

VII

MIND

The fifth spoke in the wheel of practice presented here, which corresponds to the third *satipaṭṭhāna*, is contemplation of mental states. The first part of the instructions given in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* proceeds as follows (MN 10):

One knows a mind with lust to be “a mind with lust”; or one knows a mind without lust to be “a mind without lust”; or one knows a mind with anger to be “a mind with anger”; or one knows a mind without anger to be “a mind without anger”; or one knows a mind with delusion to be “a mind with delusion”; or one knows a mind without delusion to be “a mind without delusion”; or one knows a contracted mind to be “a contracted mind”; or one knows a distracted mind to be “a distracted mind”.

Although in what follows I will be taking up in detail the individual states of mind mentioned above, at the outset I would like to note that the main thrust of the present contemplation can be summarized as a continuous inward monitoring with the question: “how is the mind?” Whatever may happen outside, which is where all our attention usually goes, becomes secondary from this perspective. What really counts is how the mind reacts to it. This is what we need to keep noticing. It is such knowing of our own mind that is the chief concern of the present *satipaṭṭhāna*, for the purpose of which the actual mental states listed serve as aids or exemplifications.

LUST, ANGER, AND DELUSION

The first three states of mind in the instructions above take up the presence and absence of lust, anger, and delusion. I suggest giving particular emphasis to these three during actual practice. Whenever a distraction occurs, it could either involve some form of desire or lust, or else be related to the presence of some degree of aversion or anger. The third alternative is when the mind is just ambling around, a condition of distraction not prominently coloured by lust or anger. This condition of the mind can be considered a manifestation of delusion. Needless to say, delusion also underlies lust and anger. But for practical purposes, it seems to me preferable to employ this category in such a way that it can be used as a complement to the first two detrimental states mentioned in the instructions.

Familiarity with the presence or absence of lust, anger, and delusion

within will in turn facilitate recognizing the same externally, when such presence or absence manifests in others. Such recognition can rely on facial expression, tone of voice, and bodily posture as pointers to the mental condition of another (Anālayo 2003: 97 and 2017a: 37n39).

The employment of these three categories helps to build a bridge from the preceding contemplation of feelings, in particular in relation to feelings of a worldly type. When lust is present in the mind, chances are that it comes accompanied by worldly pleasant feelings. Similarly, when anger arises, chances are that such arising is accompanied by worldly painful feelings. When delusion arises in turn, chances are that worldly neutral feelings are present in the mind.

Working with this relationship can offer considerable support for recognizing the arising of these detrimental states. Such recognition has to do with a basic task required by contemplation of states of mind. This task is to see through a particular train of thought and its related associations in order to discern the underlying mental current. For mindful recognition of our present mental state, the requirement is above all a clear recognition without getting involved in the details of whatever train of thought and related associations are taking place. Since it is often precisely these details that get us hooked and caught up in a particular chain of thoughts, achieving such recognition is more easily said than done. Recognizing the feeling tone of our current experience offers help for this task. It grounds awareness in the affective reality of the present moment and thereby draws attention to our subjective involvement in whatever is happening. In this way we learn to attend to the baseline condition of the mind rather than to the details of particular thoughts.

This is of considerable importance, since human beings are quite able to remain immersed in their thoughts while at the same time completely ignoring the baseline emotional condition of the corresponding state of mind. History abounds with examples of incredibly cruel actions that have had their basis in the fascination exerted by a particular political or religious ideal, leading to a thorough dissociation from basic qualities like kindness and compassion (at times in combination with relegating to some higher authority the responsibility for the harm inflicted on others). Other

examples of no less atrocious events show the opposite side of the same coin, when wallowing in emotions takes place in complete dissociation from the rational capacities of the mind. The present practice works against the grain of the tendency of dissociation, based on the groundwork preparation of embodied awareness and clear recognition of the feeling tone of experience.

This in turn brings out the significance of the three *satipaṭṭhānas* explored so far and the importance of practising them in conjunction rather than in isolation from each other. It is precisely through the preparatory work done so far in the somatic and affective domain that the present *satipaṭṭhāna* acquires its full potential. Mindfulness cultivated in this way can be visualized as opening up the communication channels between these different domains. It offers a point of integration of the rational and emotional dimensions of ourselves. This takes place by giving each an equal hearing in such a way that both can make their contribution to a complete assessment of a particular situation and to finding the appropriate response to it. In this way, intuition and reasoning come to a point of balance, based on the support provided by mindfulness. This results from the dynamics of practice underlying the first three *satipaṭṭhānas*.

The specific contribution made by the third *satipaṭṭhāna* in this respect is proper identification of the actual condition of our state of mind as a direct approach to honest recognition and the taking of responsibility for what happens within. In practical terms, this can take the form of a regular check-in to see how the mind is doing right now. Shifting from the ingrained tendency of giving all attention to the objects of experience, we instead direct some attention to the repercussions of the experiencing of those objects in the inner domain of our mind.

In a way we are so used to focusing on what is taking place outside or what we are engaged in doing that our mental range of vision has come to resemble the restricted range of vision of our physical eyes. The basic pattern is to give all attention to what is right in front of us. Or else, if something really strong comes up in the emotional domain, the narrow beam of focus shifts to that; we turn around, as it were, and all else is completely forgotten.

But such a restricted range of mental vision is a habit rather than a

necessity. The mind is not by nature limited in a manner comparable to human eyes. Actualizing this potential requires stepping back from too narrow a focus of attention and allowing our awareness to become more comprehensive. In this way we learn to apperceive the *how* of experience alongside its *what*. At the subjective level we discern the mental repercussions of what is taking place, a discerning that does not in any way inhibit our ability to perceive and interact with what is taking place outside. Indeed, the resultant breadth of mind improves both our taking in of information and our ability to deal with whatever has occurred in an appropriate manner.

A basic training in expanding the range of our mental vision has been introduced gradually through the previous *satipaṭṭhāna* exercises, where with contemplation of the anatomical parts and the elements we already went beyond the average perception of the body, concerned predominantly with its surface appearance, by attending to its more internal aspects. With contemplation of feeling we learned to turn inwards from having felt the body to becoming aware of that which feels the body. Now the task is to continue further in the same inward direction by attending to that which knows the body and that which knows feelings.

In the example of holding this book in our hands, used in the last chapter, attention proceeded from the touch sensation of the book to feeling the hands that were touching the book. In line with the overall thrust of the present *satipaṭṭhāna*, attention can now turn further inwards to that which knows the experience of holding this book in our hands: the mind.

The resultant broadening of the scope of meditative attention by including the actual state of our own mind is of fundamental importance for *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation. It lays the foundation for the present and the next *satipaṭṭhāna*, contemplation of dharmas concerned with the hindrances and the awakening factors. Cultivating the ability to monitor what goes on within, to recognize clearly the condition of our own mind, is indispensable for being able to explore fully the potential of these two out of the four *satipaṭṭhānas*.

Actually in a way the same is required for all *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation, in that we need to monitor how what we do affects our mind. This became clear already with the first exercise, contemplation

of anatomical parts. The story of the suicide of monastics due to unbalanced practice of this contemplation serves as a strong warning of the dangers of not keeping an eye on what happens in the mind (see above [here](#)).

The required turning inwards to check in on the actual condition of the mind is somewhat like reading an interesting book in the awareness that we soon have an appointment with a good friend. While reading, we keep the passage of time in mind. We might regularly glance at a watch just to make sure we do not miss the time for the meeting. This need not be something stressful or disturbing, but can simply be a relaxed way of keeping the passage of time in our peripheral awareness while nevertheless enjoying the book. Similarly, peripheral awareness can in a relaxed manner keep an eye on how things are unfolding within, monitoring the condition of our mind.

In the context of an account of the gradual path, contemplation of the mental states of others finds illustration in looking into a mirror (DN 2; Anālayo 2014a: 80). This illustrates well what the present practice is about, but in relation to ourselves: holding up the mirror of mindfulness within, in order to see clearly the reflection of our own state of mind as it is right now. This act of introspectively checking the condition of our own mind could be compared to keeping an eye on the rear-view mirror while driving a car. This helps us to have the whole traffic situation in view, rather than seeing only what is happening in front. In the same way, we look into the rear-view mirror within to see how the mind relates to whatever is happening. Again, comparable to using a mirror to ascertain whether our bodily appearance is clean or dirty, similarly we look into the mirror of mindfulness in order to ascertain the condition of our mental appearance.



Just as we ask others: “How are you?”, so we now keep asking ourselves: “How is the mind?” Expressed in terms of the three categories of contemplation of the mind mentioned above: “how is the mind, is it with lust or without lust, with anger or without anger, with delusion or without delusion?”

Mindfulness of feelings is of particular help in recognizing unwholesome thoughts before they have acquired full force. As mentioned in the previous chapter, such recognition at an initial stage in the building up of unwholesome thoughts makes it possible to nip these in the bud. At an early stage, the detrimental thoughts and associations are not yet in full swing. The degree of our identification is not yet as strong as it will eventually become if they continue. This makes it easier to step out of the thought, to let it go and change the course of the mind.

Imagine a snowball rolling down a hill. It will be easier to change its course or stop it if we catch it close to the top of the hill. Once it has moved farther down and become bigger and faster, it will be much more difficult to intercept. The course of the mind is similar.

Activating this potential requires the willingness to look at our own shortcomings. This is another topic already broached in the previous chapter, the importance of learning to bear with patience the recognition of any failure to live up to our own standards. The feelings experienced at such times are most likely feelings of the unpleasant type. Such feelings take on an unworldly dimension because they have the potential to lead us forward on the path. Self-deception as a means to avoid the displeasure of seeing our own shortcomings stands diametrically opposed to the whole thrust of progress on the path of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation.

The importance of honest and clear recognition comes out in the *Anaṅgaṇa-sutta* (MN 5; Anālayo 2013: 160f). The discourse places emphasis on the importance of clearly acknowledging the presence of a defilement as an indispensable prerequisite for being able to do something about it. If recognition is not there, the foundation for emerging from this detrimental condition is lacking.

THE ABSENCE OF DEFILEMENTS

The same *Anaṅgaṇa-sutta* similarly gives importance to recognizing the absence of a defilement. This principle also underlies the instructions for contemplation of the mind in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*. After mentioning the need to recognize a mental state with lust, for example, the instructions continue: “one knows a mind without lust to be ‘a mind without lust’.” The same holds for anger and delusion. Absence of lust, anger, and delusion is as much a matter to be known as their presence. In this way, what is absent becomes a presence through attending to its absence.

The need to recognize both presence and absence is also implicit in the instruction in the refrain to contemplate arising and passing away. Having noticed that lust or anger has arisen, for example, the task is to notice similarly when subsequently lust and anger have passed away. This need applies also to the mental states listed under the two contemplations of dharmas concerned with the hindrances and the awakening factors. Throughout awareness that a particular mental state has arisen finds its complement in awareness of its eventual passing away. The two in combination make it clear that it is indeed the nature of any mental state to arise and pass away.

It is of considerable importance that the need, evident in the list of

mental states as well as in the refrain, to direct attention to the passing away of a defiled mental state is not overlooked. The task of mindfulness is not only to draw attention to the presence of a defilement. It similarly involves giving attention to the absence of a defilement. We can savour the condition of the mind at such times, get a feel for its texture, and familiarize ourselves with it. We can experience for ourselves how much more pleasant such a condition is when compared to a defiled state of mind. Familiarizing ourselves with the difference between the presence and the absence of a defilement in terms of the texture and flavour of the mind will make it intuitively clear why the latter is preferable to the former.

The mind is somewhat like a child or a puppy. It needs to be encouraged to do what we want it to do. Imagine calling a puppy or a child by its name and then hitting it, because earlier it did something wrong. Do this a few times and the puppy or the child will learn not to come when called. Similarly, if we keep hitting ourselves by becoming frustrated and upset every time a defilement manifests in the mind, we run the risk of actually training the mind in such a way that eventually it no longer recognizes a defilement.

If we want the puppy or the child to come when its name is called, we had better give it some reward. Why not reward ourselves for a state of mind that is undefiled? Rejoicing in the absence of defilements is a powerful tool that will make for swift progress on the path to permanent freedom from defilements.

This does not mean turning a blind eye to defilements. These should be honestly recognized, but ideally without aversion. It is possible to realize that a defilement is in the mind and smile. We smile at the tendency of the mind to do the opposite of what we want it to do. We smile in the knowledge that we are walking a gradual path and that it would be unreasonable to expect that, as soon as we sit down to meditate, the mind just does what we want.

In actual practice, given the previous four contemplations, chances are that at this stage of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation the type of mind we are experiencing is at least momentarily without lust, without anger, and perhaps even without deluded distractions. It is good to recognize this. Such recognition can in turn lead to rejoicing in the condition of temporary freedom from lust, anger, or delusion. Although the roots

of the defilements are still in the mind, at least these defilements are not manifesting on the surface level. This much is sufficient cause for rejoicing. By rejoicing in this way, we accord to wholesome types of happiness the place they deserve within the gradual path to liberation. The importance of joy and happiness of this type is clearly recognized in the early discourses. According to the *Kandaraka-sutta*, for example, progress on the gradual path involves a progressive refinement of non-sensual types of happiness (MN 51; Anālayo 2003: 167).

Intentionally arousing joy when realizing that the mind is temporarily free will go a long way in strengthening the tendency of the mind to remain in the realm of what is wholesome. It also serves to provide inspiration for the practice. Cultivating a habit of rejoicing in wholesome conditions of the mind will make meditation so much more attractive and turn it into something that we look forward to, instead of being something done out of a sense of obligation. Moreover, it also offers a foretaste of the final goal. The final goal is purification of the mind from all defilements. Instead of remaining an abstract concept, through recognition of the pleasant condition of the mind that is temporarily free from defilements we can have a direct experience of the aim of our practice.

Such joy it can be

When the mind is free

Even if only

Temporarily.

CONTRACTED AND DISTRACTED

Besides mentioning lust, anger, and delusion, the first part of the instructions distinguishes between a contracted and a distracted state of mind. The implications of a contracted mind are open to question (Anālayo 2003: 178). One mode of interpretation would be to assume that in this case both mental states are detrimental. On this interpretation, a contracted mental condition could be the outcome of sloth-and-torpor or else the result of becoming narrow-minded or contracting mentally out of fear or aversion. Distraction could then refer to any scattered condition of the mind.

Alternatively, this pair could be interpreted in line with the general pattern in the listing of mental states in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* as involving a contrast between a positive and a negative state, or

between a superior and an inferior mental condition. Following this mode of interpretation, the present pair would involve the difference between a mind that is not distracted, in the sense of being collected, and a mind that is distracted. Although to my mind the actual terminology makes the first interpretation more probable, I would leave it up to the individual practitioner to decide which of these two interpretations appears more meaningful for actual practice.

Whichever interpretation we adopt, there is no doubt that this part of the instructions requires identifying a condition of mental distraction for what it is. The challenge here is that distractions can at times be rather subtle and often also quite enticing. For this reason it is particularly important to stick to the element of mindful recognition. This requires withstanding the temptation to let ourselves be carried away by the (at least momentarily) pleasurable condition of a distracted mind. For genuine progress to liberation even subtle distraction needs to be acknowledged for what it is: a condition of the mind that diverts our attention and therefore is not conducive to our meditative growth.

HIGHER STATES OF MIND

The remaining four pairs in the instructions are less concerned with defilements. Here is the relevant passage:

Or one knows a mind that has become great to be “a mind that has become great”; or one knows a mind that has not become great to be “a mind that has not become great”; or one knows a surpassable mind to be “a surpassable mind”; or one knows an unsurpassable mind to be “an unsurpassable mind”; or one knows a concentrated mind to be “a concentrated mind”; or one knows a not concentrated mind to be “a not concentrated mind”; or one knows a liberated mind to be “a liberated mind”; or one knows a not liberated mind to be “a not liberated mind.”

The four terms mentioned in the second half of the instructions refer to a mind that has become:

- great (or not),
- surpassable (or not),
- concentrated (or not),
- liberated (or not).

The qualification “great” employed for the first of these is also used for the cultivation of the *brahmavihāras* (Anālayo 2003: 179 and 2015: 55f). In a more general sense, this category could be taken to point to

an opening of the heart. In addition, a mind that has become great could also come about through other modes of cultivating tranquillity. Yet I suggest including these rather under the header of the third term, the mind that is “concentrated”, in order to be able to associate distinct meanings with these different categories when applied in actual practice.

The second pair mentioned in the instruction concerns the mind that is either surpassable or unsurpassable. Within the realm of absorption attainment, an unsurpassed condition of the mind will be reached with the attainment of the highest absorption (Anālayo 2003: 179). In a general sense, however, I would take this pair to point to the ability to recognize whether a particular meditative experience can be taken further. In other words, whatever is happening right now in our meditation, does it have the potential to lead to something higher? Or have we already arrived at what is possible within this particular sitting or course of meditation practice? Moreover, the category of a surpassable mind would also fit the case of the hindrances, which can and should indeed be surpassed.

The third term mentions a mind that is concentrated or not concentrated, which could fruitfully be understood to refer to the monitoring of mindfulness required for the deepening of tranquillity and the eventual attainment of absorption. Mindfulness is in fact present throughout absorption attainment, where it becomes particularly prominent with the third and fourth absorptions (Anālayo 2017a: 150).

Relevant to the present as well as the two preceding categories is the analytical attitude so prominent in early Buddhist meditation theory (Anālayo 2003: 180f). Instead of getting carried away by a particular meditation experience, the task is to recognize the degree of concentration achieved and what mental factors are present in this state of mind. In other words, when during practice the mind tends towards deeper levels of concentration, we simply accompany such natural development with mindful monitoring. Deeper states of tranquillity are an integral part of the path, as long as their impermanent and ultimately unsatisfactory nature is clearly understood and as long as identification with, or even reification of, such experiences is avoided.

The last pair in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*'s instructions distinguishes between a mind that is liberated and one that is not liberated. In the highest sense, this would refer to the retrospective knowledge of an arahant who realizes that the mind has been fully liberated (Anālayo 2003: 180). The same term could also be related to the cultivation of tranquillity, in the sense of the mind being liberated from obstructions to absorption attainment. Since absorption has already been covered with the label of the concentrated mind, I prefer to use the present label instead in relation to the cultivation of insight. My suggestion would be to check whether the mind has been at least temporarily liberated from selfing. Can we meditate without the ego making the front page, without constructing the self-referential sense of a meditator who appropriates the meditative experience as something to be owned and possessed? Can the conceit of an I be allowed to go into abeyance during our actual practice?

In this way, according to the mode of interpretation presented here, the four categories introduced in this part of the discourse could be employed with the following practical implications: the mind that has become great (or not) would reflect an opening of the heart, such as reached with the *brahmavihāras*. The surpassable (or unsurpassable) mind would point to the recognition that meditation can be taken further. The mind that has become concentrated (or not) would involve monitoring the deepening of mental tranquillity to reach absorption. The mind that has become liberated (or not) would reflect the absence of identifications and the sense of a self.

Needless to say, these are just my suggestions. Practitioners should feel free to adjust these in line with their personal understanding and preferences. Whatever interpretation we prefer, when overwhelmed by a hindrance the mind is clearly narrow and not great, as well as neither concentrated nor liberated. As already mentioned above, it is quite definitely surpassable. The task of the next *satipaṭṭhāna* is precisely to explore the conditions that help us to emerge from a hindrance, to surpass it and thereby allow the mind to become greater, more concentrated, and more liberated than it was when the hindrance was still present.

In a way, qualifications of the mind as great, concentrated, liberated, and even unsurpassable, listed in the instructions for the present

satipaṭṭhāna, reflect the role of mindfulness in monitoring the progress of our meditation. A crucial element to be kept in mind for such monitoring, which can range from identifying and overcoming a hindrance to the experience of deep levels of concentration and insight, is that progress in *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation is not just about having special experiences. Special experiences certainly have their place, but they are not the goal itself. The goal is rather inner transformation. Even the experience of an absorption or a stage of awakening has its true value in the extent to which it produces lasting inner transformation. Meditation practice should result in an improvement in the way we are, how we relate to others, and how we deal with outer circumstances. Such internal changes are more important than appropriating spectacular experiences as markers of our meditative expertise.

In this context it may also be relevant to note that in early Buddhist thought the distinction between path and fruit differs from the way these terms are used in later traditions. Path and fruit are not just two mind-moments immediately following each other. Instead, the path covers the whole trajectory of even years of practice and its fruit is to be found in personal transformation, in the eradication of fetters and defilements. This invests the actual meditative experience with somewhat less weight than is the case when one is influenced by the perspective on path and fruit in later tradition.

OPENING OF THE HEART

Of particular importance in relation to such personal transformation, I believe, is a genuine opening of the heart to the qualities of kindness and compassion. In my personal view, such opening of the heart is a better measuring rod for progress in our practice than having extraordinary experiences. In order to encourage this dimension of practice and also as a way of mirroring the Buddha's own unswerving quest for awakening, I suggest introducing a formal element of setting our intention at the beginning of each formal sitting. This could be an aspiration like: "May I progress on the path to liberation, for my own benefit and for the benefit of others."

Evoking such an aspiration affords an opportunity to bring in the path factor of right intention. Needless to say, for *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation to yield its full potential, it needs to be situated within the

context of the noble eightfold path.

Formulating our motivation at the outset of formal meditation provides a reference point for the course of our practice. It clearly sets the direction in which we wish to go. Including an altruistic disposition in this type of reference point is particularly beneficial. It not only encourages the opening of the heart to compassion, but also provides strength during challenging times. Simply said, we are not just practising for ourselves; we are also practising for the sake of others. Awareness of this external dimension of our meditation practice makes it easier to withstand any onslaught of doubt and frustration. Missing out on the compassionate dimension runs the risk of turning the practice of meditation into a self-centred enterprise. Meditating only for our own benefit makes it more difficult to sustain the practice in times of difficulty.

Strictly speaking, compassion is not part of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation. It falls under the path factor of right intention in the form of intending to avoid what is harmful for others (and ourselves). Although not explicitly mentioned in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, compassion has been an underlying current through the previous exercises.

Contemplation of the anatomical parts directly counters the tendency for sensual lust to get out of control, which can lead to horrible things like rape or child abuse. This is the very opposite of kindness and compassion.

Contemplation of the elements has made it indubitably clear that we are an inseparable part of outside nature. Discrimination against others due to their race or physical build becomes meaningless once we realize that we are all made up of the same elements. Such a realization makes it easier for us to have compassion and cultivate a genuine concern for the environment.

Recollection of death encourages a willingness to forgive and apologize. Time is just too short to carry a grudge or unnecessarily prolong a conflict. Moreover, having learned to face our own mortality enables us to be of real assistance to others who are dying or mourning.

With the foundation laid by these three body contemplations, contemplation of feeling naturally leads to an increased sensitivity to

what happens on the affective level. Based on this groundwork, contemplation of the mind in its internal (and even more so in its external) dimension can become an occasion for a genuine opening of the heart. In the image of the lotus that I like to use to illustrate *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation (see above [here](#) and below [here](#)), compassion is like the seeds found inside this lotus.

SKILFUL USE OF LABELS

In terms of actual practice, it is noteworthy that the instructions for contemplation of mental states, as well as the instructions in other parts of the discourse, involve the use of labels. It is certainly not the case that *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation takes place in the absence of concepts. This relates back to the topic of the coexistence of mindfulness with concepts (see above [here](#)) and the relationship between a map and reality (see above [here](#)). In the present case, the instructions are formulated in such a way that they imply some degree of mental verbalization. The reference to a mind with anger, for example, is followed by the particle *iti*, which in Pāli marks the end of a quotation. Clearly the implication is that an explicit conceptual label should be employed in order to sharpen clarity of recognition, almost as if mentally saying to ourselves: “anger”.

At the same time, however, *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation is not about ceaseless labelling. The use of a label for the sake of clear recognition is best followed by just dwelling in awareness of the texture of the mind, savouring its condition and flavour. In this way, briefly bringing up a label can function in a similar way to quickly checking a compass when hiking in order to make sure we are still going in the right direction. That much is often enough, without any need to keep checking the compass continuously and also pulling out the road map to study it in detail over and over again.

A relevant passage for appreciating the need to beware of excessive thinking activity can be found in the *Dvedhāvittakkasutta* (MN 19; Anālayo 2013: 146ff). The discourse describes how, during the time before his awakening, the future Buddha divided his thoughts into two types: those that are unwholesome and those that are wholesome. This basic distinction underlies the first states of mind listed in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*. Unlike the case of unwholesome thoughts, with their wholesome counterparts the future Buddha saw no danger in

having such thoughts. Yet he also saw that excessive thinking will tire body and mind and become an obstruction to the deepening of concentration.

The same applies to *satipaṭṭhāna*. The use of labelling is a helpful tool, but it should not be overused. Excessive labelling will tire body and mind and become an obstruction to the deepening of our practice. In view of this I like to suggest a simplification of the list of mental states given in the instructions for the present *satipaṭṭhāna*. In a way, recognition of any of the mental states mentioned in the instructions relies on the presence of mindfulness, which in the mode of practice I am presenting here is in particular an embodied form of mindfulness. For this reason it seems to me sensible to use the simple recognition of whether such mindfulness continues to be present or has been lost as a summary of contemplation of the mind. Such a summary can even be employed at times when bringing in more labels risks tiring the mind and disturbing the flow of meditative practice. Based on this succinct mode, at other times more labels can be brought in, as appropriate.

A mind in which mindfulness is well established has a distinct flavour and texture, such as being open, receptive, flexible, alive, centred, clear, and calm. Familiarizing ourselves with how our mind actually feels when we are mindful helps us to recognize this condition even without any need for labelling. It also enables us to realize quickly when we are about to incur a loss of mindfulness, when the mind just begins to close down, becoming a bit less receptive, slightly contracted, somewhat automatic rather than being really alive to what is taking place, no longer fully centred, somewhat unclear, and not as calm as earlier. Noticing such markers of an impending loss of mindfulness makes it easier to react swiftly and take the appropriate measures in order to become again properly grounded in the presence of mindfulness.

Being well grounded in the presence of mindfulness is an indispensable requirement for progress in meditation. Mindfulness serves to monitor the arousing and balancing of the absorption factors when cultivating tranquillity and of the awakening factors when cultivating insight. In both cases, without a grounding in mindfulness the practice will not unfold its full potential. Hence any time we invest in familiarizing ourselves with the distinct flavour and texture of a

mind in which mindfulness is well established, learning how to foster such a mental condition and beware of its loss, is an investment of time that will benefit our meditation practice in many ways.

OPEN PRACTICE

The same grounding continues when shifting to open awareness. Familiarity with the texture of the mind in which mindfulness is established facilitates our being aware that “there is the mind”. Rooted in whole-body awareness we are aware of the impermanent nature of phenomena in whatever way these manifest in the present moment. The simple recognition of whether we are still mentally on track serves as a continuous element during our *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation. The distinct sense of the embodied presence of mindfulness can become a baseline for the third *satipaṭṭhāna*, in the sense of enabling a continuous mode of contemplation of the mind. Such baseline practice in turn provides a solid foundation for being able to recognize any of the other mental states, listed in the discourse, as and when they manifest. In this way, just as the continuous presence of proprioceptive awareness can alert us to any loss of bodily balance, so the continuous presence of embodied mindfulness can alert us to any loss of mental balance.

When substantial distractions occur, the first three categories can be employed as soon as the distraction has been recognized. What counts as a substantial distraction can be illustrated with the example of meeting someone on the road, already mentioned above (see above [here](#)). If such a meeting just leads to a brief greeting after which we move on, then it need not be considered a substantial distraction. But if we sit down to chat, then this would qualify as a substantial distraction.

In the case of substantial distractions, once we realize, we can look back and try to discern whether we have been experiencing lust, anger, or delusion, ideally also recognizing the feeling tone of that experience. Due to such mindful recognition, lust, anger, or delusion might just vanish. Nevertheless, for a short while we could still keep a lookout for a recurrence of these states. Such a lookout would be a way of recognizing their absence, and rejoicing in their absence will go a long way in preventing their recurrence.

If during practice we find the mind repeatedly getting into thoughts coloured by lust and anger, we might adjust to this situation by giving

slightly more importance to impermanence in our main mode of practice. Awareness of impermanence, in particular in relation to pleasant and unpleasant feelings respectively, makes it easier to avoid reacting with desire and aversion. If our mind instead repeatedly gets into deluded distractions, we might give more importance to being fully alive to the present moment in our main mode of practice. In particular the subtle joy of being in the present moment prevents the type of boredom that often fuels the arising of distractions.

IMPERMANENCE

Sustained practice will make it unmistakably clear that the mind constantly changes. A particular mental state arises only to pass away, followed by the arising of another mental state. Even that which knows is just a process. If it were permanent, it would forever be frozen in the condition of knowing a single thing. The very fact that the mind knows different things makes it indubitably clear that it cannot be permanent.

Any perception or thought is a messenger of impermanence, just as much as any feeling. Practising in this way fulfils the implications of clearly knowing (*sampajañña*). The canonical passage in question defines clearly knowing in terms of recognition of the impermanent nature of feelings, perceptions, and thoughts as they arise, persist, and then pass away (SN 47.35; Anālayo 2003: 39f).

The constantly changing nature of the mind becomes particularly evident when we get into the type of thought that we would rather avoid. Even though we sit down with the firm intention to cultivate what is wholesome, sooner or later we find that the mind has taken us for a ride and gone to a place where we certainly do not want to be. It becomes so patently obvious that we are not in control of our own mind. The mind is empty, just like the body.

Interestingly, those who have fully realized emptiness through full awakening are also those who have gained control over the mind. Controlling the mind is the result of skilfully working with the conditions of the mind through gradual training. It will not be achieved by merely trying to impose our willpower in the unreasonable expectation that the mind can just be forced to be the way we want.

Although we cannot force the mind to be the way we want, we are

able to influence it by cultivating the appropriate causes and conditions. The realization of the conditioned nature of the mind undermines our sense of identification with our own thoughts, views, and opinions. On the positive side of this realization stands the insight that the way we are now is not an innate and unchangeable trait. Instead, it is the product of conditions. Conditions can be influenced and changed, and this is precisely where meditative training comes in. The conditions that are of crucial relevance in this respect are the topic of the fourth *satipaṭṭhāna*.

The insight perspectives that can be cultivated with contemplation of the mind complete our meditative appreciation of the three characteristics of impermanence, *dukkha*, and not-self. Body, feeling, and mind are without exception impermanent. What is impermanent is incapable of yielding lasting satisfaction. It is *dukkha*. According to the definition given in the first noble truth, one of the dimensions of *dukkha* is not getting what we want. This reflects our inability to control things completely. Body, feeling, and mind are clearly outside of the sphere of our complete control. For this reason, they have to be reckoned as devoid of a self. The self-notion targeted here is precisely about being in complete control. Therefore, what is impermanent and *dukkha* must be empty of a self.

The same understanding carries over from sitting to walking meditation. During actual walking, importance can be given to the constantly changing nature of the mind that is aware of the walking. Such observation can shift from awareness of impermanence to *dukkha* and eventually to the empty nature of all phenomena, whenever opportune. The comprehensive vision of body, feeling, and mind in their internal and external dimensions as being subject to the three characteristics reaches its completion at this point. Undertaken in this way, insight into the three characteristics can become our constant companion during any activity.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

Insight into the three characteristics during any activity can take as its point of reference right view in the form of the four noble truths. With the previous *satipaṭṭhāna* practice this has already to some degree become a matter of personal experience. Having verified the practical relevance of this scheme of diagnosis, any problem or challenge in

daily life can be approached with its help. This can take place by first of all honestly recognizing the stressful or even painful dimension of the problem or challenge (first truth), followed by discerning the degree to which our own attitude, expectation, or outlook makes a contribution to the stress or pain experienced (second truth). Such discernment in turn makes it quite clear that an adjustment on the side of our attitude, expectation, or outlook stands a good chance of diminishing, if not removing, the stress or pain (third truth). The medication to be applied (fourth truth) can then take the form of insight into the three characteristics. Whatever happens, it certainly is impermanent, therefore it is *dukkha* anyway, and most certainly it is empty of a self. According to what the situation demands, the medication could be by way of placing emphasis on one of the three characteristics or on all three in combination. The resultant right vision can have a substantially transformative effect, even to the extent of freeing the situation of its stressful or painful repercussions.

Such practical implementation of right view in turn builds a foundation for appreciating further dimensions of the noble eightfold path. Based on the directional input of right view and the compassionate dimension of right intention, it becomes unmistakably clear why speech, action, and livelihood need to be brought into accord with this directional input. All of these need to evolve into becoming mindfulness-supportive behaviour. The mind is in a way comparable to a pot, which is easily overthrown if it has no stand. The stand required to steady the mind is precisely the noble eightfold path (SN 45.27).

The need for a firm moral foundation finds expression in several discourses in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-saṃyutta*. Each of these depicts how a monastic, who wants to go into retreat and do intensive practice, asks the Buddha for instructions. The instructions given emphasize the need to purify moral conduct (SN 47.3, SN 47.15, SN 47.16, SN 47.46, and SN 47.47). Established in purified moral conduct, the monastic should then cultivate *satipaṭṭhāna*. Another discourse even goes so far as to state that the Buddha's teaching of morality is precisely for the sake of the cultivation of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* (SN 47.21). From an early Buddhist viewpoint, building a sound moral foundation is clearly indispensable for a proper cultivation of mindfulness.

THE DISTORTED PERCEPTIONS

The contribution made by contemplation of the mind to the hub of the wheel of practice is the knowing of the specific texture of the mind when mindfulness of the body is well established. In addition, at this point of practice insight into impermanence has become comprehensive, covering body, feeling, and mind. The body changes, that which feels the body changes, and that which knows body and feeling also changes. The contribution made to the rim of the wheel is a gradual lessening of identification with the mind. In this way the realization of emptiness also becomes comprehensive.

Looking back at the *satipaṭṭhāna* meditations cultivated up to this point, the first five spokes in the wheel involve a progressive cultivation of insight. This progress relates to the four distortions of perception (*vipallāsa*). These are the mistaken attributions of permanence, happiness, selfhood, and beauty to what in reality is otherwise (AN 4.49; Anālayo 2003: 25).

Contemplation of the anatomical parts undermines the mistaken projection of beauty onto the physical body. Practising with the elements deconstructs the erroneous assumption of a substantial self to be found anywhere in the body. This finds its complement in insight into the empty nature of the mind through the present exercise. Giving attention to our own mortality brings out the cutting edge of impermanence and thereby undermines the misleading assumption of any permanence in embodied existence. This also finds its complement in the present contemplation of mind, which makes it clear that the whole mental domain is also devoid of anything permanent. Contemplation of feeling brings out the true nature of felt experience. This directly counters the misguided attribution of happiness to what in truth and fact cannot yield lasting happiness: the pursuit of sensuality through the body. It does so by revealing a more promising arena for our innate quest for happiness: cultivating the mind in such a way that it becomes a source of wholesome joy and happiness.

A basic theme of the present *satipaṭṭhāna* is the importance of the mind regarding anything that happens. As the first verse in the *Dhammapada* proclaims, mind is the forerunner of dharmas (Dhp 1; Anālayo 2013: 145f). This role of the mind as the forerunner makes it all the more important that mindful monitoring of our mental

condition be firmly established. The insight gained in this way leads to becoming increasingly adept at dwelling independently without clinging to anything.

SUMMARY

The main thrust of contemplation of the mind is towards an accurate reflection of the condition of our own mind, comparable to looking into a mirror. Instead of directing all attention to what happens outside, we learn to keep an eye on what happens within. Here the perhaps most important condition of the mind to be recognized and fostered is the presence of mindfulness. Such establishing of *sati* alerts us to the presence or absence of lust, anger, and delusion in the mind; it also enables our monitoring of deeper levels of concentration and insight. Ongoing practice reveals the impermanent nature of all mental events, including the quality of knowing itself.