutta.

regarded as the most important suttas in the Pali Tripitaka for one's personal development.

In the opening verse of the discourse, the Buddha said:

EKĀYANO AYAM BHIKKHAVE MAGGO
SATTĀNAṀ VISUDDHIYĀ,
SOKA-PARIDDAVĀNAM SAMATIKKAMĀYA,
DUKKHA-DOMANASSĀNAM ATTHANGAMĀYA,
ÑĀYASSA ADHIGAMĀYA, NIBBĀNASSA SACCHI-KIRIYĀYA.
YADIDAṀ CATTĀRO SATIPAṬṬHĀNĀ.

Addressing the monks, the Buddha said:

There is, O monks, this one way
for the purification of beings,
for overcoming sorrow and distress,
for the cessation of mental and physical stress,
for the attainment of the right path,
and for the realisation of Nibbāna.
Namely, through the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

In other words, it is through the cultivation of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness – mindfulness of the body, feelings, mind (or mental states), and the Dhamma – that we will be able to accomplish all the five functions mentioned.

The first function is the purification of beings. This refers to the purification of one's mind from the tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion – the root causes of all mental and physical stress and anxiety.

The second function is the overcoming of sorrow or distress. Through the cultivation of mindfulness of the body, feelings, mind and the Dhamma, we will realise the impermanent and unsatisfactory nature of all mental and physical phenomena. This will enable us to overcome

the grief, sorrow and distress that arises from the loss of our loved ones or other material possessions.

The third function is about the cessation of mental and physical stress or suffering. It is this aspect of mindfulness that contemporary scientific research has been investigating, including the effects of mindfulness on stress, pain, anxiety, depression and other mental health issues.

The fourth function is the attainment of the right path through the development of higher knowledges and insights, which includes the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

The knowledge or information we obtain through our sensory perception (i.e. through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and the undeveloped state of mind) is not good enough in order to realise the Truth. It does not give us the true picture of things, because of the limitations of our sensory organs. For example, our physical eyes can only detect images within a certain spectrum of light waves, from ultraviolet to infrared. Beyond that, we are unable to see. Our ears are also limited in function. They can only detect sounds within a certain frequency of sound waves.

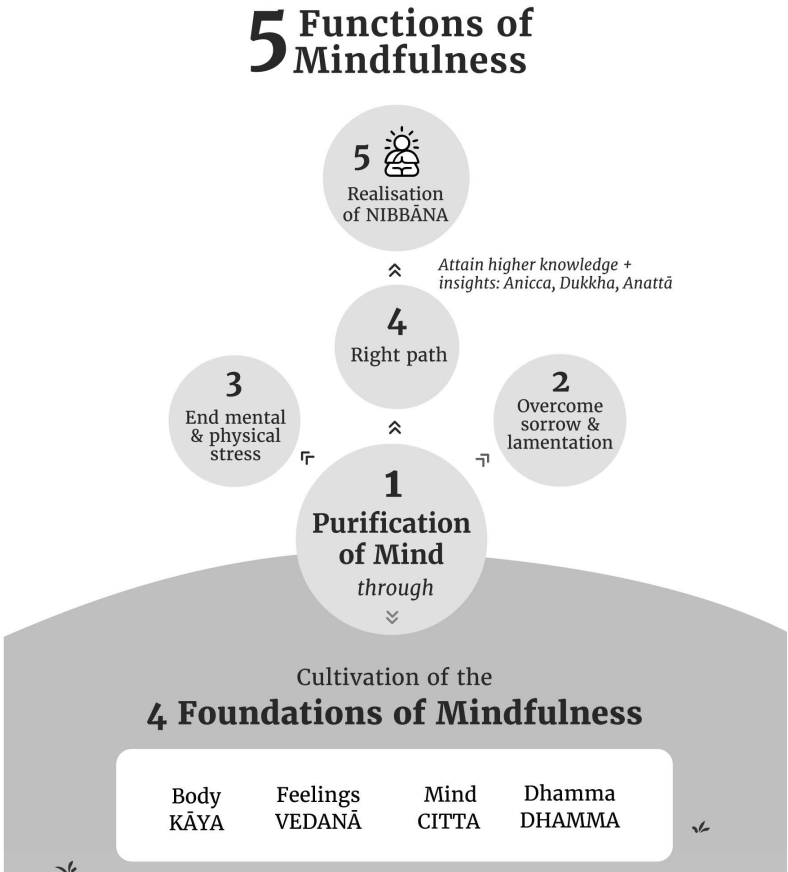
Through the cultivation of mindfulness, we will be able to attain to higher knowledges and insights that will enable us to see what the physical eyes cannot see, to hear what the physical ears cannot hear, and so on... and to know what the ordinary, undeveloped mind cannot know. It is through the laboratory of his enlightened mind that the Buddha was able to perceive and explain the nature and extent of the universe.¹⁹

The fifth function refers to the realisation of Nibbāna, the ultimate goal. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness effectively promote and

19 TI-SAHASSI-MAHĀ-SAHASSI-LOKADHĀTU or Trichiliocosm. Literally 3000 million world elements. Cūḷanikā Sutta AN 3.80..

support the threefold training of SĪLA SAMĀDHI PAÑÑĀ, or morality, concentration and wisdom, resulting in the realisation of Nibbāna.

It is through the cultivation of mindfulness of the body, feelings, mind and the Dhamma that we develop an inner experience which transcends our ordinary sensory perceptions, thoughts and concepts, so that we are able to see things as they really are (and not simply as they appear to be). In other words, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness translate our conceptual knowledge into experiential knowledge – that is, knowledge which we are able to experience for ourselves.



Important Qualities of Mindfulness

The sutta mentions three important qualities involved in the cultivation of mindfulness:²⁰

1. **ĀTĀPI** – to be ardent
2. **SAMPAJĀNA** – clearly knowing, and
3. **SATIMĀ** – to be mindful, as well as
VINEYYA LOKE ABHIJJĀ-DOMANASSA – putting aside
desire and discontent.

ĀTĀPI is translated as ardent. Ardent means having enthusiasm, zest or fervour for something, a positive energy that can motivate us in a certain direction. Here it implies diligence, right effort and a sense of enthusiasm to practise.

Knowing that this practice of mindfulness will lead us to liberation will help us develop a sense of enthusiasm. It will give us the energy we need to make steady progress.

SAMPAJĀNA is to be clearly aware, or to have clear comprehension of all phenomena. This means having clear awareness of all the activities of our body, speech and mind. Clearly understanding the purpose of what one is doing helps one to generate clear awareness, avoid distraction or confusion, and maintain the continuity of mindfulness throughout the day.

SATIMĀ means mindful. As we mentioned earlier, mindfulness is generally understood as bare attention of the present moment or ‘the here and now’ but it is not limited to that. We also need to remember the instructions on how to keep our full attention on the object of meditation. Whenever our mind is distracted, we must not forget to return our attention to the object of meditation.

²⁰ DN22, Mahā-Satipatthāna Sutta.

When these three qualities are present, there will be no opportunity for desire or discontent to arise. When we are truly mindful, our mind will be in its natural state, which is free from attachment and aversion.

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness involves the cultivation of mindfulness with regards to:

1. The Body
2. Feelings
3. Mind (or mental states), and
4. The Dhamma

Mindfulness of the Body

There are six different aspects of mindfulness of the body:

1. Mindfulness of the breath: breathing in and breathing out (known as ĀNĀPĀNĀSATI).
2. Mindfulness of the four body postures: sitting, standing, walking (or moving around) and lying down.
3. Clear comprehension of bodily activities, whatever we do with the body: such as stretching, bending, eating, drinking, answering the call of nature, and so on.
4. Mindfulness of the 32 parts of the body, or the loathsomeness or repulsiveness of the body.
5. Mindfulness of the four elements: earth, water, fire and wind.
6. The nine cemetery contemplations.

Mindfulness of the breath is the most common method of developing calmness of mind (SAMATHA)²¹ which is the foundation for the development of wisdom and insight (VIPASSANĀ).

We should first be aware as we breathe in and breathe out normally. In other words, the breath is our object of meditation. Whenever the mind is distracted, we must remember to return our attention to the breath. Our attention needs to be sustained and prolonged for the mind to develop.

Mindfulness of the breath as an object of meditation will lead to the development of JHĀNAS, or mental absorptions. The term SAMMĀ-SAMĀDHI, or Right Concentration, in the Noble Eightfold Path, is defined in terms of PATHAMA, DUTIYA, TATIYA, CATTUTHA JHĀNA or the first, second, third and fourth JHĀNA.²² The first JHĀNA consists of five mental or JHĀNA factors:

VITAKKA	– applied thought
VICĀRA	– sustained thought
PĪTI	– rapture or joy
SUKHA	– bliss
EKAGGATĀ	– one-pointedness

Of these five factors, three of them are causal factors, which means that we are able to cause them to arise. They are VITAKKA, VICĀRA and EKAGGATĀ – or applied thought, sustained thought, and one-pointedness. The other two are resultant factors and we do not have any control over them. They arise as a result of the presence of the three causal factors. These two resultant factors are PĪTI and SUKHA, or rapture and bliss.

21 In the Pali tradition, there are 40 different objects of meditation that lead to the development of SAMATHA or calmness and tranquillity of the mind.

22 MN 141 Saccavibhaṅga Sutta.

When you bring your attention to your breath, either at the tip of your nostrils or just above your upper lip, where you are able to feel the slight sensation of the air as it enters and leaves the nostrils, that is called VITAKKA, or applied thought – that is, you are applying your thought, your attention to the breath.

When you are able to keep your attention on the breath without being distracted, that is VICĀRA, or sustained thought. And if you are able to sustain your attention in one place, that is how you develop EKAGGATĀ, or one-pointedness.

When these three causal factors are present for some time, without distraction, then the two resultant factors, PĪTI and SUKHA will arise. Although they are explained as ‘rapture’ and ‘bliss’, in the early stages one would experience PĪTI as a sense of satisfaction and enthusiasm, with the body becoming very upright, and a feeling of lightness and not wanting to come out of one’s meditation.²³ There will also be a sense of ease, where the body is physically at ease (KĀYA-SUKHA) and pains and aches are gone or completely under control. The mind also begins to experience a sense of ease, where distracting thoughts are gone (CITTA-SUKHA).

When these five JHĀNA factors – VITAKKA, VICĀRA, PĪTI, SUKHA and EKAGGATĀ – are present and existing in harmony, we say that the mind has entered or attained to the first JHĀNA, or first mental absorption.

In the second JHĀNA, the first two factors of VITAKKA and VICĀRA will ease off, and the feeling of PĪTI and SUKHA becomes more pronounced.

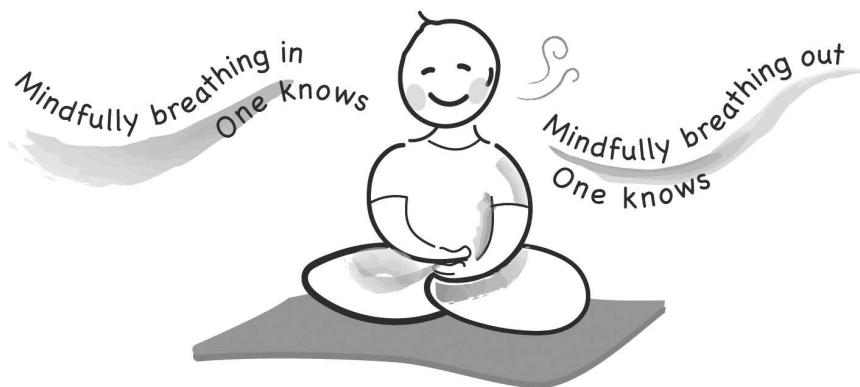
In the third JHĀNA, the experience of PĪTI fades away and there will only be two factors left, SUKHA and EKAGGATĀ, and in the

23 There are various signs of PĪTĪ, depending on one’s individual disposition or temperament.

fourth JHĀNA, the sense of bliss or very subtle pleasant sensation will also fade away and there will only remain one-pointedness of mind, or EKAGGATĀ. That is when the feeling of the breath and the body disappears and the mind becomes very equanimous, unmoved or unshaken by external phenomena.

The JHĀNAS provide a firm foundation upon which one can go on to cultivate VIPASSANĀ or insight meditation. The cultivation of these JHĀNAS, or mental absorptions, should always be undertaken under the guidance of an authentic master, so that one will not go astray.

Mindfulness of Breathing



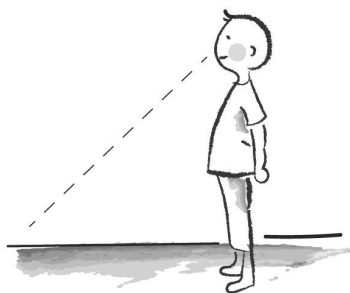
Besides ĀNĀPĀNĀSATI, the first aspect or technique of mindfulness of the body, all the other aspects serve to reinforce the continuity of mindfulness, which is very important, especially in retreat conditions. It is the continuity of mindfulness and the silencing of the mind that provides the strength and power to break the habitual tendency of our minds to create thoughts, which conditions craving and attachment.

The second aspect of mindfulness of the body refers to the four body postures: sitting, standing, walking or moving about, and lying down. In whatever posture that we adopt, we should be mindful of the points of contact and the pressure that the body makes with the ground or seat, so that the body will always be balanced and in proper alignment, thus preventing stress and strain.

Mindfulness of Body Postures



Walking



Standing



Sitting



Lying Down

**In whatever way his body is disposed,
he knows that that is how it is.**

The third aspect is the clear comprehension of bodily activities, whether bending or stretching, eating, drinking, urinating or defecating... as well as whether we are looking ahead or looking sideways, and so on. It includes all the actions or movements of the body.

Clear Comprehension of Bodily Activities



**Moving, stretching,
bending**



Eating, drinking



**Passing excrement,
urine**



Falling asleep, waking up

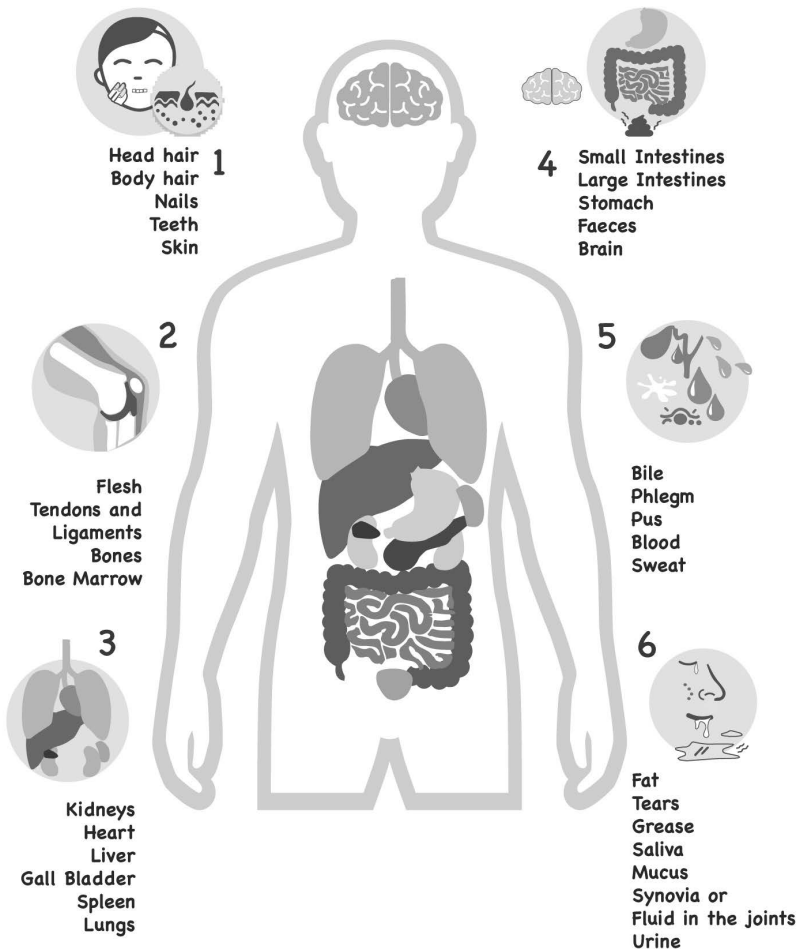


Speaking, staying silent

He is clearly aware of what he is doing

The fourth aspect of mindfulness of the body – the contemplation on the 32 parts of the body – involves the analysis of the body into various anatomical parts, organs and fluids: 20 solid or fleshy parts and 12 liquid parts. The main aim of this contemplation is to reduce and overcome lustful desire or the tendency of attachment to the body or form, by breaking the false notion of beauty (SUBHA–VIPALLĀSA) we ascribe to the body.

Contemplation on the 32 Parts of the Body



Through the contemplation on the 32 parts of the body, we need not physically dissect a body (like we dissect frogs or rats in science class) to learn about the true nature of our body. Through systematic contemplation we will be able to develop the penetrative insight to see through the skin of the body and the layers upon layers of tissues and organs of the body.

The fifth aspect of mindfulness of the body refers to the four elements: earth, water, fire, and wind. They represent the qualities of solidity, cohesion, temperature, and motion; and are constantly in a state of flux (or change). In the context of mindfulness of the body, we should examine the properties of these elements and how they affect our meditation. The qualities of hardness or stiffness, and softness or tenderness – properties of earth element – can become a source of distraction if we are not mindful. Similarly, the cohesive property of water which causes our clothes to cling to our body when we sweat or perspire may cause discomfort and become a source of distraction.

The practice of mindfulness of the four elements also enables us to realise the emptiness of the body (or form) – devoid of the self as ‘I’ and ‘me’.

Contemplation on the 4 Elements



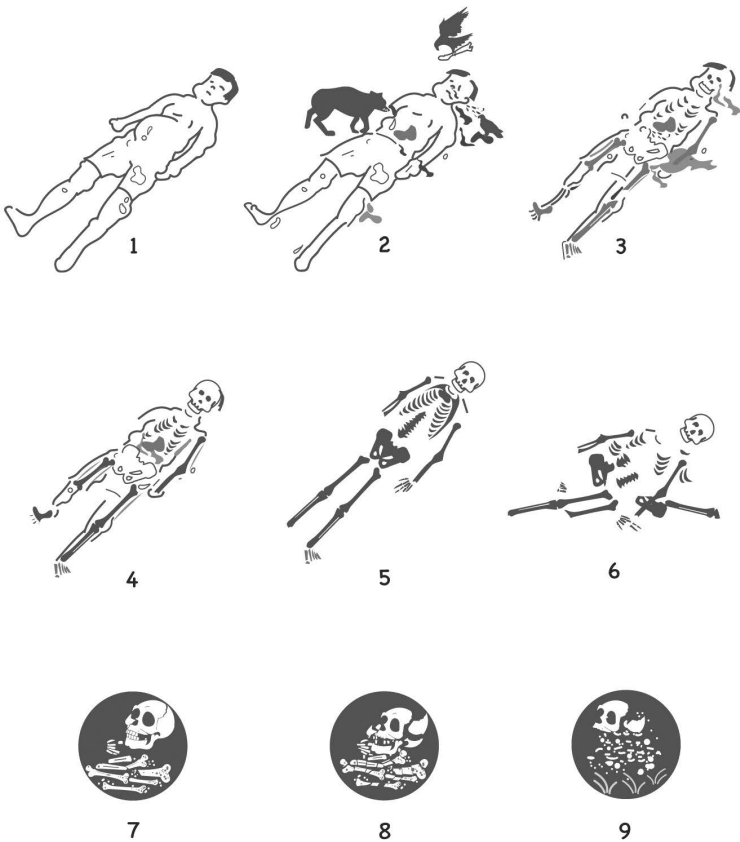
If the earlier contemplation on the 32 parts of the body is not sufficient to wake us up to the true nature of the body, the sixth aspect of mindfulness of the body – the nine cemetery contemplations²⁴ – will

²⁴ Both the contemplation on the 32 parts (PAṬIKŪLAMANAŚIKĀRA) and the nine cemetery contemplations (NAVA-SĪVATHIKA), can be found in AN 6.29 Udāyī Sutta.

certainly enhance our realisation of ANICCA DUKKHA ANATTĀ (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self). As we contemplate each of the nine stages of decomposition of the body, we should consider that our own body will also decay and decompose in this way.

It is important to understand that the aim of this practice is to understand the true nature of the body, in order to reduce and overcome the strong clinging we have to our physical body. It is meant for us to realise the repulsive nature of the body, as well as the fact that death is inevitable. Whatever we cling on to as ‘I’ and ‘my’ will only last for a limited time (as all things have an expiry date).

The Nine Charnel Ground Contemplations



The cultivation of mindfulness of all the different aspects of the body leads to the realisation of ANICCA DUKKHA ANATTĀ. When there is just mindfulness of the body as body, without the idea of ‘I’ or ‘my’, a sense of UPEKKHĀ or equanimity will be established – neither clinging nor having aversion to the body.

As we develop mindfulness of the body, it will naturally lead to the next foundation of mindfulness: mindfulness of feelings.

Mindfulness of Feelings

There are three kinds of feelings: pleasant, unpleasant, and neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

Developing Right Mindfulness of feelings means that one should observe feelings as feelings, with just bare attention, neither clinging to pleasant feelings, nor having aversion towards unpleasant feelings or painful sensations.

This can be experienced at several levels. At the worldly level, the three kinds of feelings are conditioned by the five sense objects: form or visual objects, sound, smell, taste, and tangible objects. Pleasant feeling arises when one sees a pleasant or good-looking form, or hears a pleasant sound, or smells a pleasant odour, and so on. Unpleasant feeling arises when one sees an unpleasant or ugly-looking form, hears an unpleasant sound, or smells an unpleasant odour and so on.

Neither pleasant–nor–unpleasant, or neutral feelings arises when one sees a neutral object, hears a neutral sound, smells a neutral odour and so on. Generally, a neutral feeling arises when a pleasant or unpleasant feeling fades away.

At the spiritual level, the three kinds of feelings are conditioned by the attainment of JHĀNA factors such as PĪTI (rapture) and SUKHA

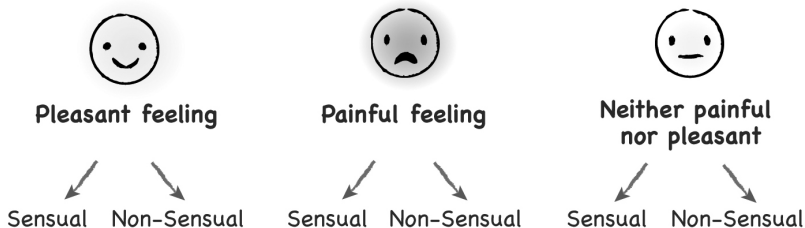
(bliss). Pleasant feeling arises with the arising of PĪTI and SUKHA. Unpleasant feeling arises with the non-arising of PĪTI and SUKHA, and neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling arises with the cessation of PĪTI-SUKHA, i.e. when PĪTI-SUKHA fades away, and one begins to develop a sense of UPEKKHĀ or equanimity.

Through the cultivation of mindfulness of feelings, one should train oneself by observing the arising of feelings, the cessation of feelings, as well as the arising and cessation of feelings. This will lead to the realisation of ANICCA or impermanence.

When there is just mindfulness of feeling as feeling (i.e. bare feeling), without the idea of 'I' or 'my', a sense of UPEKKHĀ or equanimity will be established – without clinging to pleasant feelings or having aversion to unpleasant feelings.

Contemplations of Feelings

She knows that she feels...



The cultivation of mindfulness of feelings will naturally lead on to the next foundation of mindfulness: mindfulness of the mind, or mental states.

Mindfulness of the Mind

Mindfulness of the mind, or mental states, is aimed at developing awareness of our own tendencies to greed, hatred and delusion – the root causes of DUKKHA or suffering.

When there is greed or lustful desire, one is mindful of the presence of lustful desire. When there is no lustful desire, the mind is also mindful of the absence of lustful desire. Similarly, one is also mindful of the presence or absence of hatred and delusion.

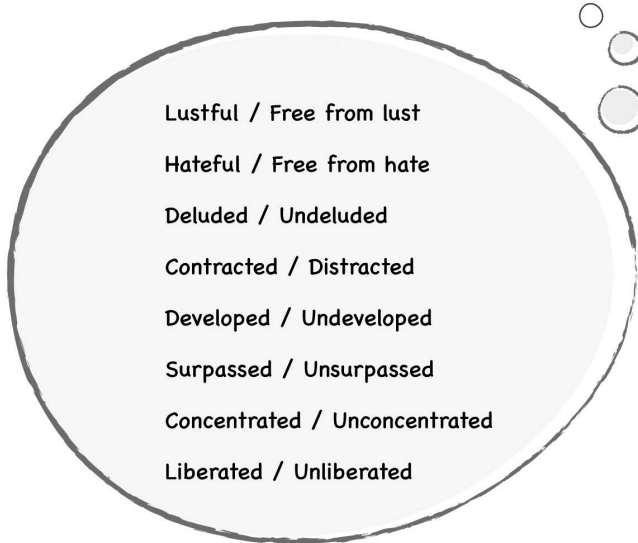
There are also other mental states which we may become mindful of. They are:

- A contracted mind
- A distracted mind
- A developed mind
- An undeveloped mind
- A surpassed mind
- An unsurpassed mind
- A concentrated mind
- An unconcentrated mind
- A liberated mind
- An unliberated mind

The cultivation of mindfulness of the mind involves mindfulness of the arising and cessation of thoughts and the different mental states. This will lead to the realisation of the characteristics of ANICCA (impermanence), DUKKHA (unsatisfactoriness) and ANATTĀ (non-self).

When there is just mindfulness of the mind (or mental states), without the idea of ‘I’ or ‘my’, a sense of UPEKKHĀ or equanimity will be experienced – not clinging to positive or negative thoughts and mental states.

Observation of States of Mind



Lustful / Free from lust
Hateful / Free from hate
Deluded / Undeluded
Contracted / Distracted
Developed / Undeveloped
Surpassed / Unsurpassed
Concentrated / Unconcentrated
Liberated / Unliberated

With the cultivation of mindfulness of the rising and cessation of thoughts, there will be less and less thoughts, and the mind will become more and more empty and silent. This will naturally lead to the development of mindfulness of Dhamma.

Mindfulness of the Dhamma

The term ‘Dhamma’ can mean many things. In the context of Mindfulness, it refers to five different aspects:

1. The Five Mental Hindrances (PAÑCA-NĪVARANA)
2. The Five Aggregates (PAÑCA-KKHANDHA)

3. The Six Sense Bases (SAḶĀYATANA)
4. The Seven Factors of Enlightenment (SATTA-BOJJHAṄGA)
5. The Four Noble Truths (CATTĀRO ARIYA-SACCA)

The Five Mental Hindrances (PAÑCA-NĪVARANA)

1. Sensual desire (KĀMACCHANDA)
2. Anger or aversion (VYĀPĀDA)
3. Sloth and torpor (THĪNA-MIDDHA)
4. Restlessness and remorse (or worry) (UDDHACCA-KUKKUCCHA)
5. Doubt (VICIKICCHĀ)

They are called mental hindrances because they hinder or obstruct the development of the mind.

The Five Mental Hindrances



**Sensual
desire**



Ill-will



**Sloth &
torpor**



**Worry &
restlessness**



Doubt

**He knows when it is present.
He knows when it is absent.**

**He knows how it comes to arise,
how it is abandoned, and
how it will not arise in the future.**

a. Sensual Desire (KĀMACCHANDA)

This refers to our tendency to want to please our six senses. We please our eyes through seeing different colours, shapes and forms; we please our ears with various stimulating music or sounds; we please our tongue with all kinds of tasty food; we please our nose with fragrance and smell; we please our body through touch and feelings; and we please our minds through imagination, fantasies and so on.

The commentary lists out six methods to overcome sensual desire:²⁵

1. Right reflection on an unattractive object (ASUBHA) (such as the contemplation on the 32 parts of the body)
2. Developing JHĀNAS (whereby the mental hindrances are kept under control)
3. Guarding the senses (INDRIYA-SAMVARA-SĪLA)
4. Moderation in eating (BHOJANA-MATTANĀNUTĀ)
5. Support of good friends (KALYĀNA-MITTATĀ), and
6. Helpful conversation (SAPPĀYA-KATHĀ)

With regards to right reflection on an unattractive object, or ASUBHĀNUSSATI (contemplation on the loathsomeness or impurities of the body), we have previously mentioned the contemplation on the 32 parts of the body. This is a very effective way to break the false notion of beauty (SUBHA-VIPALLĀSA) that we ascribe to physical form. However, it is best carried out under proper supervision.

In the first and second JHĀNA, PĪTI (rapture) and SUKHA (bliss) enable one to experience pleasure at a non-sensual level, and thereby distinguish between the gross pleasure of a sensual nature, and the subtle joy and happiness that lies beyond sensory perception. These

²⁵ Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā 3:777-782

JHĀNA factors are an excellent antidote or substitute for those addicted to sensual pleasures.

The third method is with regard to guarding the senses. If our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind are not guarded, we can easily be drawn into things that excite our senses.

When we begin to restrain our senses, by avoiding indulgence in sensual pleasure and various forms of entertainment, we will naturally feel bored and restless, because we are so used to feeding our sense desires. We need to confront and overcome such boredom and restlessness through mindfulness, just being aware of feelings and observing how they arise and cease.

We also need something to focus our attention on. That is what the object of meditation is for. Whenever we are bored or restless, we should observe our feelings and state of mind. As soon as they begin to fade away, we need to return our attention to the object of meditation such as our breath. Just be mindful of breathing, as we breathe in and breathe out normally. That is how we will be able to keep our sense desires under control.

The fourth method to reduce and overcome sensual pleasures lies in moderation in eating. Too much food makes us feel drowsy and sleepy, and unable to meditate.

The remaining methods mentioned in the commentary are the support of good friends and helpful conversation.

Silencing of the mind requires effort and perseverance. In order to reduce the proliferation of thoughts, we first need to discipline and train our minds through sense restraint. This will support the development of right concentration through the first to the fourth JHĀNAs, which

will calm down and stabilise the mind. Right concentration will lead on to the development of the necessary wisdom and insight to realise the impermanent and unsatisfactory nature of all sensual pleasures.

b. Anger, Aversion or Ill-will (VYĀPĀDA)

Craving leads to attachment, and when we are not able to get what we want, anger and aversion will arise.

Aversion, anger, hatred or ill-will is another mental hindrance. It is something which everyone experiences to different degrees.

It is also a common experience amongst meditators. When we develop aversion towards painful sensations or discomfort, we lose the ability to focus our attention on the object of meditation. The practice of right mindfulness is to develop bare attention towards our body, feelings, mind and the Dhamma, without grasping or having aversion towards any of these Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

The antidote for anger and aversion is Mettā or loving-kindness. As we cultivate Mettā more and more – towards ourselves and all those around us – our minds will settle easily and concentration will develop very quickly. We can also reduce and overcome the tendency of aversion by reflecting on the karmic consequences of our actions, as well as by proper and wise reflection, association with good friends, and suitable conversation.

As our mind becomes more calm and settled, we will also be able to notice more subtle layers of aversion that we may have towards ourselves, especially when we have put in great effort but are unable to concentrate properly. Aversion may also develop when we see others progressing in their practice, while we are struggling. That is why we need to rejoice with the success and progress of others, through

the cultivation of MUDITĀ or altruistic joy. Patience, humility, contentment and gratitude are other important qualities to cultivate in order to reduce and overcome the tendencies of aversion.

The sutta mentions that with regards to anger or ill-will, when it is present, we know that it is present; when it is absent, we know that it is absent. And we also know how the unarisen anger comes to arise, and how the cessation of arisen anger comes about. And we also know how the non-arising of the abandoned anger in the future will come about.

With the application of mindfulness of the mind or mental states, as soon as we are mindful of an angry state of mind, we have momentarily stepped out of that state. And then we should apply the antidote to anger, which is Mettā or loving-kindness. When mindfulness is well established, we may not need to apply the antidote any longer. As soon as we become aware of the unskillful state of mind, it will naturally subside.

Anger or hatred is always related to greed, or the tendency of craving and grasping. In order to overcome anger, we need to overcome the tendency of craving by silencing the mind, so that the mind will not go on 'thinking and rethinking' about unpleasant experiences we have gone through.

The ending or complete cessation of anger or hatred depends on the cultivation of wisdom and insight that enables us to overcome the deluded idea of the self as 'I, my, me, mine'. As long as the delusion of the self exists, there will be the problem of the ego and egotistic feelings, and the tendencies of craving and aversion will continue to arise.

c. Sloth and Torpor (THĪNA-MIDDHA)

Sloth and torpor refers to the inertia or laziness of the mind to apply itself to the object of meditation.

There are different causes for sloth and torpor to arise. Usually after a big, heavy meal, we tend to feel sleepy and drowsy, and are unable to concentrate.

Sometimes, due to lack of proper ventilation, one may feel sleepy and drowsy. Sometimes it could be due to our health condition and poor circulation, especially as we age.

Sometimes, lack of contentment, boredom, or a depressed state of mind can condition sloth and torpor to arise. Or sometimes it may be due to dullness or simply sheer laziness of the mind. In which case, one should exert oneself and make every effort to overcome this mental hindrance.

If you are seated in meditation and feel sleepy and drowsy, you should not force yourself to concentrate. Instead, you should change your posture, from sitting to standing and walking. After doing some walking meditation you should sit again to meditate. If you still feel sleepy and drowsy, then you should wash your face and freshen up, then sit again. If you still feel sleepy and drowsy, then take a short nap and commence your practice again.

At night, if you feel sleepy and drowsy, you should go and look up into the starry sky. That will help to wake you up. Then return to your practice. Do not give up. Only when you are really tired, then you should take some rest. That is how we need to apply effort to overcome sloth and torpor.

A particularly effective antidote is to develop sustained effort (VIRIYA) and ‘clarity of cognition’ (ĀLOKA-SANÑĀ).²⁶ This simply refers to a state of mental clarity, developed through the consistent application of mindfulness and clear awareness (SATI-SAMPAJĀNA).²⁷

d. Restlessness and Worry (UDDHACCA-KUKKUCCHA)

Restlessness and worry may be conditioned by several factors. Our tendencies to craving and aversion can cause restlessness of the mind. Sometimes we may also be affected by others around us who are restless and worried. Sometimes we have done something which we should not have done, giving rise to a sense of uneasiness due to remorse or a guilty conscience. At other times, we may not have done what we should have done, like performing our duties or completing our assignments. This too can cause restlessness and worry to arise.

There may also be other subtle causes which we are not aware of. These are often related to our own wrongdoings or shortcomings, either in this lifetime or even in our past lives. They can be overcome by seeking forgiveness and forgiving others, forgiving ourselves, and by going for refuge and seeking forgiveness from the Buddha Dhamma Sangha. This will help to clear any latent remorse which is conditioning restlessness and worry to arise.

The way to overcome restlessness and worry is to develop those qualities which will promote calmness and stability of the mind, such as the cultivation of mindfulness of breathing, in addition to any other meditation objects that will keep the mind calm and composed, such as the cultivation of Mettā (or loving-kindness) and the reflection on the great qualities of the Buddha Dhamma Sangha.

²⁶ E.g. DN 2.

²⁷ The commentaries take the expression ĀLOKA-SANÑĀ more literally and suggest the use of real light (as in light kasina).

e. Doubts (VICIKICĀ)

There are different kinds of doubts that hinder the development of our minds.

Firstly, there is doubt concerning the Buddha Dhamma Sangha. If we have doubts about the enlightenment of the Buddha, and the authenticity of the teachings and the teachers, we will not be able to make much progress in our meditation. Sometimes doubt is related to our own preconceived ideas or lack of understanding, or simply due to our own lack of confidence.

The task of overcoming doubt is not a question of belief or faith, but a process of investigation that leads to clarity and understanding. We need to develop the knowledge that will enable us to clearly distinguish between what is wholesome or skilful, and what is unwholesome or unskilful – not just intellectually, but on the experiential level.

There are three kinds of meritorious actions which will help us to overcome doubts:

- DHAMMA–SAVANA – listening to the Dhamma
- DHAMMA–DESANA – discussion or clarification of Dhamma
- DITṬHIJUKAMMA – the straightening of views

As we progress in our practice, more subtle doubts can arise, such as confusion about the path and non-path to enlightenment, and doubts about our own attainments and accomplishments. That is why proper guidance from authentic teachers is important.

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Anyone who practises meditation will experience one or more of these mental hindrances.

The sutta describes how we should cultivate mindfulness of the five mental hindrances. When they are present, we need to know that they are present. When they are not present, we need to know that they are not present.

For example, with regards to sensual desire, when it arises in our mind, we should know that it is present. When it is absent, we know that it is absent. And we know how sensual desire arises and how it ceases, and upon its cessation, how it will no longer arise in the future.

In the same manner, we need to consider the other mental hindrances of aversion, anger or ill-will; sloth and torpor; restlessness and remorse; and doubts.

Without mindfulness and clear awareness of the presence or the arising of a hindrance, there is little we can do to prevent or overcome it. If the mind is alert, as soon as we become aware of any lustful or sensual desire, it will immediately fade away. And when it is absent, we should know that it is absent. And likewise for the other mental hindrances.

In order to know how the mental hindrances arise and cease, we need to know their causal factors – or what causes them to arise.

The main cause lies in improper reflection on the sense objects. Not seeing sense objects as they truly are – impermanent, unsatisfactory and non-self – we attach a value to what we see, hear, smell, taste or touch. Then, we go on thinking and rethinking about them and we will experience some good or pleasant feeling – which conditions desire to arise – or we will experience unpleasant feeling – which conditions aversion to arise. With proper and wise reflection (YONISO MANASIĀRĀ), and mindfulness we will be able to reduce and overcome the process of thinking and rethinking and observe how the arisen sensual desire (or aversion) ceases.

Proper reflection refers to seeing things as they truly are, understanding all phenomena in terms of ANICCA DUKKHA ANATTĀ.

With the cessation of the five mental hindrances, or when they are at least temporarily under control, the mind will develop different levels of calmness and tranquillity. When these five mental hindrances are held in check, the five JHĀNA factors, VITAKKA, VICĀRA, PĪTI, SUKHA, and EKAGGATĀ²⁸ will arise. With a calm, clear and steady mind, we are able to proceed to the next aspect of Dhamma, the Five Aggregates, which will cut through our deluded perception of the self.

The Five Aggregates (PAÑCA-KKHANDHA)

The term ‘five aggregates’ is the English version of the Pali term PAÑCA-KKHANDHA. PAÑCA means five, KHANDHA literally means ‘heap’ – like a heap of straw or something that has been deposited layer upon layer.²⁹ The word ‘aggregate’ has several different meanings, but when used in the context of the five aggregates, it refers to a group of mental and physical energies. They arise together as a group or bundle, hence the term ‘aggregate’.

The five aggregates comprise the following:

1. RŪPA – physical body, material form or appearance
2. VEDANĀ – feeling
3. SAÑÑĀ – perception or cognition
4. SANKHĀRĀ – mental formations or volitions
5. VIÑÑĀṆA – consciousness

²⁸ See page 38.

²⁹ PTS Pali English Dictionary (khandha): bulk, esp. the body of an elephant or tree; (gross) substance, large mass, heap; a collection of; constituent element.

These five things make up what we call our 'self'. In other words, we analyse our self into these five aggregates. At birth, we are born not only with a physical body (or RŪPA), but also a mental compound (NĀMA) comprising feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness.

Conventionally, we use the words 'I' or 'my' to describe our self, but in reality, when we analyse this self, we will understand that it is made up of NĀMA and RŪPA. RŪPA refers to the physical process, which appears in the form of a physical body or material form. RŪPA is described in terms of PATHAVI (earth), ĀPO (water), TEJO (fire), VĀYO (wind); and their properties of solidity, cohesion, temperature and motion. And NĀMA refers to the mental process: feelings, perception, mental formations and consciousness.

We use the term 'process', because the five aggregates are in a constant state of flux or change. However, this impermanent nature of our self is not easily understood, especially when we are always identified with a label, whether it be a name or a number. (Or both, as on our ID card or passport!)

Having given a label to this physical form, we tend to think of this self as a permanent entity – an individual, a person or a being. This gives rise to the false idea of 'I, my, me, mine'. In fact, this deluded idea of the self is associated with a deeper underlying belief in the soul, or ĀTMAN, which we shall discuss later.

The aim of the cultivation of mindfulness of the five aggregates is to break this deluded idea of the self. The practice involves two stages. First, we are instructed to contemplate the five aggregates, one by one, in order to understand and realise their impermanent and fleeting nature. Then at a later stage, we need to consider them as a whole – to see how they arise and cease together. This involves the contemplation of the six sense bases, as all our thoughts are conditioned by what we

see, hear, smell, taste, touch and think. And the five aggregates are associated with the arising of every thought.

For example, when we think of a friend who is near and dear to us: The act of thinking of the friend is a mental formation (SANKHĀRĀ). Recognising the form (RŪPA) or mental image that appears in our mind involves perception (SAÑÑĀ). There is also the feeling (VEDANĀ) of wanting or not wanting to meet him or her. And there is consciousness (VIÑÑĀNA) of the thought of our friend.

When we investigate in this manner, we will see how the five aggregates arise as a group or a bundle. If we are mindful and clearly aware of these five aggregates, we will see that they arise and fade away. When we cling on to the thought of our friend or loved one, we will naturally create more thoughts (and perhaps end up making an appointment to meet him or her).

In themselves, the five aggregates are not suffering, but our grasping or attachment to the five aggregates constitutes suffering (DUKKHA). The profound meaning of DUKKHA lies in these words of the Buddha:

SAÑKHITTENA PAÑCUPĀDĀNAKKHANDHĀPI DUKKHĀ
In short, the five grasping aggregates are DUKKHA.

Grasping onto something that is constantly changing will naturally lead to suffering. Hence the importance of being clearly aware and mindful of the impermanent and empty nature of the five aggregates.

In the Pheṇa-piṇḍūpama Sutta (or ‘Phena Sutta’)³⁰ the Buddha describes the characteristic feature of each of the five aggregates in terms of a simile:

30 SN 22.95

- RŪPA – the body or form is compared to a lump of **foam or froth**, carried away by a river.
(We can see such lumps of foam or froth by the seaside, washed away by the waves.)
- VEDANĀ – feeling is compared to **bubbles** that form on the surface of water during rain.
- SAÑÑĀ – perception or cognition is compared to the illusory nature of a **mirage**.
- SANKHĀRĀ – mental formations or volitions are compared to a **plantain tree** (or banana tree) which has no pith or heartwood, just as our thoughts have no real substance; they are just conditioned phenomena which arise and fade away.
- VIÑÑĀNA – consciousness is compared to the deceptive performance of a **magician** (who makes us believe in something that does not really exist).

The Five Aggregates



Form
is like a lump
of foam



Feeling
is like a
water bubble



Perception
is like a
mirage



Mental formations
are like the trunk
of a banana tree
(which has no solid core)



Consciousness
is like a
magician

These similes or comparisons clearly illustrate that each of the five aggregates which constitute our self is insubstantial – although it appears, in reality there is nothing there.

Modern science analyses our physical body or form into atoms. Atoms are in fact 99.99% empty space. Our mind or mental processes –

consisting of feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness – are in a state of flux or constant change. As such, there is nothing permanent within this fathom-long body that we can identify as an entity called the ‘self’, and cling onto as ‘I, my, me, mine’.

The cultivation of mindfulness of the body, feelings and mind provides the necessary foundation to realise the emptiness of the five aggregates. The commentary explains how the five aggregates are related to the Four Foundations of Mindfulness:

- Mindfulness of the body relates to the aggregate of form (RŪPA–KKHANDHA).
- Mindfulness of feeling relates to the aggregate of feeling (VEDANĀ–KKHANDHA).
- Mindfulness of the mind or mental states relates to the aggregate of consciousness (VIÑÑĀNA–KKHANDHA).
- Mindfulness of Dhamma relates to the aggregate of perception (SAÑÑĀ–KKHANDHA) and the aggregate of mental formations (SANKHĀRA–KKHANDHA).

The earlier contemplation on each of the first three foundations has led to a certain degree of understanding and realisation of ANICCA (impermanence), DUKKHA (unsatisfactoriness), ANATTĀ (non-self) with regards to the body, feeling, and the mind.

What is now left is for the contemplation of the Dhamma to cut through the deep-rooted belief in the self as a permanent entity, or what is commonly called the ‘soul’.

The conventional understanding of the ‘soul’ has evolved over time, from the classical idea of a perfect, pure and permanent entity to something more fluid and dynamic, such as what is called the ‘psyche’ in modern psychology.

However, when we speak of ‘soullessness’ (or non-self, ANATTĀ) in Buddhism, we should understand that this refers to the classical idea of the soul (or ĀTMAN) and not the contemporary concept expounded by modern psychology.

Rejecting the classical idea of the soul as a perfect, pure and permanent entity, the Buddha defined the self in terms of the five aggregates. This is reflected within all the three schools of thought in Buddhism – Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana – which likewise reject the classical idea of the soul and teach the emptiness of the self.

Whether we ourselves consciously believe in an eternal soul or not, as long as we are ignorant of the true nature of our self, and view our self as a permanent, independent entity, this delusion will cause us to suffer.

It is the false view of the self as a permanent entity that gives rise to the idea of ‘I, my, me, mine’ and along with that, self-centredness and selfishness, which is the root cause of all human problems. That is why it is so important to overcome our deluded perception of the self through the practice of mindfulness.

It is through mindfulness of the six sense bases that we will see how this illusion of the self arises, and how it ceases.

The Six Sense Bases (SAḶĀYATANA)

The six sense bases comprise the six internal sense organs, and the six external sense objects. When the sense object comes into contact with the sense organ, the corresponding consciousness arises.

Sense Organ	Sense Object	Consciousness
Eye (CAKKHU)	visible object or form (RŪPA)	eye consciousness
Ear (SOTA)	sound (SADDA)	ear consciousness
Nose (GHĀNA)	smell or odour (GANDHA)	nose consciousness
Tongue (JIVHĀ)	taste (RASA)	tongue consciousness
Body (KĀYA)	touch (PHOṬṬABBA)	body consciousness
Mind (MANA)	mental object (DHAMMA)	mind consciousness

The development of mindfulness of Dhamma in terms of the six internal and external sense bases involves the cultivation of awareness of how a fetter arises or ceases dependent on both the sense organ and the sense object.

When a visible object comes into contact with the eye organ, eye consciousness arises. The eye consciousness conditions thoughts to arise. The thoughts (conditioned by AVIJJĀ or ignorance) in turn condition the arising of the five grasping aggregates, which give rise to the idea of the self as ‘I’ and ‘my’. This is regarded as the fetter of self-delusion, or SAKKĀYA-DITṬHI.

In a similar manner, each of the other sense objects such as sound, smell, taste etc., condition this fetter to arise, giving rise to the idea that ‘I am hearing, ‘I am smelling, ‘I am tasting, and so on.

When a visual object is presented to the eye, eye consciousness arises. The coming together of these three things – the eye organ, the visual object and eye consciousness – constitute what is called ‘contact’ (PHASSA).

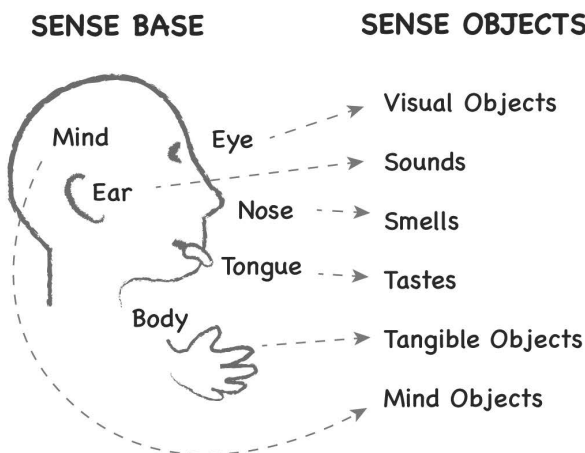
If we are just mindful of the present moment, at the point of contact – ‘seeing as seeing’ – then feeling will not arise. However, if we are not mindful and fully aware at the point of contact, then feeling will arise (as contact conditions feeling³¹).

Through our subjective mind, if we label what we see, hear, smell or so on, as ‘nice’ or ‘beautiful’, pleasant feeling will arise. If we label what we see, hear, smell or so on, as ‘ugly’ or ‘noisy’, we will experience unpleasant feeling.

If we apply our mindfulness and become clearly aware of the feeling that has arisen, then we will only experience feeling as feeling. Those who are well trained in mindfulness and clear awareness of the six internal and external sense spheres will be able to perceive things as they really are – without being influenced by the preconceived inclinations and biases that assign a value to whatever we experience.

31 This is explained in the law of dependent origination. See page 85.

The Six Internal and External Sense-Bases



He knows the sense base,
He knows the sense object,
He knows whatever fetter arises
dependent on the two.
And he knows how a fetter comes to arise,
and he knows how it is abandoned,
and he knows how it will not arise in the future.



If we are not sufficiently mindful and aware, feeling will in turn condition craving to arise. Craving (TANHĀ) manifests both as grasping or desire (wanting something), and aversion or rejection (not wanting something). When conditioned by something ‘nice’ and

pleasant, our desire or craving leads to attachment. When conditioned by something 'ugly' or unpleasant, then aversion arises.

At the root of this matter, it is ignorance (AVIJJĀ), or the false idea of the self as 'I' and 'my', that is influencing this process of feeling and perception. It is through the wrong view of the self that we perceive the process of seeing, hearing, smelling and so on, as though there is a person or being that is seeing, hearing, smelling... etc. That is how the fetter of SAKKĀYA-DITṬHI or self-delusion, arises.

In reality, there is no 'person' or 'being' that is seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling or thinking. These phenomena merely arise dependent on cause and effect. This process is explained in the law of dependent origination (PAṬICCA-SAMUPPĀDA).³²

If a fetter arises, we then need to be clearly aware and mindful of our state of mind – i.e. whether craving, aversion or ignorance is present. If it does not fade away, then by applying the antidote the fetter will temporarily be abandoned.

The contemplation on loathsomeness of the body is the antidote that will reduce the gross tendency of craving and attachment, and the cultivation of Mettā or loving kindness is the antidote that will reduce the tendency of anger or aversion. However, in order to prevent these fetters from arising in the future, we need to demolish the false belief of the self as 'I' and 'my'. This can be carried out through the systematic cultivation of SAMATHA-VIPASSANĀ.

32 See page 85.

SAMATHA–VIPASSANĀ

SAMATHA, or calmness and tranquillity, is attained through the development of the four JHĀNAS or mental absorptions (as mentioned in the cultivation of mindfulness of the body) through ĀNĀPĀNĀSATI, the contemplation of the breath.

The JHĀNAS are important in order to temporarily suppress the arising of thoughts conditioned by the belief in a permanent self, as well as other wrong views. While these are temporarily suppressed, wisdom and insight can develop through the training of VIPASSANĀ or insight, to actually cut through these deep-rooted false beliefs.

Upon coming out of the fourth JHĀNA, the mind is sharp, refined and subtle. It is also more stable and not easily distracted. This calm, clear and stable state of mind is conducive to the development of wisdom and insight.

In the development of VIPASSANĀ,³³ or insight meditation, three essential insights or higher knowledges are necessary to convert our conceptual or intellectual knowledge into experiential knowledge. They are:

1. The insight knowledge with regards to clear discrimination between mental (NĀMA) and physical (RŪPA) processes.
2. The insight knowledge into the principle governing mental and physical processes; namely, the knowledge of CAUSE and EFFECT.
3. The insight into rising-falling phenomena (UDAYA–VAYA).

These insight knowledges require a clear understanding of the five aggregates and the six sense bases. The guidance of authentic teachers to

³³ There are different techniques in the development of VIPASSANĀ but the principles are the same. The techniques explained here are based on what was taught by the Venerable Amatha Gavesi of Sri Lanka.

take one through a systematic approach to SAMATHA–VIPASSANĀ is necessary to prevent one from going astray.

The analysis of NĀMA–RŪPA is none other than the five aggregates. NĀMA refers to the mental aspect – feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. RŪPA refers to form, such as the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body; and anything that is perceived through the six sense bases – such as visual objects, sounds, odours, tastes, tangible objects and thought forms. The systematic contemplation of the five aggregates as NĀMA–RŪPA arising through the six sense bases, and the silencing of the mind will lead to different levels of awakening.

The development of these insight knowledges can be carried out effectively during walking meditation.³⁴ The intention to walk is noted as ‘NĀMA’ or a mental phenomenon, and the movement of the leg is noted as ‘RŪPA’ or a physical phenomenon. In the early stages, the noting of NĀMA–RŪPA is usually recognised after the event. But gradually we train our minds to recognise the intention and the bodily movement (or NĀMA–RŪPA) as they arise.

When ‘sound’ arises, the mind is clearly aware of the sound as RŪPA – a physical phenomenon – and the knowing or perception of the sound as NĀMA – or a mental phenomenon. Similarly, when a smell or odour arises, the mind is clearly aware of the smell as RŪPA, and the knowing or perception of the smell as NĀMA.

In the same manner, all the other sense objects – including thought forms or mental objects – are noted as NĀMA (mental phenomena) and RŪPA (physical phenomena). The differentiation of NĀMA–RŪPA should be carried out continuously without distraction so that we are able to clearly differentiate the mental and physical phenomena

34 It should be noted that in the early stages of SAMATHA VIPASSANĀ practice, we should keep our attention only on the movement of the legs during walking meditation, in order to develop SAMĀDHI. We should not analyse the movements as NĀMA–RŪPA. It is only when SAMĀDHI is established (and we are instructed by our teacher) that we begin to develop VIPASSANĀ or insight meditation.

as and when they occur. (In order to do this, a good degree of SAMĀDHI is required, hence the importance of the four JHĀNAS.)

The next step is to clearly observe the principle governing the interaction of mental and physical phenomena in terms of CAUSE and EFFECT. During walking meditation, we note the intention to walk as the cause and the movement as the effect. Once we are familiar with observing cause and effect during walking meditation, we should apply this practice to all the six sense objects. In other words, whenever a sense object comes into contact with the sense base, we note the sense object as the cause and the knowing or cognition of the object as the effect.

The training of the mind to observe our experiences in terms of CAUSE and EFFECT will eventually lead to the next insight knowledge of UDAYA–VAYA or rising–falling. In the early stages, we may analyse rising–falling phenomena in two phases, ‘rising’ and ‘falling’, but eventually our minds need to be sharp enough to experience rising–falling in a single moment. This will result in the direct experience of ANICCA, accompanied by a sense of bliss and joy. That is how we are able to convert our conceptual knowledge of impermanence into experiential knowledge.

Once the transient nature of the five aggregates is realised, the concept of the self as ‘I’ and ‘my’ will fall apart. At this stage, full faith and confidence in the Buddha Dhamma Sangha will arise and we will be able to break the first three of the ten fetters³⁵ – self-delusion (SAKKĀYA–DITṬHI), doubt (VICIKICĀ), and attachment to wrongful rituals (SĪLABBATA–PARĀMĀSA) – leading to the attainment of the first level of awakening or SOTĀPANNA (stream-enterer). Although the tendencies of craving and attachment are not yet overcome, one’s final liberation is assured within seven lifetimes at most.

35 The Ten Fetters (DASA–SAMYOJANA), are what ‘bind’ or ‘chain’ beings to saṃsāric existence.

The second and third level of awakening depends on the degree of silence in our minds. During the process of silencing, which can be carried out in any of the four postures (preferably in a quiet environment), the mind should not be fixed on any particular object of meditation. It is just clearly aware and mindful of whatever phenomena that arise.

When any thought arises, we only need to note it as 'ANICCA' or 'impermanent' and it will dissolve. Otherwise, we can analyse the thought into the five aggregates and it will dissolve. In this manner, there will be less and less thoughts and the mind will become more and more silent. The interval between thoughts will become longer and longer. When the momentum of silence reaches a threshold, the tendency to create thoughts will cease. That is how we will effectively reduce and overcome our craving tendency. It is only when we have developed a certain degree of wisdom and insight into the five aggregates that we will be able to effectively silence the mind.

When we are able to maintain silence for at least fifty percent of the time, the tendency of craving will also be reduced by fifty percent. That is when sensual desire and aversion will be kept under control, and we will attain the second level of awakening, SAKADĀGĀMI or Once Returner. 'Once Returner' means that one will be reborn in the human realm only once, but rebirth can take place in the Devaloka (or the Heavenly realm) if arahantship is not attained within this lifetime. Since these two fetters are not completely overcome, one can still experience thoughts of lust and anger to a certain extent.

When we are able to maintain total silence, the tendency of sensual desire and aversion will be eradicated, and the third level of awakening, ANĀGĀMI or Never-Returner will be attained. Thereafter, one neither returns to this world nor is born in the heavenly realms. Since one has rooted out the desire for sense gratification, after death he or she will be reborn in the Pure Abodes (SUDDHĀVĀSA), an environment reserved for ANĀGĀMIS, until enlightenment is attained.

The final level of awakening, the ARAHAT or ARAHANT, the Worthy-One, is attained when the five remaining fetters are broken or destroyed. They are: attachment to the realms of form (by clinging on to RŪPA-JHĀNAS); attachment to the realms of the formless (by clinging on to ARŪPA-JHĀNAS); pride (MĀNA), as a result of ‘measuring’ or comparing oneself with others; restlessness (UDDHACCA), as a result of the pride that arises through comparing oneself with others in terms of spiritual attainments; and the last fetter of AVIJJĀ or ignorance. This refers to the very subtle illusion of the self. Even though the gross idea of self is overcome in the first level of awakening (SOTĀPANNA), there is still a subtle illusion of self that needs to be overcome through the realisation of the Four Noble Truths.

When mindfulness of the Dhamma with regards to the six sense bases is well established, we then move on to the next aspect of Dhamma: the seven factors of enlightenment.

The Seven Factors of Enlightenment (SATTA-BOJJHAṄGA)

The seven factors of enlightenment are the factors that lead to enlightenment. They represent culmination of the development of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. They comprise the following:

SATI	– mindfulness
DHAMMA-VICAYA	– investigation of Dhamma
VIRIYA	– energy or effort
PĪTI	– rapture
PASSADDHI	– tranquillity
SAMĀDHI	– concentrated insight (VIPASSANĀ-SAMĀDHI)
UPEKKHĀ	– equanimity

The first and foremost factor is SATI, or mindfulness. Through the cultivation of mindfulness of the body, feeling, mind, and the earlier aspects of the Dhamma, we would have already encountered these seven factors to varying degrees.

Having developed calmness and insight (SAMATHA-VIPASSANĀ) through the four JHĀNAS and realised the emptiness of the five aggregates, our practice of mindfulness will now be matured to the level for these seven factors to arise, one after another in quick succession, leading to the realisation of Nibbāna.

When one's mindfulness is thus well-established, one only needs to commence the practice with a determination (ADITṬHĀNA) to develop the first factor of enlightenment, by prompting oneself with the word 'SATI'. This will then naturally trigger off the remaining six factors of enlightenment, without the need for effort to set the process of enlightenment in motion.

As one turns one's attention to ĀNĀPĀNASATI, or mindfulness of the breath, it will naturally lead to the experience of the first to the fourth JHĀNA, and in rapid succession, mindfulness of feelings, the mind and the different aspects of the Dhamma will follow.

However, if, after making this determination, one notices that the enlightenment factors do not arise, one should then continue with the cultivation of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness until the five mental hindrances are held in check.

When the five mental hindrances are no longer of any concern, the practice will naturally progress to the five aggregates and the six sense bases. That is when the second factor of enlightenment, DHAMMA-VICAYA or investigation of the Dhamma arises. On the mundane level, we understand the investigation of Dhamma to mean doing research or listening to Dhamma talks about different Dhamma topics.

However, as an enlightenment factor, it refers to the supramundane level, the investigation or contemplation of all mental and physical phenomena that arise through the internal and external sense spheres (or the six sense bases) in terms of rising-falling – knowing that whatever is of the nature to arise, is also of the nature to cease.

With the experience of UDAYA–VAYA–ÑĀNA or rising-falling phenomena, a strong and unshakeable sense of faith and confidence (SADDHĀ) in the Buddha Dhamma Sangha will develop. This faith and confidence will condition the third factor of enlightenment, VIRIYA or energy to arise, along with great joy or rapture, PĪTI – the fourth factor of enlightenment. This will in turn pitch the mind to another level, conditioning PASSADDHI or tranquillity, the fifth factor; and SAMĀDHI or concentrated insight, the sixth factor.

PASSADDHI or tranquillity is the experience of lightness and clarity through the calmness of mind and body. The sixth factor, SAMĀDHI, refers to VIPASSANĀ–SAMĀDHI or concentrated insight. It is not the same as the JHĀNA SAMĀDHI.

The concentrated insight which develops through the experience of UDAYA–VAYA or the rising-falling of all the other factors of enlightenment will pitch the mind to a higher level, until the attainment of UPEKKHĀ or equanimity – the seventh factor of enlightenment.

As equanimity grows more and more, the mind will naturally enter a state of void or emptiness and experience NIBBĀNA–DHĀTU, the element of Nibbāna or Nibbānic bliss.³⁶

NIBBĀNAM PARAMAM SUKHAM
Nibbāna is the highest bliss.

³⁶ This is the experience of the supramundane dhamma (ASAṆKHATA–DHAMMA – the unconditioned dhamma).

The depth or degree of this experience may vary, coming in a flash or lasting for some time, depending on the strength and clarity of one's mind

In other words, each of these factors has already played a part in our cultivation of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. While we are training ourselves in mindfulness, it may seem to be a very gradual and tedious process, but when our mindfulness matures at this final stage, if we make the determination, these seven factors of enlightenment can arise so quickly that the practitioner may not really be conscious of the whole process. Through repeated practice, we will become familiar with their sequential development, one conditioning the others in rapid succession, with no real effort required. That is how we will be able to enjoy the bliss of Nibbāna longer and longer, bringing the practice to perfection.

What is Nibbāna? NIBBĀNA in Pali or NIRVĀṆA in Sanskrit³⁷ is the *summum bonum* or ultimate goal in Buddhism. It is true happiness totally free from the tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion – the root causes of all the suffering that accompanies the saṃsāric cycle of birth, old age, sickness and death.

Through the development of the seven factors of enlightenment, Nibbāna will be realised at varying levels or degrees. The contemplation on the final aspect of mindfulness of the Dhamma, the Four Noble Truths, will pave the way for the complete realisation of Nibbāna.

The Four Noble Truths (DUKKHA-ARIYA-SACCA)

The profound knowledge that the Buddha realised on the night of his enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree in Bodhgaya was taught in his first sermon, the Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta at the Deer Park in Sarnath, in terms of the Four Noble Truths:

³⁷ According to the commentaries, NIBBĀNA is composed of NI = 'absence', and VANA = 'a metaphorical expression of craving'. As such, NIBBĀNA can be defined as the eradication of craving.

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 1. DUKKHA | – suffering or unsatisfactoriness |
| 2. SAMUDAYA | – cause (of DUKKHA) |
| 3. NIRODHA | – cessation (of DUKKHA) |
| 4. MAGGA | – path (leading to the cessation of DUKKHA) |

The development of mindfulness of the Dhamma in terms of the Four Noble Truths involves the clear understanding of the different aspects of DUKKHA, its cause, its cessation and the path that leads to the cessation of DUKKHA, namely the Noble Eightfold Path.

DUKKHA–SACCA

DUKKHA–SACCA, the Noble Truth of suffering (or unsatisfactoriness), is explained in terms of its physical aspect, its mental aspect, and a combination of mental and physical aspects with respect to the five grasping aggregates (PAÑCUPĀDĀNA–KKHANDHĀ).

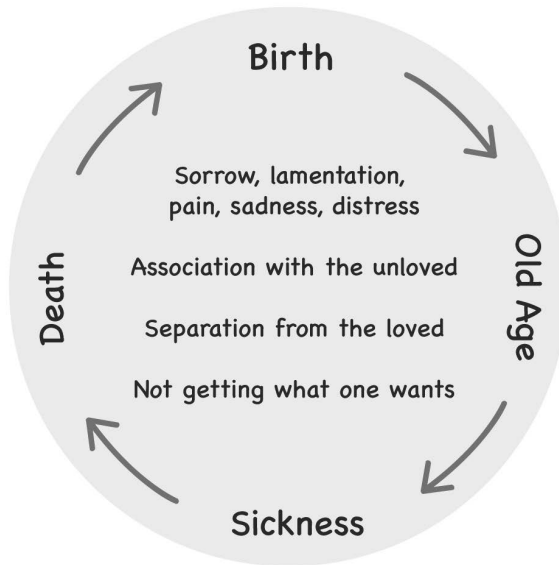
In terms of its physical aspect, that is, suffering conditioned by the body, DUKKHA is explained as birth, aging and death.³⁸ The mental aspect consists of sorrow, lamentation, bodily pain, mental pain or sadness, despair or distress; association with unloved or unpleasant people and conditions; separation from loved ones and pleasant conditions; and not getting what one desires (unfulfilled desires or disappointment).

Then, as a culmination of both the mental and physical aspects, DUKKHA is summarised in terms of the five grasping aggregates (PAÑCUPĀDĀNA–KKHANDHĀ). The more profound meaning of DUKKHA lies in this term, ‘the five grasping aggregates’, which is not easily understood by ordinary lay people. However, it is very

³⁸ Sickness is later explained under ‘not getting what one desires’. It is however included in the First Sermon, the Dhammacakka–ppavattana Sutta.

important for us to understand it, if we wish to know what DUKKHA is really about. The word ‘suffering’ does not really give us the true meaning of DUKKHA.³⁹

The Noble Truth of Suffering



In short, the five aggregates of grasping are suffering.

SAMUDAYA-SACCA

SAMUDAYA-SACCA, or the Noble Truth of the cause (or the arising) of suffering, is explained in terms of craving that produces rebirth, and is accompanied by delight and lust, namely: the craving for sensual pleasures (KĀMA-TANĤĀ), the craving for existence (BHAVA-TANĤĀ), and the craving for non-existence (VIBHAVA-TANĤĀ).

As we have discussed earlier, conditioned by AVIJJĀ or ignorance, craving arises as a result of the interaction of our sense bases – our

³⁹ See Bhikkhu Anālayo, “Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realisation”, p.242.

eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind – with the sense objects of form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental objects.

When we give a value to something, such as ‘nice’ or ‘pleasant’, good feeling will naturally arise. This good feeling will condition craving for form, sound, smell, taste, touch or mental objects. This in turn conditions thoughts, and the process of thinking and rethinking. It is this process of thinking and rethinking that generates further craving and attachment to develop.

Craving is a force which drives us to get what we want. When we are able to get what we want, we feel happy. But what we do not realise is that we are actually adding more fuel to the force of craving. So the craving gets stronger and stronger, and we want more and more. That is how attachment develops. When we are not able to get what we want, then we become unhappy, and aversion or anger arises.

Both craving and aversion are conditioned by the ignorance of the true nature of things. All mental and physical phenomena are subject to change and impermanence. As such, our craving and clinging to things that are constantly changing naturally leads to disappointment and suffering.

Since craving and attachment are conditioned by our own mental creations through thinking and rethinking, we need to realise that what we have created, we are also able to ‘discreate’ through the training of the mind.

The peace of mind which we experience in meditation is the result of the silencing or stilling of the mind, when the interval between thoughts becomes longer and longer. It is the momentum of silence that will eventually break the habitual tendency of the mind to create thoughts, thus putting an end to mental proliferation.

The cultivation of mindfulness of the cause of suffering through careful observation of the arising and cessation of craving will naturally lead on to the contemplation on the cessation of DUKKHA.

NIRODHA-SACCA

NIRODHA-SACCA or the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering is explained in terms of the complete cessation of craving, giving it up, relinquishing it, liberating oneself from it, and detaching oneself from it.

The detachment or cessation of craving occurs at the point of contact, when one's sense bases – eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or mind – interact with the sense objects of form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mental objects.

As we have described earlier, if, at the point of contact, we are mindful and clearly aware of 'feeling as feeling', feeling will cease and fade away. With the cessation of feeling (i.e. bare feeling as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral) craving ceases. That is how craving is overcome.

With the application of mindfulness and clear awareness one detaches oneself from these phenomena and does not cling on to them. So even though the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness are present, the grasping or clinging tendency is not present. With the cessation of the grasping or craving tendency, the process of thinking and rethinking also ceases, and hence suffering ceases.

The cultivation of mindfulness of the cessation of suffering will naturally lead on to the final aspect of mindfulness of the Dhamma: the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

MAGGA-SACCA

MAGGA-SACCA is explained in terms of the Noble Eightfold Path, namely:

SAMMĀ-DITṬHI	– Right Understanding (or Right View)
SAMMĀ-SANKAPPO	– Right Thoughts (or Right Intention)
SAMMĀ-VĀCĀ	– Right Speech
SAMMĀ-KAMMANTO	– Right Body Action
SAMMĀ-ĀJĪVO	– Right Livelihood
SAMMĀ-VĀYĀMO	– Right Effort
SAMMĀ-SATI	– Right Mindfulness
SAMMĀ-SAMĀDHI	– Right Concentration

Right Understanding or Right View refers to the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths, namely, DUKKHA (suffering or unsatisfactoriness), the cause, the cessation and the way leading to the cessation of DUKKHA. When Right View is established, then all the other path factors follow – Right Thoughts, Right Speech, Right Action... etc.

Right Thoughts or Right Intention refers to thoughts of renunciation, and thoughts free from ill-will and cruelty.

Right Speech refers to the avoidance of lying, slandering, harsh speech, and frivolous talk.

Right Body Action refers to the avoidance of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct.

Right Livelihood refers to the giving up of wrong livelihood,⁴⁰ and earning a living through right livelihood.

Right Effort is fourfold, namely:

- The effort to prevent the arising of unwholesome or unskillful states of mind;
- The effort to overcome any unwholesome states of mind that have arisen;
- The effort to cultivate wholesome states of mind that have not arisen;
- The effort to maintain wholesome states of mind that have arisen, to prevent their decline, and to increase, expand and develop them to the fullest.

Right Mindfulness refers to the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, namely:

- Contemplating the body in the body;
- Contemplating feelings in the feelings;
- Contemplating mind in the mind;
- Contemplating the Dhamma in the Dhamma.

In developing these Four Foundations of Mindfulness one should always be ardent, clearly aware and mindful, putting aside clinging and aversion.

Right Concentration refers to the development of the first, second, third and fourth JHĀNAS or mental absorptions (which we have discussed earlier).

40 There are five kinds of wrong livelihood that should be avoided, namely: the production and sale of armaments or weapons; the production and sale of poisons; the production and sale of drugs and intoxicants; the bringing up of animals for slaughter; and slave trade (or human trafficking).

Contemplation on the Four Noble Truths

How do we go about contemplating the Four Noble Truths? Firstly, we need to understand that there is something we need to do with regards to each of the Four Truths:

DUKKHA has to be ‘perceived’ or ‘understood’;
Its cause or origin has to be ‘eradicated’;
Its cessation has to be ‘realised’; and
The practical path to this realisation has to be ‘developed’.

In the first sermon of the Buddha, the Dhammacakka–ppavattana Sutta, the Buddha declared to the first five ascetics how he had perceived and realised the Four Noble Truths. He said:

This is the Noble Truth of DUKKHA.
It should be fully perceived.
And it has been fully perceived.

This is the Noble Truth of the cause of suffering (SAMUDAYA).
It should be eradicated.
And it has been eradicated.

This is the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering (NIRODHA).
It should be realised.
And it has been realised.

This is the Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering (MAGGA).
It should be developed.
And it has been developed.

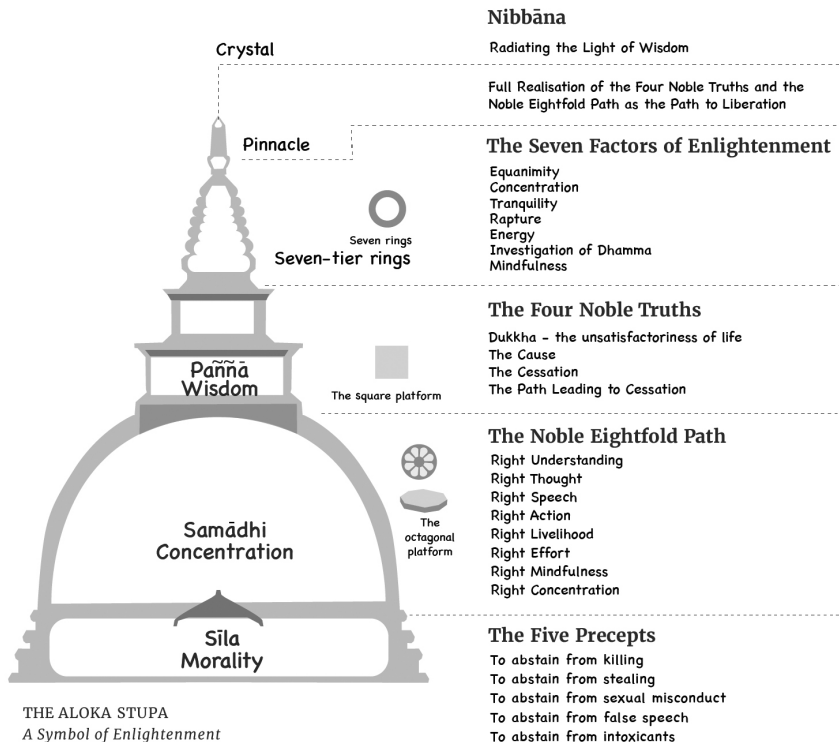
This is known in Pali as TIPARIVATṬAṀ DVĀDASĀKĀRAṀ, or the three aspects and 12 ways in which the Buddha realised the Four Noble Truths.

Although many of us have heard about the Four Noble Truths and understood the teachings at the intellectual or conceptual level, we still need to practise and realise them in all the three aspects and 12 ways. This is what is meant by PARIYATTI, PATIPATTI, PATIVEDHA, or theory, practice and realisation.

Any truth, for that matter, should be investigated (or practised) and realised for oneself. Otherwise it will only remain a belief or dogma.

This concludes the explanation on how one develops the foundation of mindfulness of the Dhamma in terms of the Four Noble Truths – the very knowledge which the Buddha himself realised under the Bodhi tree.

The Result of Establishing Mindfulness



Dependent Origination (PAṬICCA–SAMUPPĀDA)

In order to understand how the saṃsāric cycle of birth and death can be ended, we need to further consider the teachings of PAṬICCA–SAMUPPĀDA, or dependent origination, and the role of mindfulness in cutting through the links of dependent origination. PAṬICCA–SAMUPPĀDA is what the Buddha realised on the night of his enlightenment, and later expressed in terms of the Four Noble Truths.⁴¹

On the night of his enlightenment, three important knowledges or insights arose in the mind of the Buddha. They are:

1. PUBBE–NIVĀSĀNUSSATI–ÑĀṆA
The recollection of past lives.
2. CUTŪPAPĀTA–ÑĀṆA
The ability to see how beings die and are reborn according to their karma.
3. ĀSAVAKKHAYA–ÑĀṆA
The knowledge of putting an end to all defilements through the realisation of dependent origination.

The teachings of dependent origination – which explains how suffering arises, and how suffering ceases – have been passed down to us in terms of a formula with twelve links, in two cycles – a forward and a reverse order.⁴²

41 SN 56.11

42 The underlying principle can be summarised as: IMASMIṀ SATI IDAM HOTI, IMASSUPPĀDĀ IDAM UPPAJJATI. When this exists, that exists. When this arises, that arises. IMASMIṀ ASATI IDAM NA HOTI, IMASSA NIRODHĀ IDAM NIRUJJHATI. When this does not exist, that does not exist. When this ceases, that ceases. In other words, whatever is of the nature to arise is also of the nature to cease.

The first cycle or forward order (ANULOMA) explains how suffering arises. This is also known as the BHAVA-CAKKA or the wheel of becoming. The second cycle or the reverse order (PAṬILOMA) explains how suffering ceases. That is, how to put an end to the saṃsāric cycle of birth and death.

The twelve links are as follows:

AVIJJĀ-	PACCAYĀ	SAṄKHĀRĀ
SANKHĀRA-	PACCAYĀ	VIÑÑĀṆAṀ
VIÑÑĀṆA-	PACCAYĀ	NĀMA-RŪPAṀ
NĀMA-RŪPA-	PACCAYĀ	SAḶĀYATANAṀ
SAḶĀYATANA-	PACCAYĀ	PHASSO
PHASSA-	PACCAYĀ	VEDANĀ
VEDANĀ-	PACCAYĀ	TANHĀ
TANHĀ-	PACCAYĀ	UPĀDĀNAṀ
UPĀDĀNA-	PACCAYĀ	BHAVO
BHAVA-	PACCAYĀ	JĀTI
JĀTI-	PACCAYĀ	JARĀ-MARAṆAṀ

SOKA-PARIDEVA-DUKKHA-
DOMANASSUPĀYĀSĀ SAMBHAVANTI

Ignorance conditions volitional activities;
 Volitional activities condition consciousness;
 Consciousness conditions mental and physical phenomena
 (or mind and body);
 Mental and physical phenomena (or mind and body) condition
 the six sense bases;
 The six sense bases condition contact;
 Contact conditions feeling;
 Feeling conditions craving;
 Craving conditions attachment;
 Attachment conditions becoming;
 Becoming conditions birth;

Birth conditions old age, death, grief, lamentation, pain, depression and despair.

Dependent origination begins with AVIJJĀ or ignorance as the main cause of suffering. Ignorance refers to the state of mind that is unaware of the true nature of life. As long as we have ignorance, there will be all sorts of thoughts – SAṄKHĀRĀ or volitional activities. For example, when we suffer and we do not know the cause, many different thoughts will arise in our mind, and we will tend to place the blame on everything around us. That is how AVIJJĀ conditions SAṄKHĀRĀ.

Furthermore, not understanding the true nature of the mind, we tend to identify things in terms of subject/object – as if there is a person, a being or an entity that sees a visual object, hears sound and so on, instead of just ‘seeing as seeing’, ‘hearing as hearing’, etc.

The first two links explain how our previous life conditions our present lifetime, and the last two links explain how our present life conditions our future life. In other words, the past conditions the present and the present conditions the future.

Dependent origination can also be understood as a dynamic process taking place, here and now; in which case the term NĀMA-RŪPA refers to our mental and physical processes, and the term JĀTI refers to the birth of the idea of the false notion of the self as ‘I’ and ‘my’, not simply the birth of a being. As long as there is ignorance, the false notion of ‘I’ and ‘my’ will keep arising.

As we have mentioned earlier, the Buddha explains suffering not only in terms of physical and mental pain and agony, but also in terms of the five grasping aggregates.⁴³

43 SAṄKHITTENA PAṆCUPĀDĀNA-KKHANDHĀPI DUKKHĀ. In short, the five grasping aggregates are DUKKHA. (Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta SN 56.11)

In order to break through the false notion of the self as ‘I’, and ‘my’, we need to cultivate mindfulness. Having inherited a mind-body or mental-physical complex (NĀMA-RŪPA) and the six sense bases, we need to understand how the six sense bases condition contact;

Contact conditions feeling;

Feeling conditions craving;

Craving conditions attachment; and

Attachment conditions the process of becoming.

When we attach certain pleasant values such as ‘nice’ or ‘beautiful’ to what we see, hear, smell, taste and feel, and we go on thinking and rethinking about it, we will experience pleasant feeling. This in turn will condition desire or craving to arise.

And, because we are not aware that in the process of fulfilling our desires we are adding more fuel to the fire of craving, we become attached (UPĀDĀNA). This attachment or clinging leads to becoming (BHAVA). Becoming leads to birth (JĀTI).

In this manner, PAṬICCA-SAMUPPĀDA or dependent origination explains how suffering arises. In the reverse order, it also explains how suffering ceases. When AVIJJĀ, ignorance ceases, SĀNKHĀRĀ, volitional activities cease... and so on.

Through the cultivation of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and the training of SAMATHA-VIPASSANĀ we will effectively be able to break through the links in the chain of dependent origination. This is done through the silencing of the mind, which enables us to overcome the habitual tendency of our mind to create thoughts. In the process, our mind becomes very sharp and clear, enabling us to cut through the links of dependent origination, especially at the points of contact and feeling. If our mindfulness is sharp, when we see, it is just seeing; when we hear, it is just hearing and so on. So as soon as contact arises, the mind does not create further thoughts. There is no more

proliferation of thoughts. We are just aware of things as they are. It is this essence of awareness that results in the process of awakening and the realisation of impermanence and emptiness.

As long as the mind is not sharp enough, contact will give rise to feeling. However, if we can be mindful of feeling just as bare feeling, then craving or aversion will not arise. Similarly, when we are mindful of the craving state of mind, craving immediately ceases. We need to do this again and again in order to end the cycle of becoming. This is what the reverse cycle is about.

In this manner, through the practice of mindfulness, the links of dependent origination can be cut between contact and feeling, feeling and craving, and even between craving and attachment. And that is how the force of craving can be reduced and overcome, leading to the cessation of suffering.

The Significance of Practising Mindfulness

In the Mahā-Satipatṭhāna Sutta, it is mentioned that “If anyone should develop these Four Foundations of Mindfulness in such a way for seven years, one of two fruits could be expected – either final liberation, Nibbāna; or if there is any fetter remaining, then non-returning.” It then goes on to say that such attainment could be realised within seven months, seven weeks, or even seven days.

The secret lies in the cultivation of the continuity of mindfulness, from morning to night and from night to morning, without allowing distractions to disturb the mind. This is how we will be able to break the habitual tendency of our minds to create thoughts. When we see a visual object and attach a value to it, such as ‘nice’ or ‘beautiful’, and we go on thinking and rethinking about it, pleasant feeling will arise. This will condition craving, the cause of suffering, to arise.

The same applies to the other sense organs, such as ears, nose, tongue, body, mind, and the respective sense objects, such as sound, smell, taste, touch, and thoughts or mental objects. With the application of mindfulness and sense restraint, we will be able to develop the ability of ‘seeing as seeing’, ‘hearing as hearing’, and so on, without giving rise to craving and aversion, thus putting an end to suffering.

The Story of Bahiya

It was this very concise and terse teaching of ‘seeing as seeing, hearing as hearing’, etc... that the Buddha gave to Bahiya, just before he became an arahant and died.

Bahiya was a merchant who engaged himself in trade by sailing down the Indus River and across the sea. He sailed successfully for seven times and returned home safely. On the eighth occasion, while he was on his way to Suvaṇṇabhūmi, his ship was wrecked, but he survived by floating on a piece of timber, reaching the land near Suppāraka.

Having lost all his clothes and belongings, he covered himself with a piece of bark and went round with a bowl, begging for food. People would offer him costly robes and other luxuries, but he refused them all and decided to live a simple and austere way of life. So his fame increased and he was revered and venerated. At some point he even thought he was already an arahant.

Then a certain devata, who was Bahiya’s own past relative, realising that he was misled through his own imagination, paved the way for him to meet the Buddha in Sravasti.

Upon seeing the Buddha going on alms round, Bahiya was awe-inspired. He immediately threw himself down with his head on the feet of the Buddha and humbly requested for teachings. Twice the Buddha refused to give him any instruction as he was on his alms

round. But upon the third request the Buddha, out of compassion, instructed him: “Seeing as seeing, hearing as hearing, smelling as smelling, tasting as tasting and feeling as feeling, without giving rise to the idea of the self.” Then the Buddha moved on. Not long after the Buddha’s departure, Bahiya was attacked and killed by a cow with a young calf.

Upon returning from his alms round, the Buddha saw that Bahiya had died. Realising that Bahiya had put into practice the brief instructions which he had received, and that he had attained arahanthood while dying, the Buddha instructed his disciples to make all the necessary arrangements for the body to be cremated and a memorial erected for him. Bahiya was able to realise the Truth because he had been a practitioner. He had full faith and confidence when he saw the Buddha and his mind was ready to receive instructions and to put them into immediate practice.

The Magic of Mindfulness

The magic of mindfulness lies in our ability to cut off any unwholesome state of mind at the point of contact, through the application of bare attention and awareness. When craving or lustful desire arises, if we are mindful of that state of mind, in that moment we have already stepped out of the unwholesome state of mind. In the same manner, the moment we are aware and mindful of our anger or confused state of mind, we have already stepped out of the angry or confused state of mind. Then we can apply whatever tools or methods that we have learned to maintain calmness and clarity of mind.

Without mindfulness, our minds are often driven by our own frivolous thoughts and emotions, and we tend to get stuck in all our feelings, preconceived ideas and imagination. That is how fear, anxiety and depression develop. It is through the cultivation of mindfulness and

clear awareness that we will be able to break this vicious cycle. The continuity of mindfulness is needed to break our habitual tendencies and bring about a real transformation of character.

Whilst the regular practice of meditation for an hour or so on a daily basis can provide us with a certain degree of calmness and clarity to attend to the stressful way of modern living, it is not good enough to bring about a real transformation. It is an intensive retreat period with the prolonged continuity of mindfulness that will effectively bring about real transformation of an ordinary, worldly human being into a good human being, and from a good human being into a noble and worthy one, by overcoming the tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion.

The manner in which the Four Foundations of Mindfulness are cultivated enables one to translate one's conceptual understanding into experiential knowledge. The term KĀYE KĀYĀNUPASSI VIHARATI refers to dwelling mindfully, or contemplating the body in the body. Similarly, VEDANĀSU VEDANĀNUPASSI VIHARATI refers to the contemplation of feelings in the feelings. CITTE CITTĀNUPASSI VIHARATI refers to the contemplation of the mind in the mind. And DHAMMESU DHAMMĀNUPASSI VIHARATI refers to the contemplation of the Dhamma in the Dhamma. Dwelling mindfully of the body in the body, we do not confuse the body with feelings, or mind, or Dhamma (and so on).

How else can we understand the body, feelings, mind and the Dhamma? We can do so by reading books, listening to Dhamma talks and through the internet and social media, or even by studying a PhD course on mindfulness, but we will not be able to actually experience these four foundations for ourselves. The manner in which the Four Foundations of Mindfulness should be developed as mentioned in the

Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta – by contemplating the body in the body, feelings in the feelings etc. – clearly emphasises the need for us to practise and realise them for ourselves. That is how we will be able to convert our conceptual knowledge into experiential knowledge.

The systematic cultivation of mindfulness discussed in this booklet provides a ‘road map’ to the path of liberation. However, we still need the guidance of authentic teachers along the way, to ensure that we remain on track and make steady progress.

The practice of mindfulness is one of the most fundamental Buddhist practices, no matter which school or tradition.

Amongst Theravada practitioners, the emphasis lies in the cultivation of mindfulness of the body, especially with respect to the breath (ĀNĀPĀNASATI), and all the other aspects of mindfulness revolve around it.

Amongst the Mahayana Chan or Zen practitioners, their main object is the cultivation of mindfulness of the mind, and all other aspects of mindfulness revolve around it.

This is also true among the Tibetan or Vajrayana practitioners, where the main emphasis lies in the ‘essence of awareness’, based on mindfulness of the mind.

Any meditation practice based on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness can serve as the main focus of insight contemplation and lead to the realisation of truth.

At a certain stage of one’s practice, when mindfulness is established, one should familiarise oneself with the true nature of the mind without depending on any object of meditation.

As mentioned in Verse 5 of the Ratana Sutta:⁴⁴

YAM BUDDHA-SEṬṬHO PARIVAṆṆAYĪ SUCIM
SAMĀDHIM ĀNANTARIKAÑÑAM ĀHU
SAMĀDHINĀ TENA SAMO NA VIJJATI
IDAMPI DHAMME RATANAṀ PAÑĪTAM
ETENA SACCENA SUVATṬHI HOTU

That sanctity praised by the Buddha Supreme,
described as ‘concentration without interruption’;
There is nothing equal to that concentration.
Truly, in the Dhamma is this precious jewel.
By this truth, may there be happiness!

Although the term SAMĀDHI or concentration is used here, there is no particular object of meditation. There is only an uninterrupted state of mind that is clearly aware and undisturbed by all the phenomena related to sights, sounds, smells, tastes, feelings and thoughts which appear and cease, rising and falling.

According to the oral instructions of Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, a great luminary and Dzogchen master (1910 –1991):

While mind is watching mind,
Though there is nothing to see, it is vividly clear;
Uncontrived, free, and at ease in that state,
Rest naturally, simply undistracted.
Whatever thought occurs from that state,
Without stopping or analyzing, watch its very nature.
Its arising doesn’t obscure the absolute nature;
Whatever occurs, relax right there.
Don’t follow thoughts about the past,
Don’t anticipate thoughts about the future,
Directly transcend the external world;

44 Ratanasutta, Kp 6

That is called the “four parts without three.”
If you maintain this recognition of thoughts,
You will feel that they do not truly begin, remain, or end.
Though you notice them, they have no effect on your true nature;
That is the bare natural state, the way it is.
If you take that empty awareness, open and carefree, as the path,
All the time, during formal practice and afterward,
You will quickly and surely acquire a confident realization
That confusion is freed by itself.⁴⁵

Ultimately, the goal of Buddhist meditation is to attain that state of pure awareness, where there is no fixation and grasping whatsoever. The mind simply dwells in its intrinsic state of clarity and emptiness. This leads to the realisation of ASAN̄KHATA–DHAMMA – the unborn and unconditioned – the bliss of Nibbāna.

The significance of mindfulness is highlighted in the final teachings which the Buddha left for the world. In his parting words to Ananda, his faithful attendant, the Buddha said:

TASMĀTIH’ĀNANDA, ATTA–DĪPĀ VIHARATHA
ATTA–SARAṆĀ ANAṆṆĀ–SARAṆĀ,
DHAMMA–DĪPĀ DHAMMA–SARAṆĀ ANAṆṆĀ–SARAṆĀ.

Be an island unto yourselves, be a refuge unto yourselves. There is no other refuge. Let the Dhamma be your island and your refuge. There is no other refuge.⁴⁶

The Buddha then explained what he meant by taking the Dhamma as your refuge. It refers to none other than practising the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

45 *Brilliant Moon*, the Autobiography of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, p.293.

46 DN 16 Mahāparinibbāna Sutta. Note: DĪPĀ may be translated as ‘island’ or ‘lamp’.

And, before his Mahā Parinibbāna in Kusinara, the Buddha gave this final advice:

VAYA–DHAMMĀ SĀṆKHĀRĀ
APPAMĀDENA SAMPĀDETHA

Transient are all component things,
Work out your deliverance with mindfulness.⁴⁷

47 DN 16 Mahāparinibbāna Sutta.

Conclusion: Mettā and Mindfulness

Mettā and mindfulness complement one another in the process of the development and purification of the mind. Whilst the cultivation of Mettā helps to reduce the tendency of aversion which clouds and obscures the mind, the practice of mindfulness enables one to clear the underlying causes of aversion (such as craving and delusion).

The word for human being in Pali/Sanskrit is MANUSSA, derived from MANAS (mind) and USSANATĀ (elevated state). In other words, humans are beings with an elevated or developed state of mind, with the highest potential for mental development and purification.

Through Mettā and mindfulness as taught by the Buddha we can make use of this precious human life to develop our highest potential.

Mettā promotes many wholesome and skilful qualities which build up our merit field. Mindfulness paves the way for the development of wisdom and insight. Through Mettā and mindfulness we will cultivate merits and wisdom – the two essential ingredients for our final liberation and enlightenment.

Mettā and mindfulness also pave the way for us to reach out to others. Mettā is the basis of all altruistic values. Mindfulness leads us to develop the necessary wisdom and skills to alleviate the suffering of others. Together, Mettā and mindfulness promote wisdom and compassion for the welfare and happiness of all.



About the Author

Venerable Mahinda has been promoting the study and practice of Mettā and mindfulness in more than 20 countries since his ordination in 1976 under the tutelage of Venerable Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda Nayaka Thera. He has practised meditation in India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand under the guidance of several well-known Theravada teachers, and has also been inspired by the teachings of Mahayana and Vajrayana masters.

The message of Mettā has spread globally through his initiatives such as Metta Round the World, Metta Camps, 24hr Metta, Metta Circles and Metta conventions (in Singapore, Sri Lanka, Australia and Malaysia) etc.

The Aloka Meditation Centre in Australia, and two retreat centres in Malaysia – Alokarama and Mitraville – have been established to promote the cultivation of mindfulness meditation.

At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, an initiative called Million Minutes of Metta and Mindfulness was launched online by Venerable Mahinda with around 7,000 participants from at least nine different countries, recording more than 6 million minutes of Metta & Mindfulness.

Through the Aloka Online Dhamma Course “Mindfulness – based on the Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta”, the teachings on mindfulness were attended by more than 500 regular participants from 17 countries. This was followed by weekly Samatha Vipassanā sessions in Malaysia, Singapore and Australia.

His effort to promote Mettā and mindfulness is aimed at generating peace, harmony and stability within the individual, family, society, nation and the world – in keeping with the Buddha’s mission:

*For the welfare and happiness of the many,
Out of compassion for the world,
For the benefit, the welfare and the happiness
Of gods and humans.*

*Mettā and Mindfulness are powerful means
of self-transformation that will help us
meet the challenges of our time.*