

## THE DHARMA TREASURE

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Tonight what I'd like to do is to look at a particular Buddhist sutta, one of the most famous of all the suttas in the Pali canon, and perhaps the most important of all the Buddha's discourses. If you go to Asia, particularly to a south-east Asian country like Thailand, you'll sometimes see a Buddhist shrine, and upon that shrine will be what looks like a treasure chest - a rectangular thing like a box, about eighteen inches long, which seems to be made of gold and studded with jewels. But it's not a box. It's a sutta, a written discourse of the Buddha, originally written down around two thousand years ago after having been passed down by word of mouth for hundreds of years. It is written in Thai script, in the Pali language, on palm leaves or long, rectangular sheets of paper. Or sometimes the words are even written on sheets of gold. Unlike our own books, the sheets are not stapled together - they are just placed in order, one on top of the other, and they are encased by two elaborately carved wooden covers. It is these covers which we may sometimes see richly ornamented with gold leaf, and studded with turquoise, ruby, sapphire and diamond.

Even though no-one knows how long it has been since Pali was actually a spoken language - it's certainly far more than a thousand years - the words written upon those palm leaves, perhaps in letters of gold, are, for the Buddhists who visit this particular temple, their greatest treasure. In fact this particular book is an important object of worship. When the Buddhists whose temple this is perform their puja, when they celebrate their practice of Buddhism ceremonially, they naturally worship the Buddha, the teacher who discovered the way to Enlightenment. But they also worship his teaching. And for them, it is this particular book which symbolises all the teachings, all the practices.

In fact you find something like this, this Dharma worship, this book worship, this worship of the teachings of the Buddha as symbolised in the written word, in most if not all eastern Buddhist traditions. The Tibetans, for example, have very distinctive shrines. They are famous for their beautiful Buddha images, and in Tibetan gompas we may see many different forms of the Buddha, all seated together upon a specially proportioned wooden altar. The altar is very meticulously structured, so that the highest Buddha form is given the highest place of all, and the others placed exactly right in the spiritual hierarchy, with all the butter lamps, ritual offering bowls, and other special offerings like flowers and incense placed below. But then sometimes, above the shrine, above even the highest Buddha-form, you have the Dharma texts. Usually in an elaborately carved wooden case, sometimes fronted with glass, you sometimes see rows of Tibetan woodblock-printed books - sutras and tantras. And these scriptures, rather like their southeast Asian equivalent, are printed upon long rectangles of rough handmade paper which are encased in wooden covers. The books are then carefully wrapped in cloth, sometimes in beautiful gold brocade, with a red sash round the middle to hold it all together. And they're placed above the altar, above the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

So in a sense the Tibetans revere the Buddhist texts, the Buddhist Dharma, even more than the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas themselves. And they do this because the Dharma is primary. The Dharma is primordial even - it was there even before the Buddha was there. Enlightenment arises out of the realisation of the Dharma, the truth, the ultimate real nature of things. It is said that after his Enlightenment the Buddha himself worshipped the Dharma. It's interesting that even an Enlightened being wants to find something even higher than himself. And that's why the Tibetans often have all those books above their Buddha images, and that's also why the southeast Asian Buddhists worship the Dharma, that's why they endow the written word with such costly and beautiful ornamentation. That's why they treasure the Dharma so much.

But, as I said, they very often choose a particular text to adorn and worship. And of course it is interesting for us to enquire which text they choose to revere in this way. Which Dharma text is considered the most valuable, the greatest treasure of all? How to choose? After all, the Buddha taught so many things.

What did he teach? Lets just digress, very briefly, and take a look at the contents of the Buddhist scriptures. They are divided into three divisions known as the three  pitakas  or 'baskets'. There is the Suttapitaka, the Abhidharmapitaka and the Vinayapitaka. The Suttapitaka is the division of suttas. These consist of stories in which the Buddha almost always plays the major part - though they sometimes feature his main disciples, like Sariputta or Moggallana instead. They always contain some teaching or other. There are hundreds and hundreds of these stories, some very long, others just a few lines; and, apart from the actual Dharma teachings, they contain all kinds of things - detailed information about the society of the Buddha's time, Indian myth and legend, stories about the Buddha, his disciples - as well as very profound philosophy and practical teaching. There is a great deal of really fascinating reading in the suttas.

But quite early on, perhaps during the Buddha's lifetime, someone must have realised that there is a need to sort all that great mass of material out - to take out just the material that would be most useful for practising the spiritual life. This is how the Abhidharma came into being. Abhidharma means 'higher' or 'essential' Dharma'. The people who compiled the Abhidharma were trying to get at what is most essential. Unfortunately what they often ended up with was, for our needs at least, often very dry and analytical. But some of it is even now very useful, and very profound, the expression of a great deal of insight.

The whole idea of condensing the teaching into its essentials, demonstrates the need to reflect upon the Dharma, to reflect upon it so that we understand it thoroughly, so that we make it our own. It really isn't enough just to have a provisional understanding. If we are really serious about practising Buddhism it isn't enough for us to simply know, for example, that the Buddha gained Enlightenment through his insight into conditioned co-production. It isn't enough for us merely to know that, so that we know where to look it up, we know that Sangharakshita and Subhuti and other writers have written on certain aspects of it. No. We need to develop a personal understanding of conditioned co-production, or whatever teaching it happens to be. To some extent we do this already, because when we learn a particular teaching that we find interesting, we cannot help but reflect upon it from time to time. But consider the proportion of time we actually spend in that way, compared to the rest that goes on in our mind. If we are ever to gain a really deep understanding, we need to make our reflection more conscious and deliberate - not only through our own thought but also through discussion, through group study. And also through writing things down in your own words, formulating your understanding in a way that makes sense to you. This can be done with the aid of diagrams, mind maps, flow charts, images, drawings, or whatever appeals to you. This is the principle out of which the Abhidharma seems to have evolved. Out of the desire to clarify what the Buddha was really getting at, people wanted to condense things down, systematise things, get everything on one page as it were, so that they could see it more clearly.

OK, thirdly, there's the Vinayapitaka. The Vinaya is another kind of condensation of the material in the suttas, but from the point of view of applying the Dharma to everyday life. So it's about ethics, it's about principles of human behaviour. Of course the Buddha worked mostly with the monks, so the Vinaya is about principles of behaviour in that particular situation. What to do when one monk deceives the other monks, what to do when one monk takes another monk's property, or takes for himself property which is supposed to be for collective use. What to do when a monk abuses the trust of the lay people, etc. The Buddha never started with a list of rules, but in forty five years of living with the monastic Sangha circumstances sometimes arose in which rules had to be made. So in each case the story is told of how

a particular rule arose.

So this is very interesting for us. Ethical principles like that of generosity and helpfulness are obviously worthwhile. But if we are actually to be generous and helpful consistently, we often need to make rules for ourselves. We need to agree amongst ourselves that it is OK to do this, but not OK to do that. It is interesting to note in this context that the Buddha authorised the monks to change the minor rules of the Vinaya if it seemed appropriate after his death. In other words he considered the need for rules a temporary affair, applicable to particular circumstances which will change with time, whereas the basic ethical principles themselves never change. The wisdom-principle that we should be kind to others arises out of a universal, eternal truth; whereas the safety rule that says "don't drive cars over 70 mph" applies to particular circumstances.

So the Vinaya aspect of the Buddha's teaching is there because it isn't enough just to know the Dharma. The doctrine, the Abhidharma, isn't enough - we need to apply those Dharmic principles in our concrete experience, apply them to the way we actually treat ourselves and others.

So it is knowing about the Suttas, knowing about the Abhidharma, knowing about the Vinaya, with an understanding of all this, the Buddhists of southeast asia choose the most important text for them. So what do they choose? What teaching is it that we find encased in those jewelled covers, that they worship with so much appreciation and respect? - that they value above all other teachings? Well, we would expect it to be a very practical, even down-to-earth teaching, and we would expect it, also, to be very profound doctrinally and philosophically. And it is both. The text that they choose is known as the Satipatthana Sutta.

You'll find the Satipatthana Sutta in the first volume of the Majjhima Nikaya, the Middle Length Sayings. It's the tenth sutta there. There's also a version in the Digha Nikaya, but the content is almost identical. As you will have gathered, the Satipatthana Sutta is very much respected in the Buddhist world as one of the most, if not the most important discourse of the Buddha. This is because it is about the teaching of mindfulness or awareness. The Buddha himself seems to have considered mindfulness to be his central teaching, since his very last words were an admonition to the monks to be mindful. "Strive on with mindfulness".

So what does this mindfulness mean to us?

Imagine that you are working behind the counter of a very busy shop. It's a wholefood shop, and it's near Christmas. There are lots and lots of customers. They are coming in thick and fast and there are all sorts of them. One of them doesn't have any idea of what she wants and she wants you to help her to find out for her. Another one you know quite well because every time he comes in he is very critical about what the shop stocks. What you sell him doesn't work, doesn't contain the right ingredients, isn't ethically sound, isn't the best you can get, and is too expensive. Another customer is extremely odd, and you know him too because he comes in most days. Every time he comes in he assumes a different character - one day it's a heavy accent, the next day he's very upperclass. That might sound fun in a way but usually in fact he's rather unpleasant and it can be a bit of a shock if you are caught unprepared, because he usually rushes into the shop in a very brusque and demanding sort of way. Another person wants some very specialised advice about their own diet, about their particular set of allergies and things that they can and can't eat, about dietary supplements they need, and also, at the same time, they are asking you about their baby's diet. Unfortunately you aren't quite sure whether babies can eat muesli or not. You ponder on these questions for a while. You stall in fact. But all the time the queue of customers is growing and they seem quite demanding. Somehow, now, they even seem a little menacing. They all want something from you. You even start to panic a little and just to get some leeway you fob the mother off with a pat answer to her question, avoid entirely the muesli question, and get on to the

next customer. You do all that in a somewhat irritated way, and you also feel irritated about the fact that you are irritated. And later on, reflecting on the day, you feel irritated about the whole sequence of events, and you wonder whether there is really any hope for you - is there really anything that you can do about your emotional reactions?

But let's say you don't actually give up hope. Let's imagine that in this case you are a Buddhist, and are lucky enough to be working together with other Buddhists - working with other people who care about the mental states they experience, and which they inflict on others. And because you care about your mental states, you wonder about what you can do about them. You care enough to want to be creative with them.

And that word, creativity, sums up what mindfulness is about. Mindfulness and creativity are in many ways different words for the same thing.

Let's take the first passage from the Satipatthana Sutta.

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[1] Thus have I heard: At one time the Lord was staying among the  
 [1] Kuru people in a township of the Kurus called Kammassadhamma.  
 [1] While he was there, the Lord addressed the monks, saying:  
 [1] "Monks". "Revered One", these monks answered the Lord in assent.  
 [1] The Lord spoke thus:  
 [1] "There is this one way, monks, for the purification of  
 [1] beings, for the overcoming of sorrows and griefs, for the going  
 [1] down of sufferings and miseries, for winning the right path, for  
 [1] realising nibbana, that is to say, the four applications of  
 [1] mindfulness. What are the four?  
 [1] Herein, monks, a monk fares along contemplating the body  
 [1] in the body, ardent, clearly conscious of it, mindful of it, so  
 [1] as to control the covetousness and dejection common in the  
 [1] world. He fares along contemplating the feelings in the  
 [1] feelings, ardent, clearly conscious of them, mindful of them, so  
 [1] as to control the covetousness and dejection common in the  
 [1] world. He fares along contemplating the mind in the mind,  
 [1] ardent, clearly conscious of it, mindful of it, so as to control  
 [1] the covetousness and dejection common in the world. He fares  
 [1] along contemplating the mental objects in the mental objects,  
 [1] ardent, clearly conscious of them, mindful of them, so as to  
 [1] control the covetousness and dejection common in the world".

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[1]"So as to control the covetousness and dejection common in the world".[1] In other words, so as to maintain a creative attitude, so as not to be tied to our usual limited emotional responses, responses connected with a limited view of ourselves. A view of ourselves which thinks so often of having things or not having things, investing hopes and fears in having or not having things, getting dejected when we don't have things. And [1]"There is this one way, [1]monks, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrows and [1]griefs, for the going down of sufferings and miseries, for winning the right [1]path, for realising nibbana, that is to say, the four applications of [1] mindfulness" [1]

For 'monk', of course, read 'man or woman'. The traditional commentary points out that the Buddha taught this to monks, since he spent most of his time with the monks, but that the teaching applies to all practitioners of Buddhism.

Anyway, we see from this that the point of mindfulness is to overcome sorrow and grief - in more positive terms, to win happiness, to win the right path which leads to nirvana or Enlightenment. And you notice he says it's [1]"the only way." [1] This might sound rather dogmatic to us. We tend to like the idea of there being many ways to the same goal, not just one. We like to

think that everyone has his or her own path to tread. And of course that's true in some ways - people have very different temperaments, very different conditionings. The Buddha is not denying that. He is saying that there is a particular quality that everyone needs to acquire, whatever their temperament and conditioning, if they are to be able to develop spiritually, and that this quality is mindfulness. In that sense it's 'the only way'. Basically, without awareness, you simply can't develop at all. The Path - that is, any spiritual path, any spiritual path that is really a spiritual path - is a path of awareness. It's a path of mindfulness.

Well this reveals something that we've forgotten to do and that is to define what mindfulness actually is. We've equated mindfulness with creativity, but that's a bit too general. Now we seem to be saying that mindfulness is awareness. That's more like it, in fact. In a nutshell, mindfulness is being aware of what is happening at the present moment. It's "being here now", it's being present. It's being in touch with what's happening. It's not being distracted. Actually this "being here now" is one of two key aspects of mindfulness, and it's called [\[1\]sati\[1\]](#). As in the [Sati](#) [patthana Sutta](#).

But it wouldn't be correct to say that this [\[1\]sati\[1\]](#) is only "being here now". Let's look at our own experience - is being in touch with what's happening simply a matter of being in the present? Surely the past comes in somewhere too, even though perhaps we don't want to be dwelling on the past in a distracted sort of way, constantly replaying thoughts and emotions connected with the past. Of course we don't want that, and that's what the "be here now" idea is about. But surely we do need to recollect the past. Surely our history is what has made us what we are. Surely there have been lessons learned which we need to recall from our past experience. If our experience of life was really only the present moment, it would be a very narrow, very one dimensional affair. For a start, we would have no recollection of what we had just done, said, or thought. We would forget who we are - we would never, ever, know who we are at all. No - mindfulness, or [\[1\]sati\[1\]](#) clearly includes a kind of 'background awareness' of the past. And not only that, it also includes anticipating what might happen, what is likely to happen, in the future. But again, this awareness of the future isn't a kind of obsessive anxiety about what might happen, or - on the other hand - a set of blind assumptions about what will happen. And it isn't in the foreground of our awareness. It is a subtle 'background' sense that actions have results, that there are going to be other experiences in the future.

This sense of the future brings our attention to the second principle aspect of mindfulness. This is awareness of purpose. The Pali term for this is [\[1\]sampajanna\[1\]](#). In the suttas it is often translated as "clear comprehension", or "clear consciousness". Here is the passage where it is first mentioned:

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 [1] "And again, monks, a monk, when he is setting out or returning  
 [1] is one acting in a clearly conscious way; when he is looking in  
 [1] front or looking around, when he has bent in or stretched out  
 [1] his arm, when he is carrying his outer cloak, bowl and robe,  
 [1] when he is eating, drinking, chewing, tasting; when he is  
 [1] obeying the calls of nature; when he is walking, standing,  
 [1] sitting, asleep, awake, talking, silent - he is one acting in a  
 [1] clearly conscious way."

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 In other words, in whatever we do we need to be conscious of why we are acting in that way, what it's all for. So as well as our general awareness of what is going on, as well as [\[1\]sati\[1\]](#), mindfulness is our sense of purpose, our knowing why we are doing whatever we are doing. These two together make up creativity. Creativity is an increasing clarity about what we are trying to achieve, when we are so aware of what is happening that we don't miss the

opportunities which are presented to us. We use our opportunities to create whatever we want to create. Whether we want to create a friendship, or a source of income, or a better atmosphere, or a good meal, or our own mental state in meditation.

There are said to be three kinds of awareness of purpose: awareness of what we are trying to do in a practical way, awareness of the suitability of our present actions for achieving our purpose, and awareness of our spiritual practice. Just to expand on those three briefly, let's say we are talking to that mother in the shop. In that situation, our awareness of what we are trying to do is actually a very complex thing - as it often is. Even if our job, or our life generally, is a very simple one, we are, in fact, always engaged on a number of different fronts, and also at different levels. Looked at from a very broad perspective, the whole of our life has culminated in the present moment. The present moment is the result of everything we have tried to create, every thing we have desired, and striven for, and avoided, and worried about, and thought about. Not that we've got everything we always wanted, not that, but all those years of wanting have formed the way we are, have accumulated like the lines and wrinkles on our face, and moulded the present moment. In other words purpose is not just the conscious decisions we make. We are often quite unconscious of why we do things. We are driven by a mass of habitual motivations that we have built up over our whole life, patterns of desires and aversions that probably started when we were children, and no doubt include hang-overs from previous existences. So awareness of purpose includes this deeper sense of purpose - it includes learning about what we are driven by unconsciously, making the unconscious more conscious. But for us in the shop, talking to that mother in the wholefood shop about babies eating muesli, no doubt it simply means being aware that we are here to do a particular job, that we are there to help the customers coming in. Even though it's a rush and we are tending to lose our mindfulness.

Then, second kind of awareness of purpose - awareness of the suitability of our present actions for achieving our purpose - probably means asking ourselves "here I am, pretending that I know something about infant diet, fobbing this woman off with a pat answer to her question. Is this the best way?" - and perhaps concluding that it would be better to suggest she asks someone who actually knows. That would really be more in accordance with our overall purpose. That would be more useful to her.

Then, thirdly, awareness of our spiritual practice, or of the domain of our spiritual practice as the commentary says - this is a point from the traditional commentary to the Satipatthana Sutta - awareness of our spiritual practice in that shop would perhaps mean trying to remain in a clear state of consciousness. Or perhaps it would mean trying to act in accordance with the precepts. Or perhaps it would mean remembering to be mindful. It could be all these, and more. So from this we can see that sampajanna, mindfulness of purpose, has many dimensions: it is so to speak the dimensional aspect of mindfulness practice, the background aspect, whereas sati is the focus, the directed aspect.

OK, so now we have the basis. We know what mindfulness is, that it's awareness of what is happening, and awareness of what we are trying to achieve. But when we say, 'awareness of what is happening', what do we actually mean? What are we really referring to? What is "what is happening"? For our experience is so vast, there are so many things going on, so many things to be aware of. In his lecture on Perfect Mindfulness Sangharakshita speaks of four aspects of awareness. Firstly there's awareness of the environment, the world outside. Then, secondly, there's awareness of ourself, the world inside. Then thirdly there's awareness of other people - who also, of course, have an inner life. Then fourthly there's awareness of reality, in other words the overall context, the overall truth of things. This approach really covers everything that we can possibly be aware of. Though you'll find each of these four aspects mentioned, implicitly or explicitly, in the Satipatthana Sutta, the sutta concentrates its attention upon the second of these four aspects, that is awareness of self. So why is that, do you think?

Why is it that the Buddha doesn't bother particularly to mention awareness of the environment, even of other people, even of reality, even though those aspects are mentioned? It isn't because those aspects are not considered important. It's obviously because awareness of self is considered to be of supreme importance. And why is that? It is because that self-awareness is the whole message of Buddhism, the whole basis of Buddhism. "Know thyself", as the maxim goes. If we can be aware of our own part in things, we can change ourselves. By changing ourselves, we begin to change the world.

The title of our sutta treasure, our dharma treasure, is the Satipatthana Sutta. The word sati has already been explained. Thich Nhat Hanh translates the word patthana, a foundation, as 'establishment', to indicate that there are four aspects of ourself, four points at which we need to establish our awareness. I have often explained these four points as first of all our body, then our feelings, then our emotions, and finally our thoughts.

This is not quite the terminology used in the Satipatthana Sutta, though body, feeling, emotion and thought is a useful simplification. Tonight, let's look at what the sutta actually says. The four foundations as explained in the Satipatthana Sutta are first body and secondly feeling, in exactly the same way. Then the third foundation is states of mind. The Pali word is citta. Citta means mind or heart and mostly consists of what we usually call emotional responses. The description in the sutta is as follows:-

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 [1] 'Herein, monks, a monk intuitively knows the mind with  
 [1] attachment as having attachment, and the mind without  
 [1] attachment as having no attachment; he knows the mind with  
 [1] hatred as having hatred, and the mind without hatred as  
 [1] not having it. He knows the mind in a dull state, in a  
 [1] distracted state, and in an expanded state, and he knows  
 [1] it when the mind is not in these states. He knows when  
 [1] the mind is experiencing dhyana or higher states of  
 [1] consciousness, and when it isn't. He knows when the mind  
 [1] is liberated, and when it is not liberated'.

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 So citta is generally equivalent to emotion. The description of this category is very broad indeed. Specifically, it speaks in terms of greed, hatred and delusion, the basic negative emotions. Then it mentions the positive emotions, which pertain to higher states when one's consciousness is not troubled by attachment and hatred. Then it mentions freedom, or the lack of it, which, according to the commentary, either refers to a temporary freedom from negative states or the permanent freedom that may be won through insight.

The fourth foundation in the Satipatthana Sutta is mental objects or dhammas, which is quite different from simply thoughts, though it includes them. This refers to a kind of a checkout, a sort of ethical analysis, of whatever mental events we experience, as they arise. We don't just check thoughts but feelings and emotions as well. We try to see if they have anything to do with various categories such as the Five Hindrances, the Ten Fetters, the Factors of Enlightenment, etc. If it is useful, we cultivate it; if it isn't, we try not to come under its influence. So once we become aware that a certain thought or emotion or feeling is in your mind, we check to see what it is, whether it is skilful or unskilful, see whether it is a hindrance or an Enlightenment factor. So this category of 'mental objects', or dhamma - the Pali word here simply means 'things' is an analytical process which involves thought, but thought directed toward developing ones capacity to see the Dharma in everything. This kind of reflective thought is really a kind of insight practice, especially when we reflect upon the coming into being and passing away of the various objects of our attention, and especially of the mental states that arise in dependence upon those mental objects. Perhaps we recognise, for example, that at a particular moment of time our mental state

pertains to the first fetter, that of personality view, of habitual self-view. We see that the whole experience is dependent upon the somewhat inflexible way that we see ourselves. We try to see the dependency of our experience, see how that mental state was conditioned, see how it passes away as other mental objects come into existence and condition a new set of responses.

Now the nature of the description in the Satipatthana Sutta is clear, I'll briefly go through each of the four  $\square$ patthanas $\square$ , the four foundations of mindfulness, the four aspects of awareness of ourselves. Mindfulness of our body, of our feelings, of our mental state, and of the objects of our attention, the  $\square$ dhammas $\square$ .

So first of all, body.

Body means that we are aware of our physical experience. We are aware of how - in Alexander technique terms - we are 'using' our body. That is, how we are behaving physically. This means being aware of how we are sitting or standing or walking or lying down, whether we are comfortable or uncomfortable - how we are placing our limbs, how we are moving. It means awareness of posture, awareness of body language, awareness of physical energy. It means awareness of how we feel in our body, awareness of subtle physical energies, subtle movements. Awareness of the body also includes the way we do things physically - how we pick things up and put them down, how we open doors, how we use a typewriter or drive a car.

If we develop more physical awareness of ourselves, we will find that in the long term our movements become less wasteful of energy. They become more exact. We will also discover a lot about ourselves. Because if we pay attention to our physical posture and movements, we will start to notice how they reflect our emotional state. The way we stand reflects our emotional state. The way we sit down, the way we hold our arms and legs when we are talking to someone, the way we put food into our mouth, the way we give someone a friendly hug, all reflect, and reflect very closely, our mental state. This is so much so that I think that we can find out almost anything we want about our mental state from awareness of our posture.

This can be particularly useful in meditation. For example, sometimes we don't really know what is going on in our practice, sometimes we just can't tell why we don't seem to be getting anywhere. We can't analyse it with our mind. But our body knows. If we pay attention to our body, how it is, how it feels, there is often a message there - not a message that we can put in words, but a message that we can read and use if we try. The body's language is more symbolic. If our chest feels constricted or our shoulders feel tense, there's an emotional message, there is something going on emotionally which we don't necessarily need to understand with our intellect - we can feel what is missing. And we can also use physical means to supply what is missing. We don't have to understand 'lack of confidence' or 'tension, worry' when we discover that constricted chest or those tight shoulders. We can feel that there needs to be more space in the chest, feel that our shoulders need to relax. We can contact the emotion which lies behind the physical manifestation of the emotion. This is better, actually, than simply relaxing whenever we feel tense - feel the emotion behind the tension first, really feel that, and work with that. Sometimes relaxation can be a way in which we actually repress an emotion. Perhaps we feel deeply sad about something. From the point of view of psychological integration, it would be better if we could experience that sadness, incorporating it into our consciousness. It might be difficult and even painful to do that, but in the long term it'll make us happier. But while that sadness is unconscious, it causes that tight chest - just for example. But if, in the meditation, we just try to relax, and only see the situation in terms of relaxing tension, and not in terms of the underlying emotional complex, then we may simply end up repressing, and not allowing that emotion to be resolved. If, on the other hand, we remain with the tension, remain with it in a spirit of metta and acknowledgement, then quite a lot may sometimes happen. We experience the emotion. Tears may come up, tears of pain and also tears of relief, and as the emotion becomes



more fully resolved, tears of happiness, and what is sometimes called priti or ecstasy may arise in our meditation. And our tight chest, or tense shoulders, relax. Not because we have told them to relax, but because the internal pressure which tightened them no longer exists.

Feeling is the second of the foundations of mindfulness. The first aspect, body, is concerned with bodily sensations. But feeling also has to do with mental sensations like ideas and perceptions, because each kind of experience, whether it is physical or mental, has a 'feeling tone' to it. We don't just experience isolated sensations. We don't just experience the sensation of our feet on the floor, or the sensation of food in our mouth, or just some thought or idea on it's own. We don't experience these things in isolation. They all have some feeling quality accompanying them, as part of the general package of experience.

The Buddha says,

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 [1] 'Herein, monks, while he is experiencing a pleasant  
 [1] feeling he comprehends, "I am experiencing a pleasant  
 [1] feeling"; while he is experiencing a painful feeling he  
 [1] comprehends, "I am experiencing a painful feeling"; while  
 [1] he is experiencing a feeling that is neither pleasant nor  
 [1] painful he comprehends, "I am experiencing a feeling that  
 [1] is neither pleasant nor painful" - whether that feeling  
 [1] has to do with material things or with non-material  
 [1] things. He fares along contemplating the feelings in the  
 [1] feelings internally, externally, or both at the same time.  
 [1] He fares along contemplating the origin and the passing  
 [1] away of feelings, or both at the same time. Or,  
 [1] thinking, "there is feeling", his mindfulness is  
 [1] established precisely to the extent necessary just for  
 [1] knowledge, just for remembrance, and he fares along  
 [1] independently of and not grasping for anything in the  
 [1] world'.

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 Feeling is a very, very simple thing - basically feelings are either pleasant, or they are painful. Or they are so weakly pleasant, or so weakly painful, that we can hardly bother to decide whether they are pleasant or painful. These can be called 'neutral' feelings. They are so weak that we can't be bothered to decide whether we would like more of this feeling because it's pleasant, or to get away from it because it's unpleasant.

Most feelings, in fact, are like this - neutral. We are experiencing lots of neutral feelings right now. But very often our feeling is neutral because we are relatively unaware of our feeling. If we became more aware of how we experienced things, we would discover that things that we once found neutral are now definitely a pleasure or a pain. We get more sensitive to pleasure and pain as we develop through meditation. We find out more about our feelings.

And we find out more about our mental states too. The third foundation of mindfulness really boils down to awareness of our emotions, though - as we saw in the sutta - various moods and other mental states, including higher states of consciousness, are also fitted into this category.

From the Buddhist perspective, emotions are quite distinct from feelings. Feelings just happen to us. You can't create feeling, not directly. Not without doing something else first that triggers the feeling. When we feel pleasure or pain we're passive to it, it's part of experiencing something, some sensation. For example, we are experiencing all the sensations we are being subjected to as we listen to this talk - sitting in the chair or on the floor, taking in ideas, looking at this or that person or this or that thing.

Every sensation and idea automatically has a feeling tone. It's pleasant, painful, or so weakly pleasant or painful that it hardly matters. The feeling arises together with the experience. If it's pleasant, we'll want to repeat it. If it's painful, we won't want to repeat it.

And this is where the emotional element comes in. Emotion is basically wanting, it's basically desire to experience this or that sensation and the pleasant feeling it gives us. Or it's wanting not to experience this or that sensation and the unpleasant feeling that it gives us.

The emotions that we have about things are our responses, our reactions, to these primary experiences of pleasure or pain. We tend to feel angry or resentful, or perhaps just sad, about experiences that we find painful. We tend to get enthusiastic, or perhaps for example proud or protective, about things that we find enjoyable. So here we have some examples of emotional responses: anger, resentment, enthusiasm, positive pride, loyalty.

There are many, many emotions, and we are usually responding with a fairly complex mixture of them. These complex mixtures add up to moods and mental states. I'll try to give some idea of the scope of the Buddhist conception of emotional life by presenting you with a traditional list of emotions from the Abhidharma.

So here are some positive emotions: confidence, self-respect, shame, contentment, metta, clarity, energy in pursuit of the good, integrated concern for development, equanimity, nonviolence.

Here are some negative emotions: attachment, hatred, conceit, lack of awareness, indecision, holding false view; fury, resentment, slyness-concealment of one's state of mind, over-defensiveness regarding one's state of mind, envy, materialism, pretence regarding one's state of mind, dishonesty, intoxication, malice, shamelessness, lack of respect for wise opinion, stagnation regarding one's state of mind, ebullience, suspiciousness, laziness, lack of concern for one's state of mind, feeble attentiveness to the positive, mental preoccupation, woolgathering.

Of course each of these is just a word; we would need to properly define, from our own experience, what is meant by each. There seem to be more negative emotions than positive ones, - perhaps it is that we have more words for negative emotions than positive ones, or perhaps it is that they can get more and more complex while positive emotions tend to be simpler. Emotion, as a part of our experience, is in any case much more complex than feeling. Feeling is the simple experience of pleasure or pain; emotion is our reaction, or our response, to that feeling. It is usually a mixture, a complex mixture, of responses.

All right then, finally we come to that other part of us, the rest of our mental experience. We've had our body, our bodily experience; we've had two aspects already of our mental experience, feeling and emotion. But there is also thought. Thought is the fourth foundation of mindfulness, the fourth aspect of our experience which we can keep an eye on, the fourth aspect with respect to which we can deepen and develop our experience, and eventually harness in the development of wisdom and even Enlightenment. In terms of the Satipatthana Sutta, thought is the fourth foundation of mindfulness in the sense that we use thought to analyse the nature of the dhammas or objects of the mind. I think that in this context it is useful for us to become more aware of our thinking faculty itself, or our imaginative faculty itself - even before we start using it in the way the Buddha suggests. We often need to tune into it - so let's spend a minute or so looking at the nature of thought.

Thought is a broad term - there are many kinds of mental experience which come in here. As I've already hinted, there is our imagination - there are images which arise in our mind, dream images, waking images, meditation images. There are intuitive perceptions. This is all within the realm of thought. Then there are distracted, semi-conscious thoughts, there are distracted, semi-conscious fantasies and also conscious, directed fantasies.

All this is thought. With all this mental material it is helpful to distinguish between two basic types, which are directed thinking and

associative thinking. Most of our mental activity is associative. Images and dreams come and go through associations, unconscious associations, and so do most of our thoughts. It's like when we are having a conversation and we find ourselves going on for ages, going from one subject to the next, and suddenly there's a pause, there's a silence and someone asks, "well - how did we get on to that subject?" - and you trace it back. We were talking about this, which led to that, which led to that, and then we go on to this subject. Most of our thinking is like this. Actually it can be very interesting to look at the associations we make. The associations which lead us to go from one subject of thought to another can be very useful, very revealing psychologically. In meditation it can sometimes be interesting to trace our thoughts back to their source - sometimes just a single sound sets off an association, which then leads to another train of thought, which leads to another.

But there is the other kind of thinking we call directed thinking - it is much rarer. This is when we are deliberately thinking about something, turning it over deliberately in our mind, thinking about this or that aspect of it, looking for some kind of conclusion. We're trying to find out what we think. Directed thinking is a process of discovery, and mindfulness of thoughts in this sense is creativity in thought. The more we try to be aware of our thinking, the more we discover in our thinking. And the way to be aware of thoughts is to want to be aware, to be interested in being aware, interested in finding out what we actually do think.

Mindfulness of thoughts isn't a question of encouraging directed thinking and discouraging associative thinking. There are positive and negative aspects of both - associative thinking can be distracted, or it can be an inspired vision, or a brilliant piece of lateral thinking. Deliberately directed thinking can be neurotic and willed, or it can be clear and sharp. But anyway, even when we think directedly there are usually elements of associative thought mixed in. As we think, we look for clues in the images and impressions which are floating around in the flotsam and jetsam of our associative mental activity. There's a kind of directedness which scans the subconscious imagery as it looks for its direction, as we try to become aware of what we are thinking. Actually it is very difficult to describe what really goes on when we think directedly. Sangharakshita was once asked to describe his thinking and if I remember correctly he described in terms of geometrical forms and planes, intersecting and joining one another.

Thinking is very important and we need time for it if we are trying to develop. Mindfulness of thought can be developed through keeping a diary, by writing down what has happened, especially our thoughts. It can be developed through meditation, as through the process of settling the mind we come to discard irrelevant thoughts. But most of all it is developed simply through trying to be aware, through being curious enough, being enquiring and adventurous enough, to want to know what we think.

In the Satipatthana Sutta the Buddha applies this kind of thinking to the Five Hindrances, the five Skhandhas, the six senses, the seven Factors of Enlightenment, and the four Noble Truths. We don't have time to discuss these in detail. But you can easily find out more about them and then use them in your own mindfulness practice. He says,

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 [1] "Herein, monks, a monk fares along contemplating mental  
 [1] objects in mental object from the point of view of the  
 [1] five Hindrances. And how, monks, does a monk fare along  
 [1] contemplating mental objects in mental object from the  
 [1] point of view of the five Hindrances [and the five  
 [1] Skhandhas, senses, Enlightenment factors, and the rest]?  
 [1] Herein, monks, when a subjective desire for sense-  
 [1] pleasures is present [sense desire being the first of the  
 [1] hindrances], he comprehends that he has a desire for  
 [1]

sense-pleasures; or when a subjective desire for sense-pleasures is not present, he comprehends that he does not have a desire for sense-pleasures. And in so far as as there comes to be an uprising of desire for sense pleasures that had not arisen before, he comprehends that. And in so far as as there comes to be an uprising of desire for sense pleasures that had arisen before, he comprehends that. And in so far as there comes to be no future uprising of desire for the sense pleasures he has got rid of, he comprehends that.[1] [And he comprehends in the the same way for ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and anxiety, and doubt. And the same for the arising and passing away of the five Skandhas and the six senses, and for the existence or non-existence of the seven factors of Enlightenment and the four Noble Truths].

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So this is the whole range of mindfulness of ourselves: we have body, we have feeling, emotion and thought.

To conclude, let's bring all this back to our own practice. We can increase our awareness of all four foundations of mindfulness through the Mindfulness of Breathing meditation. The Mindfulness of Breathing is not really just a concentration exercise, even though it is often described as such. It also brings our emotional life together. Because concentration cannot be gained through forcedly fixing our attention upon the object of meditation. If we are to gain any degree of access concentration or dhyana, we have to engage our deeper energies, energies that are usually caught up in distractions, energies that are primarily emotional in character. It seems to me that self-awareness centres upon emotion. Emotions show themselves in our bodily posture and movements; in our emotional reactions it is pleasant or painful feeling that we cling to, or reject; and thought itself is an expression of emotion. So bodily and mentally, we are driven by emotion. In all our actions and responses, we feed the fire of our emotional responses, a fire which burns continuously. Sometimes it's a nice warm fire, sometimes it's a destructive fire, and sometimes it's the lack of fire, cold and dark. But deep, powerful energies are involved throughout, and it is just not possible to force these energies to co-operate in our Mindfulness of Breathing. They have to be wooed. They have to be persuaded, cajoled, coaxed into co-operation. In fact, these energies have to want to concentrate. They have to become interested in concentration. Shantideva compares our untamed emotional energies to a wild elephant. You can't force a wild elephant to be interested in concentration. If you can tame it at all, you can only tame a wild elephant with a combination of firmness and kindness. It's rather like the story of the Buddha's enemy, Devadatta, setting a mad elephant stampeding towards the Buddha, in the hope it would kill him. It looked pretty likely that the elephant would make short work of the Buddha, the way it was trumpeting furiously and angrily galloping down the road, raising a great cloud of dust. Many of his less enlightened disciples were running all over the place in a panic, and trying to get the Buddha caught up in it too. But the Buddha was perfectly confident. He just stood there and looked at the elephant. And something about the Buddha's manner just changed the elephant's manner. The elephant just became quiet and peaceful, and stopped stampeding, and just nuzzled the Buddha's hand.

That's what we need to do in our own Mindfulness of Breathing practice. An emotional element is required. Something of the Buddha's kindness - and his firmness - needs to be incorporated. We need to bring our attention firmly back to the breath every time we get distracted, but still we need to do this in a gentle way, a kind way. Gentle persistence is what is needed. It's a quality that comes from self-knowledge. We get to know the mental states that come up in our meditation. We don't get all upset and confused

when the anger, the sexual fantasies, the murderous fantasies, the doubt, the mind-numbing sloth and stupidity, or whatever it is for you, comes up. We're well prepared. And we are also well prepared for getting beyond the hindrances to concentration from time to time. We don't get all excited when something actually starts happening in our meditation, and at the same time we don't undervalue that opportunity. We know through experience that if we meditate in the right conditions, for a certain amount of time, with a flexible attitude, paying attention to things such as our posture, if we work in the best way we can - that this is what happens. We get into access concentration and it is quite natural. And we can then take our meditation a little bit further. That's what I mean by maturity. We know ourselves to some extent, and so we can work with ourselves. We know our body, we know our feelings, we know our emotions, we know our thoughts. We know ourselves.

Knowing ourselves is the basis of the spiritual life. And it's the way to Enlightenment. The Satipatthana Sutta concludes with the following words, and so shall we.

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[1] "Whoever, monks, should thus develop these four  
 [1] foundations of mindfulness for seven years, one of two  
 [1] results is to be expected for him: either Enlightenment  
 [1] here and now, or if there is still any residue remaining,  
 [1] the state of non-returning. Monks, let be the seven  
 [1] years. Whoever, monks, should thus develop these four  
 [1] foundations of mindfulness for six years, five years, four  
 [1] years, three years, two years, for one year - one of two  
 [1] results is to be expected for him: either Enlightenment  
 [1] here and now, or if there is still any residue remaining,  
 [1] the state of non-returning. Monks, let be the one year.  
 [1] Whoever, monks, should thus develop these four foundations  
 [1] of mindfulness for six months, five months, four months,  
 [1] three months, two months, for one month - for a half month  
 [1] - one of two results is to be expected for him: either  
 [1] Enlightenment here and now, or if there is still any  
 [1] residue remaining, the state of non-returning.

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