Satipaṭṭhāna Rethought

a meditation manual
based on earliest Buddhist texts

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Preface

What you are reading is a manual of *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, the fruit of a years-long effort to reconstruct what exactly the early Buddhists texts say about this critical teaching. *Satipaṭṭhāna* had confused me for a long time, for there seems to be astonishingly little in these early texts that is currently interpreted consistently or convincingly, and many details are generally ignored in historical sources and by modern teachers.

It seemed to me that part of the confusion about what the *satipaṭṭhāna* texts say comes from a history of re-interpretation of key concepts. For instance, the meaning and role of *samādhi* or *jhāna* found in the still influential commentarial tradition (5th Century, Sri Lanka) contrast markedly with what is found in the early texts. Furthermore, much of the confusion around *satipaṭṭhāna* seems to have resulted from attempting to reconcile multiple contrasting historical frameworks that don't in principle cohere. *Satipaṭṭhāna Rethought* is an interpretation based strictly on the earliest texts, with no reference to later derivatives. It reveals this teaching as well-spoken, systematic and coherent.

I've explained the various points of interpretation represented here in several papers within the ongoing scholarly "*Rethinking Satipaṭṭhāna"* project (references below) in terms of etymology, functionality, coherence, cognitive consistency and strict adherence to the early texts. *Satipaṭṭhāna Rethought* presents results of *Rethinking Satipaṭṭhāna* in the form of a practice manual for meditation that adheres closely to the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the central text of the many *suttas* dealing with *satipaṭṭhāna*. I have been test driving its methods in my own practice over the last couple of years, and have encouraged others to take if for a spin. This manual leaves the academics behind in order to make the fruits of this research more accessible to the dedicated Buddhist practitioner. The ancient *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* on which this manual is based is itself a practice tutorial, taking the practitioner through a series of twenty-one targeted exercises, and the present manual does the same, but with explanations appropriate for the modern practitioner.

Most modern teachers of meditation treat *Dhamma* in an altogether cursory manner, but this is largely a twentieth-century artifact of popularization. The early *satipaṭṭhāna* was clearly intended to guide a detailed investigation of *Dhamma* teachings in terms of direct experience. The present manual indulges in *Dhamma* as needed. But the reader will appreciate that the *Buddhadhamma*

was actually much less abstract than commonly recognized. It had to be in order to bring it into a meditative context.

Readership. This manual is intended primarily for experienced and advanced meditators, particularly those with training in one of the insight traditions, such as modern Theravāda *vipassanā*, Zen *shikantaza* or Tibetan *dzogchen*. *Satipaṭṭhāna Rethought* may require some adjustments to what has been habituated in previous training, for it is a practice of *active* investigation of the observable objects and contingencies of experience in terms of *Dhamma*, rather than a practice of pure receptivity or noting of what arises. *Satipaṭṭhāna Rethought* fully integrates *samādhi* and the *jhānas* (meditative composure) as critical to realizing the fruits of practice, rather than relegating this to an independent "*samatha*" practice. Finally, *samādhi* is "one-centered," rather than "one-pointed," allowing the scope of attention to be a broad as necessary to perform the current task of investigation. The stability of *samādhi* is maintained through the natural ardency common in engagement in a skilled task, rather than by a resolute fixation of attention on a single point. Any requisite retraining should be easily managed by the experienced meditator.

References. In order to keep this account simple and direct, no discussion of the relative merits of alternative interpretations of various aspects of *sati-paṭṭhāna* is attempted here, but rather I refer the reader to various more scholarly papers of the *Rethinking Satipaṭṭhāna* project, which can be found on-line at https://sitagu.org/cintita/satipatthana/. The author can be contacted at bhikkhu.cintita@gmail.com. Also, you might consult my book, *Dependent Coarising*, cited on the linked page, for additional discussion of the *Dhamma* of "contact," "the sixfold sphere," "the aggregates," "impressions" (feelings), "consciousness," "fabrications" and "insubstantiality."

I've cited passages from *suttas*, utilizing the indexing system (exemplified by "SN 47.3." This system of reference is that used, for instance, in https://www.accesstoinsight.org/ and https://suttacentral.net/.

Terminology. The sutta translations found here rely heavily on Bhikkhu Bodhi's Wisdom translations, but conform to my own interpretation of the early texts. In particular, some of some Pali terms are non-standard, where clarity has demanded a more apt English word. The most notable example is 'mastery' for Pali *sati*, where 'mindfulness' is standard. The meaning of 'mindfulness' in the modern Buddhist context has shifted radically away from its origin in *sati*, and its use has become misleading in translating the earliest texts, in which *sati* has clearly to do with memory. 'Mastery' places *sati*

properly in the context of the practice, acquisition and internalization of *Dhammic* skills. Likewise, *satipaṭṭhāna* itself, commonly translated as 'foundations of mindfulness,' is rendered literally as "mastery-attentiveness," a compound of *sati* 'memory' + *upaṭṭhāna* 'standing near' or 'attending to.' 'Foundations' derives from an alternative etymology (*sati* + *paṭṭhāna*) that has come into disfavor. I will simply use the Pali *satipaṭṭhāna* throughout, to avoid confusion. Other terms that might cause confusion will be clarified as we go, and are also listed in the glossary at the end of this manual.

Acknowledgments. A wide swath of the network of interdependent contingencies is implicated in the origination of this manual. Convention dictates that I conceptualize a number of "selves" and then attribute certain roles to them, if I want to say anything further at all.

So, Venerable Ñāṇadhammika (Austin) and Bruce Sebecke (Houston) proofread the manuscript, and Jan Naidu (Houston) provided technical assistance in producing the cover. Alan Penton, Bruce Sebecke, John Tohkubbi and Scott Conn were early pioneers, only after myself, in bringing *Satipaṭṭhāna Rethought* into their practice.

I am presenting this manual to the world just in time for the inaugural *Satipaṭṭhāna Rethought* Retreat, to be held May 24-27, 2024 for sixty participants at the American Bodhi Center in Hempstead, Texas. The staff and supporters of Jade Buddha Temple in Houston make this retreat possible, and Lee-Wen Teh and Barbara Homan (in particular) are handling the logistics. Fred Hauer and Loretta Draths, of the Buddha's Book Club that meets weekly here in Minnesota, have bankrolled the provision of copies of this manual to retreat participants.

As a monk, I live in constant gratitude toward many donors and supporters to me and to the monastery at which I live, without which I would not have the leisure to undertake projects like this. The monks with which I live (all of them Burmese at this writing) provide a harmonious, inspiring and accommodating environment in which to pursue my meditation, studies and writing. May these teachings be a way to pay the generosity of many others forward. Finally, the influence of many great practitioners and teachers are found in these pages. All errors are, of course, my own.

Bhikkhu Cintita
Chisago City MN, April, 2024

1. Introduction

> This is the one way, *bhikkhus*, a path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of n*ibbāna*, namely, the four *satipaṭṭhānas*. (*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10)

So begins the Buddha's primary discourse on *satipaṭṭhāna*. *Satipaṭṭhāna* is the historical source of most contemplative/meditative traditions in Buddhism, including modern "*vipassanā*" (insight meditation), and the so-called "mindfulness" movement, and undoubtedly had a strong influence on the development of East Asian and Tibetan methods. It is also deeply implicated in "*samatha*" or tranquility meditation. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is today perhaps the most studied early Buddhist discourse.

Satipaṭṭhāna is based on the principle of "come and see" (*ehipassiko*), whereby *Dhamma* guides "coming," and our own experience is the object of "seeing." We are taught initially to investigate simple, direct experience, largely free of preconceptions, much like a child sees the world, and with the same wonder. We then learn to master attention, to put the mind where we want it, to withdraw thought and deliberation, so that we can entrust our practice to intuition rather than reasoning, much in the nature of a virtuoso musician. We then learn to question those abstract presumptions that guide most of adult worldling behavior and thinking, that obscure the simple terms available to the child and that lock us into a fixed and unwholesome way of experiencing the world. We discover their insubstantiality and learn to abandon them.

To do this, s*atipaṭṭhāna* guides through a series of exercises, which are grouped under the four categories of "body," "impressions," "mind" and "*dhammas*," giving us "the four *satipaṭṭhānas*." Their purpose is to develop "right view," whereby individual *Dhammic* teachings are verified in experience, familiarized and internalized, such that *Dhamma* becomes ultimately a matter of direct perception, leading to the attainment of "knowledge and vision of things as they are." Effectively, we begin this practice by seeing once again through the eyes of a child, and end it by seeing through the eyes of the Buddha.

1.1 Principles of Satipaṭṭhāna Rethought

Satipaṭṭhāna is grounded in the following fundamental principles:

(1) Buddhism is a "practice tradition." It is about the enactment, development and cultivation of skills of virtue, composure and wisdom.

It is specifically *not* an abstract speculative philosophy, but rather a training toward the perfection of human character, and the *Dhamma* is a guide for this practice.

(2) The *Dhamma* is almost entirely subject to verification in terms of direct experience.

The Buddha invited us to "come and see," and declared that the *Dhamma* is "experienced by the wise." In the early texts, it has for the most part a direct basis in the direct "observables" of experience.

(3) *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice develops and cultivates "right view."

This first step on the noble eightfold path is a development of wisdom that begins with study of the *Dhamma*, including reflection to develop a preliminary understanding. This is carried forward into *satipaṭṭhāna* practice.

(4) *Satipaṭṭhāna* contemplation develops skill in *Dhamma* by investigating, verifying and internalizing *Dhamma*.

"Internalizing" the teachings weaves them into the fabric of experience at an "intuitive" level. *Dhamma* becomes the manner in which we begin to perceive and act spontaneously in our experiential world.

(5) "*Samādhi*" or "*jhāna*" is integral and critical to the fulfillment of *satipaṭṭhāna* practice.

Samādhi locks in our wholehearted engagement in the task of investigation, and plays a critical role in encouraging insights and in internalizing our mastery of *Dhamma*.

(6) The ultimate function of *satipaṭṭhāna* contemplation is the attainment of "knowledge and vision (of things as they are)."

"Knowledge and vision" is the precursor of awakening. This, in conjunction with the practice of virtue, brings us close to *nibbāna*.

1.2 An example of satipaṭṭhāna contemplation

Let's look at the steps you *might* take in practicing one of the *satipaṭṭhāna* exercises (there are variations).

Establish the context. Take your place on your cushion, cross your legs, adjust your posture, put aside worldly concerns, and take a few long breaths.

Bring *Dhamma* to mind. Next choose a *Dhamma* teaching as a "theme" of investigation, oh, let's say, the five "appropriation-aggregates." For this step, it is important that you already have a working understanding of the teaching, which I try to provide for each exercise in this manual. This is the beginning of "mastery." The five aggregates are listed as "form," "impression," "perception," "fabrications" and "consciousness," each of which is in turn described in many places and in many ways in the early texts.

Bring observables to mind. Next, determine the observables that provide potential verification of this teaching. If there is confusion about the correspondence between teaching and observables in your understanding, then "reconciliation" may be called for, perhaps resulting in a readjustment of your provisional understanding of what the individual aggregates are. Each, in the case of the aggregates, is a collection of momentary "awareness events" classified by type, which are observable as they originate and vanish moment by moment.

Investigate. Next, note these awareness events as they arise in experience, each of which you should be able to classify as a form, an impression, a perception, a fabrication or consciousness. You should consider the impermanence of each awareness event, its dependence on other observable factors, etc. Your objective is to "comprehend" the observables in terms of the *Dhamma*, and the *Dhamma* in terms of the observables.

Fully engage. Having "put away" worldly concerns, bring "ardency, clear comprehension, and mastery" into your investigation. The composite of these four factors brought to practice is the engine of *satipaṭṭhāna* contemplation.

Allow the mind to still. *Samādhi* settles in naturally as you engage in the task of investigation. This level of engagement produces an experience that may differ from what you are accustomed to, but which is no less deep, so that active, explicit thinking recedes. *Samādhi* will quietly lock in your engagement, give rise to rapture, filter out abstract conceptualizations and narratives, and encourage insight and the development of a purely intuitive understanding of the aggregates.

Develop mastery. In this way, mastery of *Dhamma* builds up and develops progressively over the weeks, months and years into a different way of experiencing the world.

1.3 Reading the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta

Foreseeably, this overview of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* will serve for repeated reference. I suggest an initial reading to understand its coherent structure and acquire the gist of its content, and then return to it occasionally as you engage with the rest of this manual. The entire text also appears as an appendix at the end of this manual. The details will be explained at appropriate places as you proceed through the following chapters.

The discussion here centers around the Pali version of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10) (or the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, DN *22*, which differs only in its much longer exposition on the Four Noble Truths). The body of the "Text" is a series of descriptions of twenty-one contemplative exercises, most of which are suitable for the cushion. More broadly, it is supported by many additional texts concerned with *satipaṭṭhāna*, both in the Pali and in the Chinese canon.

1.4 The opening of the Text

The Text begins:

> Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living in the Kuru country where there was a town of the Kurus named Kammāsa-dhamma. There he addressed the *bhikkhus*,
>
> "*Bhikkhus*." "Venerable sir," they replied.
>
> The Blessed One said this:
>
> This is the one way, *bhikkhus*, a path for purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for attainment of the true way, for realization of *nibbāna*, namely, the four *satipaṭṭhānas*.

'One way' *ekāyano*, (*eka* 'one' + '*ayana* 'way,' 'path') is sometimes translated as 'direct path' or 'only path.' Its uniqueness as a way to *nibbāna* here suggests its importance, but keep in mind that it is not adequate in itself to fulfill that goal, rather it is a near-final step on a very long path of practice, with many prerequisites, primary among which is "virtue." For instance:

> Then, *bhikkhu*, when your virtue is well purified and your view

> straight, based upon virtue, established upon virtue, *then* you should develop the four *satipaṭṭhānas* in a threefold way. (SN 47.3)

(The three ways are "internally," "externally" and "both internally and externally," which we will describe below.) By analogy, pushing the garage door button might be the one and only way to arrive at home, but still a relatively minor step overall if we have yet to drive across two states, to deal with restless children and to tank up multiple times, before we reach a point where the garage door will actually respond to pressure from our thumb.

> What are the four? Here, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body, ardent, comprehending and masterful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides impression-contemplating among the impressions, ardent, comprehending, and masterful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides mind-contemplating in the mind, ardent, comprehending, and masterful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas*, ardent, comprehending, and masterful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world.

This passage makes reference to two intersecting frameworks, which I will call "the *satipaṭṭhāna* method" and "*satipaṭṭhāna* contemplations." The contemplations, also referred to in the literature as "the four *satipaṭṭhānas*" are:

(1) body-contemplation in the body,
(2) impression-contemplation among the impressions,
(3) mind-contemplation in the mind, and
(4) *dhamma*-contemplation among the *dhammas*.

The *satipaṭṭhāna* method is full engagement in a practice by one who is …

(1) ardent,
(2) comprehending,
(3) masterful, and
(4) "having put away covetousness and grief for the world."

The method is a clear recipe for enactment and development of skills introduced as principle (1) above.

> "Ardency" is the energy that drives our practice. We must be wholehearted, not casual, in our practice and be willing to put in time and effort. In terms of the noble eightfold path, ardency is represented by "right effort."

Comprehension and mastery are mutually dependent and cooperative partners. In *saptipatthana* practice, mastery is on the side of *Dhamma* and comprehension is on the side of the observables in our practice of investigation.

> "Mastery" is the cumulative skill that has been acquired through prior study and practice. It will continue to develop with further practice, and approach perfection with time.
>
> "Comprehension" applies mastery to investigation of the current practice situation. Just as mastery guides comprehension, comprehension provides the feedback that develops mastery. In short, we learn primarily by doing. This collaboration is also represented by the seventh path factor, "right mastery," which plays a supporting role in all of the wisdom and virtue practices.
>
> "Putting away covetousness and grief for the world" reduces distractions that otherwise deflate our full engagement in the practice, by separating oneself from worldly concerns while engaging in the practice task. I will generally replace this awkward phrase with "seclusion." Seclusion is also the entry point for *samādhi*, which arises quite spontaneously for the engaged practitioner. *Samādhi* further narrows the scope of attention and limits the cognitive faculties to those necessary for the task at hand.

1.5 Exercises within the Text

The introduction of the Text, just cited, is followed by the description of a series of twenty-one exercises organized into four blocks corresponding to the four *satipaṭṭhānas*. We will cite and describe each exercise but one in detail in this manual. The final exercise, on the four noble truths, is too encompassing to cover adequately here, and was likely included as an invitation to bring a broader range of unspecified *Dhamma* teachings into *satipaṭṭhānas* practice.

As an initial example, we will look at the short bodily activities exercise 1.3. The first section, of "body exercises," begins:

> And how, *bhikkhus*, does a *bhikkhu* abide body-contemplating in the body?

Three following sections begin with the same question but with reference to the respective *satipaṭṭhāna*. Each exercise consists of a "signature exercise" followed by a common "refrain." The exercises are allocated to the four *satipaṭṭhānas* as follows:

1. Body	2. Impressions	*4. Dhammas*
1.1. breath	*(only one exercise)*	4.1. hindrances
1.2. postures		4.2. aggregates
1.3. activities	3. Mind	4.3. sense-spheres
1.4. body parts	*(only one exercise)*	4.4. awakening factors
1.5. elements		4.5. noble truths
1.6-14. corpse		

For 1.3, the signature exercise reads:

> Again, *bhikkhus*, when walking, a *bhikkhu* comprehends, "I am walking." When standing, he comprehends, "I am standing." When sitting, he comprehends, "I am sitting." When lying down, he comprehends, "I am lying down." Or he comprehends accordingly however his body is disposed.

The body refrain reads:

> In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, or he abides body-contemplating in the body externally, or he abides body-contemplating in the body both internally and externally.
>
> He abides contemplating in the body the nature of origination, or he abides contemplating in the body the nature of vanishing, or he abides contemplating in the body the nature of both origination and vanishing.
>
> The recollection that "there is body" is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mastery.
>
> He abides independent. He doesn't cling to anything in the world.
>
> That is how a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body.

The purpose of *satipaṭṭhāna* contemplation is to investigate *Dhamma* "teachings" in terms of "observables" (or observables in terms of teachings). It is noteworthy that the signature exercises of body, impressions and mind describe *observables* relevant to the exercise, but most make scant reference to *teachings*, while the refrain describes a set of teachings applicable to virtually any set of observables. This contrasts with the *dhamma* exercises of the fourth *satipaṭṭhāna*, in each of which the signature exercise focuses explicitly on a well-established and clearly named teaching.

The refrain that follows each signature exercise is almost identical throughout, but with some slight variations,directing the practitioner to investigate the

observables of the signature exercise in terms of the foundational teachings of the "three signs" (*tilakkhaṇa*) of "non-self," "impermanence" and "suffering." The most remarkable feature of the refrain is its threefold reference to contemplating "internally," "externally" and "both internally and externally." This trichotomy provides a mode of analysis directed specifically at investigating the thorny teaching of "non-self," which will be described presently.

1.6 The conclusion of the Text

The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* ends on a positive note:

> *Bhikkhus*, if anyone should develop these four *satipaṭṭhānas* in such a way for seven years, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return. Let alone seven years, *bhikkhus*. If anyone should develop these four *satipaṭṭhānas* in such a way for six years …
>
> [The amusing passage goes on and on like this.]
>
> … Let alone half a month, *bhikkhus*. If anyone should develop these four *satipaṭṭhānas* in such a way for seven days, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return.
>
> So it was with reference to this that it was said: "*Bhikkhus*, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of *nibbāna*, namely, the four *satipaṭṭhānas*."

This echos the beginning of the Text. It concludes:

> That is what the Blessed One said. The *bhikkhus* were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words.

… as they virtually always were.

1.7 Internally, externally and both internally and externally

Most of us "presume" that there is a self as a substantial and fixed thing or essence, a "me" that's been there as long as we can remember. We organize

our worldview around this presumption, then famously suffer as a result. The practice of non-self is to quell (weaken or eliminate) this presumption. In order to do this, we consider every form of evidence we can think of that has the potential for verifying the presumption, only to find it wanting. We find no more subtle contemplation in the *sutta*.

The refrain does not mention "self" or "non-self" directly, and so it is easy to miss the degree to which *satipaṭṭhāna* is about non-self. In fact, the refrain introduces a peculiar strategy for approaching this teaching. The need for this strategy comes from a certain challenge to verifying non-self in terms of observables: Just as we cannot in principle verify that there are no flying penguins, we cannot in principle verify that there is no self. The best we can do is repeatedly fail to verify in direct experience that there is a self. When we understand this strategy, some otherwise obscure features of the text make complete sense. These include:

- the use of the terms 'internally,' 'externally,' and 'both internally and externally,'
- the construction 'body-contemplating in the body,' etc., and
- the themes of the first three *satipaṭṭhānas*: body, impressions and mind.

There seem to be three widely recognized facets of the presumed self, corresponding to three sources of potential evidence: the self as it appears to manifest in the body (the "body/self"), the self as it appears to manifest in contact with the world "out there" (the "consciousness/self"), and the self as it appears to manifest in the mind (the "mind/self"). These correspond to the first three *satipaṭṭhānas*. We can think, "I have a body, therefore I am!" or "I am conscious of the 'world out there,' therefore there is me 'in here,'" or "I think, therefore I am!" Each individual exercise in the first three *satipaṭṭhānas* provides an alternative range of observable potential evidence for the self. The fourth *satipaṭṭhāna* serves to collect together complex exercises, two of which are relevant to the consciousness/self, and two to the mind/self.

The strategy for the practice of non-self is outlined in the first clause of the refrain:

> In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, or he abides body-contemplating in the body externally, or he abides body contemplating-in the body both internally and externally.

"Internal contemplation" focuses on observables that constitute potential evidence for the self (in this passage, the body/self). This contemplation is directed by the signature exercise, for instance, as the breath or bodily

activities. We have here the opportunity to become very intimate with these observables in themselves as we settle into *samādhi*.

“External contemplation” brings the presumed body/self deliberately to mind, and “both internal and external contemplation” asks the question: “Is the self alongside the observables coherent?” What results in ongoing practice is typically an immediate intuitive sense that the two are incongruous, or that the presumed self is an abstract intrusion into what is directly observable.

The second clause of the refrain (on origination and vanishing) directs us to integrate impermanence into internal contemplation. Impermanence of observables is the primary source of incongruity between evidence and presumption. (We’ll take up the remaining clauses of the refrain in due time.)

1.8 On to the exercises

The following chapters structure *satipaṭṭhāna* practice into four stages before concluding:

2. “Observables and their contingencies.” The practitioner will devote the most time here, in “internal contemplation” in the body and mind exercises, focused on observing impermanence and conditionality.

3. “Seclusion, *samādhi* and *jhāna*.” Contemplation of the hindrances and of the seven awakening-factors will strengthen practice overall.

4. “Whose body and mind?” The practitioner will undertake “external contemplation” in the body and mind exercises to quell the presumption of the self.

5. “Unmasking the world.” The practitioner will engage consciousness and the constructed nature of the world, in the impressions, hindrances and sense-spheres exercises.

6. “Afterword.” I will make some summarizing and concluding remarks.

A glossary and a translation of the text of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* are appended.

2. Observables and their contingencies

In this chapter we learn how to practice dwelling in body and mind with minimal presumption. In the terms of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, this is through "internal contemplation" with regard to bodily and mental observables, within the scope of the first (body) and third (mind) *satipaṭṭhānas*, and with regard the Buddha's teachings of impermanence and conditionality.

2.1 The Dhamma of contingency

Under "contingency" I understand a melding of impermanence and conditionality. It is a nice English world that expresses the necessarily transitory nature of phenomena as critically dependent on other contingent phenomena. We can visualize this as a network of contingency in constant flux. When we fail to recognize the highly contingent nature of the things of our world of experience, we live in terms of many presumptions about things that are more-or-less fixed, such as "the self" and other objects of clinging. We consequently lead a life of broken promises and suffer for it. This is the message of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*'s refrain. We will focus in this chapter on the second clause of the refrain, repeated as follows:

> He abides contemplating in the body the nature of origination, or he abides contemplating in the body the nature of vanishing, or he abides contemplating in the body the nature of both origination and vanishing.

'Origination' translates the Pali word *samudaya*, in lieu of the also common translation 'arising.' Origination is better, because it suggests comprehending not only the *arising* of an observable, but also what an observable arises *from*. That is, it integrates impermanence and conditionality. *Samudaya* is the word used, for instance, where the origin of suffering in the second noble truth is equated with craving.

Conditionality is very simple for the Buddha:

> When this is, that is.
> From the arising of this follows the arising of that.
> When this isn't, that isn't.
> From the cessation of this follows the cessation of that. (Ud 1.3)

In short, conditionality consists in observable relations among observables. It does not invite investigation of underlying mechanisms in the manner of modern science, but rather invites us to identify patterns of co-occurrence. For instance, in walking meditation, you might notice the following observables:

(1) leaning right/left,
(2) weight or pressure on left/right foot,
(3) moving right/left foot (consisting of "lift, shift, place").

The following recurring conditional relations are found among these observables:

(1) leaning right/left → weight on right/left foot,
(2) weight on right/left foot → motion of left/right foot.

These conditions are consistent with the definition the Buddha offers, and further explanation would probably take us into the realm of unobservable underlying causes that, while interesting, are not in the purview of this simple practice.

"Internal contemplation" requires that we *set aside* "the self" or "me" as a potential observable or as something with a conditional role in the network of contingencies. This restriction also excludes "my (whole) body" or "my (whole) mind," which we commonly identify as "the body/self" and the "mind/self." But this restriction allows lesser factors of a bodily or mental nature as observables, such as breath, posture or feeling happy. Nonetheless, it is likely that you will not completely shake off the self, but will find it somehow lurking in the background, pulling the strings, doing the breathing, moving the feet, etc. Moreover, we particularly tend to identify "intention" (to do something) with the self. For this reason, I recommend that you regard neither the self nor intention as a conditioning factor. For instance, in walking meditation, you may (think you) discover a condition, "I intend to move foot → foot moves." Try to leave "you" and your intentions aside.

2.2 Practicing with the exercises

Each of the signature exercises of the body and mind *satipaṭṭhānas* clearly specifies a set of observables for investigation in terms of the teachings of impermanence and conditionality. You will want to spend a lot of time with each of these exercises, or each of a large subset of them. Keep in mind that you are aiming at "comprehension," trying to get as intimate with the observ-

ables as possible and with their contingencies. You will know you are in the swing of these exercises when they become fun, the kind of fun that comes from performing a task well (see chapter 3).

But before *mastering* these exercises, I recommend that you *begin* working with the following two chapters as well, then come back to this chapter for continued practice. After you become *somewhat* familiar with one or two of these exercises, you should venture into Chapter 3 on *samādhi*. This will help you stay engaged, while inhibiting conceptual thinking, and will provide a boost for the practice of the current chapter. After you become *very* familiar with at least a few of the exercises of the current chapter, you *might* venture into Chapter 4, which will introduce the practice of non-self; and this piggybacks on the internal contemplations of the present chapter.

2.3 Breath (satipaṭṭhāna 1.1)

The breath is easily observable and ever present in almost any context, including on the cushion. Contemplation of the breath, is known to be highly conducive to *samādhi*.

This initial signature exercise is as follows. It provides observables and also details not found in the other exercises of the Text but applicable to many of them.

(1) Here a *bhikkhu*, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, sets his body erect, masterfully attending to what is in front.

(2) Masterful, he breathes in, masterful he breathes out. Breathing in long, he comprehends, “I breathe in long”; or breathing out long, he comprehends, “I breathe out long.” Breathing in short, he comprehends, “I breathe in short”; or breathing out short, he comprehends, “I breathe out short.”

(3) He trains thus: “I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body”; he trains thus: “I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body.” He trains thus: “I shall breathe in tranquilizing the bodily fabrication”; he trains thus: “I shall breathe out tranquilizing the bodily fabrication.”

(4) Just as a skilled lathe-operator or his apprentice, when making a long turn, comprehends, “I make a long turn”; or, when making a short turn, comprehends, “I make a short turn”; so too, breathing in long, a *bhikkhu* comprehends, “I breathe in long”… he trains thus: “I shall

breathe out tranquilizing the bodily fabrication."

Context. The "context" of your investigation is given explicitly in clause (1). You are certainly already sitting in an equivalent manner in a comfortable position and in a quiet environment conducive to settling body and mind. I will refer to this as "on the cushion." "Masterful" is a factor of the *satipaṭṭhāna* method discussed in the previous chapter. It refers to whatever *Dhammic* know-how you bring to the cushion: in this case your understanding of the teachings of impermanence and conditionality gained through book study, but also the extent to which you've already internalized these teachings so that you might implicitly and readily perceive phenomena in terms of these factors. "Attending to what is in front" refers to bringing the relevant observables to mind for comprehension. 'Comprehends' is also a factor of the *satipaṭṭhāna* method. The context of sitting on your cushion is optimally conducive to *samādhi*. However, we will see that it is often not suitable for other exercises, where you will have to look off the cushion to find observables.

Observables. It is best to observe the breath without controlling it. Observables are described in clause (2). You are free to discover additional observables on your own, and you will certainly not miss the rhythmic expanding and contracting of the chest, pressures and movements in the shoulders, in the belly and so on, the movement of air, and maybe even a wheezing sound. Try to follow the course of each in-breath: the beginning, the middle and the end. Observe that breathing stops, then there is no breath, then an out-breath begins. Some people report a sense of panic after the out-breath completes and relief at the onset of the in-breath. Become intimate with the breath in this way. There is nothing fixed, only a continuous stream of similar short-lived breathing events, each of which is ephemeral, fleeting, transient and worthy of close inspection.

Contingencies. The conditionality of breathing is found foremost in its cyclical nature, which runs through a familiar course as each stage gives rise to the next. Observe the cyclical pattern itself, and also how it conditions the stilling of the mind and the establishment of *samādhi*. Also notice that, with the stilling of mind, the breath becomes lighter and eventually imperceptible. Fright or movement makes the breath heavier.

Sidestepping the self. Recall that you should exclude the body/self from observation or participation in contingencies in internal investigation. This is why I stipulated that you should not try to control the breath when engaged in this exercise. While the breath generally proceeds without thought, it might at any time be conditioned by intention: you can willfully stop, hold and restart the breath, take a deep breath and so on. The body/self will think that it is in

control at this time. For this reason, observe the breath passively. Pretend you are observing someone else's breath, over which you have no control.

Notes. Clause (3) is an alternative description of "external" contemplation, also described in clause (1) of the *refrain*. Clause (3) will be discussed further in Chapter 4 where we take up external contemplation.

The exercise concludes with a simile in clause (4). I suspect that what is translated as a lathe may be a potter's wheel, but the principle is the same. A skilled craftsman's mastery is always expressed directly in how his hands (or some tool) work the material locally, just as you experience "the breath" locally as observables. The craftsman turns away from an imagined final product (a bowl, for instance) as you turn away from the presumption of a whole body/self.

Distinctive Benefits. "Distinctive benefits" are understood as ways in which a given exercise fulfills some aspect of Buddhist practice peculiar to itself. The breath, our first example, is often used as an anchor for stabilizing and stilling the mind and is an effective way to enter *samādhi*, as we will see in the next chapter. You will benefit from this as you perform this exercise, but also even if you take your investigation "off line," that is, simply watch the breath without probing further. In fact, you will *want* to do this at times when are weary or indecisive, for sustaining a very tranquil state in this way is pleasant, and helps to recharge your batteries. (Off-line, you may even want to narrow, for a time, the one-centeredness of *satipaṭṭhāna* practice into the one-pointedness of other techniques.) This is to give "settling" (*samatha*) priority over "investigation" (*vipassanā*), as we'll also discuss in the next chapter.

2.4 Postures (satipaṭṭhāna 1.2)

This signature exercise is very short:

> Again, *bhikkhus*, when walking, a *bhikkhu* comprehends, "I am walking." When standing, he comprehends, "I am standing." When sitting, he comprehends, "I am sitting." When lying down, he comprehends, "I am lying down." Or he comprehends accordingly however his body is disposed.

Context. The context of sitting on the cushion in the presence of others might limit your observables largely to the single "on the cushion" posture. Otherwise, go ahead and slowly move your arms or torso even while sitting to perform this exercise. Or you might practice this exercise in conjunction with yogic *asana* practices, where a wider variety of postures is found. You will

also benefit from attempting this exercise for short periods during the day when it occurs to you, where a very rich variety of conditioning factors can be observed.

Observables. You might decide to assume a certain posture at a given time, but also notice that you pass unplanned through a series or continuum of postures throughout the day, each appearing, and then disappearing to give rise to the next. The instructions list a few basic postures, but then opens the practice up to "however his body is disposed." The instructions invite you to "comprehend" each posture, that is, to be keenly aware of the details, how each of the limbs is disposed, which limb is pressed against which other limb, and where contact with the floor, chair or other objects is felt.

Contingencies. Without planning, observe how you are continually moving from one posture into another and how the current posture depends on your current activity and on other circumstances. Hunger or boredom leads to snack-seeking behavior, which leads to the familiar posture of bending at the waist with your head in the refrigerator, one hand leaning into the corner and the other extended backwards grasping the door. What is your posture when you are about to open a house door? How about a car door? How about walking down stairs? Are you holding on to the railing? How about taking off your shoes? Wrestling with your dog?

Sidestepping the self. As in all of the internal contemplations, try to refrain from incorporating "me" into your observation of conditions, as in "I am bending over" or "I am holding onto the railing." Correlations between posture and environment or activity may be simple and direct. In this way you internalize, through repeated practice, an impersonal way of experiencing this aspect of the world.

Notes. You may notice that the postures present themselves immediately, without having to scan through the body, which, for instance, the body parts exercise (below) requires. You don't have to check how each limb in turn is disposed. Rather remarkably, you comprehend the entire posture all at once, spatially visualizing its shape bounded by the surface of the body in detail. Scanning would be like the security guard who systematically walks through the building looking for security risks. Observing posture is like the security guard who has a constant view of the whole building from a single location through an array of closed circuit TV screens. The ease of observing posture is recognized as "proprioception," a fine, neurally encoded, highly connected sense faculty that provides constant awareness of the outer extent of your body.

Distinctive benefits. Posture, like the breath, is conducive to *samādhi*, especially on the cushion. Both are "easy" exercises, in that the observables are presented vividly and directly to the senses with little effort, and as a result, the mind stabilizes around them readily. Although the breath is most commonly employed to induce a meditative state, in Japanese Soto Zen the "on the cushion" posture fulfills much the same role.

2.5 Activities (satipaṭṭhāna 1.3)

The bodily activities exercise is certainly the most dynamic and brings contemplation into the world of everyday activities. The signature exercise reads:

> Again, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* is one who acts with comprehension when going forward and returning, who acts with comprehension when looking ahead and looking away, who acts with comprehension when flexing and extending his limbs, who acts with comprehension when wearing his robes and carrying his outer robe and bowl, who acts with comprehension when eating, drinking, consuming food, and tasting; who acts with comprehension when defecating and urinating; who acts with comprehension when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent.

Context. Given all the kinds of familiar activities you perform throughout the day, it is hardly possible to keep this exercise on the cushion. You might want to break into this exercise through "walking meditation," an activity for which an undisturbed context might be secured, and in which your activities can be kept very limited. You can also bring this practice to everyday activities, particularly routine physical activities like chopping potatoes, but do this in a context in which there is no need to multitask, nor to interact with other people, and in which there are no other distractions. Turn off the TV, phone or any other potential sources of disturbance. Don't whistle while you work, and don't even think about opening a bottle of Chablis.

Observables. The observables vary for each mundane task that you undertake during the day: washing dishes, taking a shower, knitting, or engaging in your favorite hobby. Attend as best you can to every detail of the current task: aligning knife with potato, pressing the knife into the potato, splitting slices apart. If your task is opening a door, note the sensation of the doorknob in your hand, the turning of the doorknob, the movement of the door, the click of the bolt as the door swings back into place.

The observables are routine things you do in the course of the day (some of those listed in the text are routine only for monks), notably things that you can do largely on autopilot. Walking or opening doors, for instance, have been for the most part thoroughly internalized earlier in life, such that you rarely think about them. As a result, even though you are doing them, you might not notice that you are doing them, and you will likely have no recollection of having done them. Your task is to bring them into "explicit" awareness to fulfill this exercise.

A couple of tips might help you maintain the practice throughout much of the day. First, think of your day as a long series of individual tasks: getting out of bed, preparing and drinking coffee, washing up, tidying your bedroom, washing the dishes, driving to work, etc. Try to be engaged in one and only one task at any given time, and complete each task with optimal results. For those tasks in which your mind is likely to wander, add additional structure to the task to make it more challenging. If you are cutting potatoes, make every slice of identical thickness.

Contingencies. Observe how many activities with bodily involvement, seem to unfold in accordance with observable conditions like hunger, danger or social norms, when you do not try to control them. For instance, you might notice that if the door is locked, your hand automatically reaches into your pocket for the key of itself; no thought required. Hands, feet, posture, and the collaboration of multiple parts of the body *are* involved as factors in the network of contingency, but intentions are absent for the most part.

Sidestepping the self. You might find it helpful to put "me" aside altogether by pretending that you are observing some unknown person through a window, so that you can only see activity with no access to decision-making processes.

Distinctive benefits. This practice allows you to do *two* things at once *without* multitasking: you practice *satipaṭṭhāna, and* your dishes get clean! Moreover, as you perform this exercise, you tend to improve your skill in the already learned mundane activity. For instance, if you wanted to improve your golf swing (perhaps under the guidance of an instructor), you would have to monitor your accustomed swing by bringing the swing that you would normally perform without thinking into explicit awareness. You would would then note where the flaw is, and walk your way through the correct swing, rehearsing your swing in this way many times, at first with due deliberation, but soon allowing the swing to happen of itself flawlessly and effortlessly. Your swing will then have been completely re-learned and re-internalized. This is almost exactly what you do when you practice this exercise, but with a different skill set: in *satipaṭṭhāna* your mastery is directed at *Dhamma*, In the

example cited it is directed at a bodily skill: golf.

There is in early Buddhism a distinct practice of "mastery directed at the body" (*kāyagatā sati*, sometimes translated 'mindfulness of body'). This is presented in at least one passage (DN 2 i70-1) in terms identical to the signature activities exercise as a preliminary practice *before* undertaking *satipaṭṭhāna* per se. Accordingly, it lacks the *Dhammic* wisdom of the *satipaṭṭhāna* refrain, for it is not directed at *Dhamma*, but rather at mundane, already fully internalized bodily skills. This explains the name of this practice. The value of mastery directed at the body for Buddhist practitioners is certainly that it develops the "*satipaṭṭhāna* method" off line, and trains in developing *samādhi* off the cushion. Mastery directed at the body also seems to underlie what is commonly known as "everyday mindfulness."

2.6 Body parts (satipaṭṭhāna 1.4)

This exercise decomposes the "whole body" mentally into its composite parts. The text reads:

(1) Again, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* reviews this same body up from the soles of the feet and down from the top of the hair, bounded by skin, as full of many kinds of impurity thus: "In this body there are:
(a) head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin,
(b) flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow,
(c) kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, stomach, feces,
(d) bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, snot, oil of the joints, and urine."

(2) Just as though there were a bag with an opening at both ends full of many sorts of grain, such as hill rice, red rice, beans, peas, millet, and white rice, and a man with good eyes were to open it and review it thus: "This is hill rice, this is red rice, these are beans, these are peas, this is millet, this is white rice." So too, a *bhikkhu* reviews this same body… as full of many kinds of impurity thus: "In this body there are head-hairs … and urine."

Context. The perfect context for this exercise might seem either to provide the ability to view an MRI image of your complete body, or to provide someone else's fresh corpse and the instrumentation necessary for dissection. Failing either of these alternatives, you must resort to "visualization" for the hidden parts listed in (b), (c) and (d). Moreover, the mental visualization of these parts

requires significant knowledge of anatomy, and (since you want to inspect conditionality as well) physiology, alongside imagination. The upside is that visualization can be practiced on the cushion, since you do not have to look elsewhere for the observables. Unfortunately, even on the cushion, the hidden observables do not simply present themselves to you: you must decide on a scanning strategy and on which details to include.

Observables. The Buddha gives us a list of thirty-one body parts (later tradition added the brain) to visit. You don't need to follow the order of the list, but certainly the visible parts, (a), are the best place to start. Starting with the head hairs, place your mind right there, observe how the hairs are embedded at one end in your scalp, are of a certain color, and so on. I like to add eyes to (a), which seems an obvious omission, and sometimes tongue. Notice that (a) to (d) represent four layers. If you visit the parts in this order, then you will begin with the outer layer of the body and work your way inward.

There is a compelling case for giving special, and possibly even exclusive, emphasis to the visible parts: First, they are directly observable, as are the observables of most of the exercises (though touch may be necessary). Second, you probably "appropriate" these very parts and their attributes to a much higher degree than the others as "me" and "mine." This is simply because they are important in presenting yourself socially. Most people are keenly attuned to this, embellishing these particular parts through everything from coiffure to dentistry, and from nail polish to rouge, not to mention warpaint. Third, you won't have to learn anatomy.

Proceeding from the outer layer, (b) represents the skeletal-muscular system, tightly bound together and filling out the skin bag to give the body its shape. You might want to visit the various joints, ribs and so on, imagining how the muscles connect to them, and how the various parts move together. Layer (c) fills the internal parts into the belly and chest cavities. Finally (d) collects together all the fluids and things that ooze throughout the whole body.

The simile (2) describes picking through the bag grain by grain, much as you will scan within the skin bag.

Contingencies. Even prior to this practice,you have probably become keenly aware of the impermanence of the visible parts, in both the short term and the long term. Skin flakes, nails need to be cut. Skin wrinkles, sags and becomes discolored with age, hair turns gray and falls out, teeth decay and need to be pulled. However, at an even later age you will probably realize that not all is right within (b), (c) and (d), as arthritis and other ailments set in.

Contemplating the body parts internally in terms of impermanence and conditionality, you can appreciate how they work together and depend on each other. This will perhaps be most apparent in your investigation of the fluids and oozings of (d). Since you must visualize anyway, you may want to visualize individual body parts even at the cellular level, to bring out their lesser contingencies.

Sidestepping the self. As in other exercises, you want to leave the self out of your investigation of conditionality. A pitfall in visualizing the body parts is the potential for representing what is not directly observable presumptively as something quite permanent, particularly if the prerequisite medical knowledge is limited. As a result, you may observe the spleen, say, as permanent and everlasting. How would you know otherwise?

Notes. The most valuable result of this exercise is not only in revealing and internalizing the contingency of the bodily parts, but also in revealing the "constructedness" of the body as a whole (the body/self), and in initiating insight into the nature of whole-part relationships in general. For instance, if a large group of Texas Longhorn sports fans so choose, they might provide a photo op by occupying a field in the form of a map of Texas. Looking at the photo, you might see the map, but looking more closely, you might realize, "It's just people standing there," and might subsequently have trouble seeing the map.

Distinctive benefits. The body parts exercise also serves as a distinctive basis for the contemplation of loathsomeness of the body. This practice is valuable in disenchanting and loosening your self-identification with the body.

2.7 Elements (satipaṭṭhāna 1.5)

In ancient India the material world was composed of the four "elements" of "earth," "water," "fire" and "air." The body was no exception. The text reads:

(1) Again, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* reviews this same body, however it is placed, however disposed, by way of elements thus: "In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element."

(2) Just as though a skilled butcher or his apprentice had killed a cow and was seated at the crossroads with it cut up into pieces; so too, a *bhikkhu* reviews this same body, however it is placed, however disposed, by way of elements thus: "In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element."

Context. As with the body parts exercise, observation is largely dependent on visualization, for which sitting on the cushion is appropriate.

Observables. 'Elements' here is a misleading translation, since it does not seem to refer to anything like atoms or molecules. 'Properties' is an alternative, implying a *quality* of something physical alongside other properties. I conceptualize the elements as *substances*, each of which extends out into the world but mixes together with other elements in different proportions as they overlap. The simile of the exercise seems deficient: although a cow can be carved into four parts, the parts of a cow do not intermix in the manner of the elements.

Where elements do mix together, different qualities may manifest. For instance, when a small quantity of water mixes with earth, the water may lose its fluidity, but instead manifest as cohesion (consider the case where earth is initially in the form of a powder). Earth appears as solidity, either hard or soft. Water appears as fluid or cohesive. Fire appears as hot or cold and is also found as aging, digestion and burning up. Air appears as motion. For example, blood is predominantly water, with an admixture of earth, and with a good dose of air (circulation), and (of course) fire (temperature).

The Buddha recommends one way of investigating the elements that piggybacks on the body parts exercise. You proceed as before through the lists (a), (b), (c) and (d), and for each part observe the predominant element. Hint: earth is predominant for the lists (a), (b) and (c) and water for (d). You then have to look for fire and air in the heat, digestion and movements of air and fluids in the body, evident is association with earth and water.

Contingencies. A notable feature of the elements is that observing each element in the surrounding environment isn't much different from observing it within the skin bag. You will also notice that these substances pass readily in and out of the body, as you drink, eat and breath in, perhaps as you move closer to a fire on a cold day, and as you urinate, defecate, breathe out and dissipate warmth. All of the elements pass in and out of the body freely and regularly. Drink a glass of water, feel it entering your stomach and notice that it has brought cold with it, visualize it permeating the rest of your body, feel it flowing through your veins when you take your pulse, and see, feel and hear it sloshing around as spittle in your mouth. Then picture it collecting in your bladder and observe it leaving the body when you urinate, sweat or spit. Feel free to track it further as it passes through your plumbing and septic system, and enters the soil.

Notes. A potential result of this practice is a re-conceiving of the whole body,

not as a material thing, but as a special kind of process through which material freely flows, much like an eddy or wave in a body of water, a tornado in the surrounding air, or like a candle flame. The elements have a visible degree of independence from the body/self.

2.8 Corpse (satipaṭṭhāna 1.6-14)

The first thing that stands out about the corpse exercises is that there are fully nine of them. I doubt the Buddha expects us to devote proportionally much time to the corpse exercises. Rather their full value is as snapshots of an evolving basis of observables that provide a perspective on our limits in conceptualizing the body/self. The text of these nine exercises is as follows:

(6) (a) Again, *bhikkhus*, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, one, two, or three days dead, bloated, livid, and oozing matter,
(b) a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate." [refrain] …

(7) (a) Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, being devoured by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, or various kinds of worms,
(b) a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate." [refrain] …

(8) (a) Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, a skeleton with flesh and blood, held together with sinews,
(b) a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate." [refrain] …

(9) (a) Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, held together with sinews,
(b) a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate." [refrain] …

(10) (a) Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, a skeleton without flesh and blood, held together with sinews,

(b) a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate." [refrain] …

(11) (a) Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, disconnected bones scattered in all directions—here a hand-bone, there a foot-bone, here a shin-bone, there a thigh-bone, here a hip-bone, there a back-bone, here a rib-bone, there a breast-bone, here an arm-bone, there a shoulder-bone, here a neck-bone, there a jaw-bone, here a tooth, there the skull—,
(b) a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate." [refrain] …

(12) (a) Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, bones bleached white, the color of shells,
(b) a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate." [refrain] …

(13) (a) Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, bones heaped up, more than a year old,
(b) a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate." [refrain] …

(14) (a) Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, rotted and crumbled to dust,
(b) a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate." [refrain] …

Context. A charnel ground seems to have been an oft utilized context for this exercise in the Buddha's day. It was a place where corpses were left uncovered to decompose, rot, be chewed on, bloat, team with maggots and eventually turn to dirt. (This practice might be difficult for the squeamish.) It is unlikely that there is a charnel ground in your neighborhood, but notice that clause (a) of each of these exercises contains the phrase "… as though he were to see …," which indicates that visualization suffices to observe the objects of this contemplation. Visualization can be done on the cushion. Nonetheless, prior preparation is appropriate and possible. You might seek out and study graphic pictures or videos related to the topic, or schedule a daily sitting with road kill to improve your ability to visualize. Many Buddhist traditions also support or

mandate meditating with a corpse ceremonially during the few days after death and before burial or cremation. The latter is a valuable practice and manageable by the queasy, since it concludes before things get too gross.

Observables. The observables are hard to miss. As you progress from one corpse exercise to the next, familiar bodily observables fall progressively away, and the evidence of decay takes its place. Breath and bodily actions are extinguished at death. Then the body parts begin to fall away, either through decay from within, becoming a uniform slime, which decomposes into gasses that bloat the skin bag. Or body parts are consumed by large animals or by worms and insects, eventually leaving skin and bones, which in turn dry up and disappear. Well into the series of corpse exercises, even the last remnants of a bodily posture disappear as bones become disconnected. While this is all occurring, non-human life itself continues to arise and vanish, as the bacterial cultures once living in the intestines digest the body, as maggots, jackals and vultures join them, as birds feed off the maggots, as mushrooms and grasses take root in the rich soil produced in this continuing biological activity.

Contingencies. Through the series of nine exercises as a whole, you observe radical impermanence, as the forces of nature give rise to the transformation of the corpse, and the corpse in the various stages conditions the flourishing and disappearance of diverse life forms. These natural processes are indifferent to any human concepts or attitudes you might have about “me” or “my body” or about life and death. Any thought of a self or of a recently deceased “Uncle Fred” becomes increasingly untenable.

Distinctive benefits. Aside from playing havoc with the idea of a self or a being, these exercises provide a healthy familiarity with death that is largely lacking in our culture. The corpses we are used to are observed at a funeral parlor, embalmed and made to look better then they looked in real life, then buried or cremated out of sight of grieving relatives. Modern culture tnnds to overlay a fear of the unknown upon the fear of death. You recognize in these contemplations that death and decay are satisfyingly natural processes as life in one form gives rise to life in another. Like the body parts exercise, this exercise supports contemplation of loathsomeness of the body. Like the elements exercise, this exercise reveals the free interchange between what is inside and what is outside of the body.

2.9 Mind (satipaṭṭhāna 3.)

So far, we have considered body exercises of the first *satipaṭṭhāna*. We now turn to the single mind exercise of the third *satipaṭṭhāna*. The text reads:

> And how, *bhikkhus*, does a *bhikkhu* abide contemplating mind in the mind?
>
> (1) Here a *bhikkhu* comprehends mind affected by lust as mind affected by lust, and mind unaffected by lust as mind unaffected by lust.
>
> (2) He comprehends mind affected by hate as mind affected by hate, and mind unaffected by hate as mind unaffected by hate.
>
> (3) He comprehends mind affected by delusion as mind affected by delusion, and mind unaffected by delusion as mind unaffected by delusion.
>
> (4) He comprehends compact mind as compact mind, and scattered mind as scattered mind.
>
> (5) He comprehends exalted mind as exalted mind, and unexalted mind as unexalted mind.
>
> (6) He comprehends surpassed mind as surpassed mind, and unsurpassed mind as unsurpassed mind.
>
> (7) He comprehends composed mind [in *samādhi*] as composed mind, and uncomposed mind as uncomposed mind.
>
> (8) He comprehends liberated mind as liberated mind, and unliberated mind as unliberated mind.

The form of the refrain that follows this exercise substitutes ‘mind’ for ‘body,’ such that the clause relevant to the present chapter reads:

> He abides contemplating in the mind the nature of origination, or he abides contemplating in the mind the nature of vanishing, or he abides contemplating in the mind the nature of both origination and vanishing.

Context. Since you bring mind with you everywhere, you can bring it to the cushion. However, some of the observables are more readily found under more mundane circumstances and might better be observed opportunistically as they arrive in everyday life. Just put hand to chin and look pensive, and those around you will hopefully understand that you need a moment to ponder.

Observables. The observables listed for this exercise are states that tend to dominate the mind temporarily and for the most part have distinctive significance in *Dhamma* teachings and practice.

“Lust,” “hate” and “delusion” in clauses (1), (2) and (3) are pervasive in the

discourses in reference to unskillful or unwholesome factors of mind. 'Lust' is sometimes replaced by 'greed' in the early texts. You can also understand these as neediness, aversion and confusion. Lust and hate are forms of craving: wanting to acquire or keep something, and wanting to avoid or get rid of something. Delusion is not seeing what is going on. The opposites of lust, hate and delusion are renunciation, kindness and wisdom. At any time, one of these six might dominate the mind, subject to observation.

In clause (4), the word I translate as 'compact' more broadly means "concise, thin, slender or contracted." The word for "scattered" is derived from the same root, but with a contrary prefix, and can mean "distracted, mentally upset, disturbed or perplexed." Bones can also be scattered. Is your mind ever like that? Attentiveness is required for *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, but scatteredness might infect mind when you sit down to meditate.

In clause (5), 'exalted' seems to mark continued progress in practice. Mind is unexalted when you start out in Buddhist practice, then becomes exalted as you develop qualities like renunciation, kindness and wisdom, and you begin to experience exalted states more readily and frequently.

In clause (6), "superior" and "unsurpassed" refer to higher qualities of mind identified with spiritual progress. These might encompass unworldly impressions, including rapture, a precursor to a composed mind, described as one of the awakening factors.

In clause (7), what I translate as 'composed' means "in *samādhi*," best observed on the cushion during *satipaṭṭhāna* practice. Normally during *satipaṭṭhāna* practice the mind will settle into composure and *jhāna*. The exercise of "the seven awakening factors" traces the process of settling the mind into *samādhi* during *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, first passing through antecedent states of rapture, and serenity.

In clause (8), the distinction between "liberated" and "unliberated" is generally with respect to awakening. However practitioners may sometimes experience fleeting states of liberation, when lust, hate, delusion, life's problems and suffering are all spontaneously absent, only to return a bit later.

Contingencies. The conditioned and conditioning factors for these various mental states are diverse. Those that inspire lust, hate and delusion are each found primarily *off* the cushion in everyday contexts, but are then carried *onto* the cushion. Most higher qualities of mind are in association with your practice on the cushion.

Distinctive benefits. Lust, hate and delusion and their opposites are strongly

implicated in ethical practices, and you have here an opportunity to examine their roles in the network of conditionality. In particular greed, hate and delusion are the roots of "unwholesome" *kamma*. When they arise and when you act on them, you commonly end up doing some harm. You don't see things clearly when under the influence of lust or hate, so you might fail to see their downside in the heat of the moment. The unwholesome roots are accompanied by immediate observable suffering or a degree of discomfort. These ethical teachings may initially not be obvious, but you are invited to verify them in observable experience, and as you internalize these insights, they will in turn direct your conduct in a more pro-social direction.

This contemplation also supports the monitoring of the various factors integral to *satipaṭṭhāna* practice itself. Two of the *dhammas* exercises of the fourth *satipaṭṭhāna* fulfill this function, and also share overlapping observables with the mind exercise: these are the "five hindrances" and the "seven awakening factors." Since both of these also have to do with attentiveness within *satipaṭṭhāna* practice itself, these are discussed in the next chapter, on that topic, but might well have been subsumed under mind contemplations.

Investigation of observables and their contingencies is refreshingly simple, yet complex enough to keep you engaged. In a sense it brings you back to a childish world long hidden by habituation, in which the details are important sources of curiosity and wonder. The Buddha's teachings of impermanence and conditionality provide a reliable guide to that world.

3. Seclusion, *samādhi* and the *jhānas*

Each of the *satipaṭṭhāna* exercises investigates one or more *Dhamma* teachings in terms of observables. *Satipaṭṭhāna* itself is a *Dhamma* teaching and is no exception: we can investigate the observable mechanisms of *satipaṭṭhāna* itself, beginning with the *satipaṭṭhāna* method. Indeed, among the exercises are two that concern the refinement of attention within *satipaṭṭhāna* practice. These exercises are those of the "five hindrances" and the "seven awakening factors," both found in the fourth (*dhammas*) *satipaṭṭhāna*. We do well to try to learn these two exercises early on in *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, because their understanding will be a boon for our practice of the other exercises. These exercises were certainly included in the *sutta* for that reason. I've extended this discussion to the "four *jhānas*," not explicitly distinguished in the Text, but essential to the fulfillment of the *satipaṭṭhāna*'s promise of knowledge and vision.

3.1 The five hindrances (satipaṭṭhāna 4.1)

The "five hindrances" are the basic distractions which obstruct *satipaṭṭhāna* as well as other wisdom and ethical practices. The hindrances are highlighted, albeit indirectly, in the opening of the *sutta*:

> He abides contemplating body in the body, ardent, comprehending, and masterful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world.

"Having put away covetousness and grief for the world" narrows the scope of attention by excluding unwholesome worldly distractions. This is widely regarded as shorthand for abandoning the "five hindrances" of "sensual desire," "ill will," "sloth and torpor," "restlessness and remorse," and "doubt." Having abandoned the five hindrances, one is also said to be "secluded." For instance, abandoning either is found as a condition for entering *samādhi* at the first *jhāna*:

> Here, when a *bhikkhu* has entered upon the first *jhāna*, sensual desire is abandoned, ill will is abandoned, sloth and torpor are abandoned, restlessness and remorse are abandoned, and doubt is abandoned.
>
> (MN 43 i294-5)

Equivalently,

> Here, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a *bhikkhu* enters upon and abides in the first *jhāna*, … (MN 141 iii252)

"Seclusion" is often understood as physical, but can also be mental; one tends to give rise to the other I will use the terse word 'seclusion' to refer to the state of "having put away covetousness and grief for the world." From a basis in seclusion, *samādhi* will further narrow attention to center more closely around the teachings and observables relevant to a primary exercise, and even constrain dispensable cognitive faculties.

The text for this exercise reads as follows:

> Here a *bhikkhu* abides contemplating *dhammas* among the *dhammas* in terms of the five hindrances. And how does a *bhikkhu* abide contemplating *dhammas* among the *dhammas* in terms of the five hindrances.

(1) (a) Here, there being sensual desire in him, a *bhikkhu* comprehends, "There is sensual desire in me"; or there being no sensual desire in him, he comprehends, "There is no sensual desire in me."
(b) And he also comprehends how there comes to be the arising of unarisen sensual desire, and how there comes to be the abandoning of arisen sensual desire, and how there comes to be the future nonarising of abandoned sensual desire."

(2) (a) There being ill will in him, a *bhikkhu* comprehends …
(b) And he also comprehends how there comes to be the arising of unarisen ill will …

(3) (a) There being sloth and torpor in him, a *bhikkhu* comprehends …
(b) And he also comprehends how there comes to be the arising of unarisen sloth and torpor …

(4) (a) There being restlessness and remorse in him, a *bhikkhu* comprehends …
(b) And he also comprehends how there comes to be the arising of unarisen restlessness and remorse …

(5) (a) There being doubt in him, a *bhikkhu* comprehends, "There is doubt in me"; or there being no doubt in him, he comprehends, "There is no doubt in me."
(b) And he comprehends how there comes to be the arising of

> unarisen doubt, and how there comes to be the abandoning of arisen doubt, and how there comes to be the future non-arising of abandoned doubt.

Context. The hindrances are most directly investigated when they arise as you attempt to practice another, "primary," *satipaṭṭhāna* exercise. You observe the hindrances primarily at the edges of *satipaṭṭhāna*, either at the beginning of a *satipaṭṭhāna* session, or as they encroach into our *satipaṭṭhāna* practice. This affords a (hopefully) brief opportunity to engage in this exercise. Alternatively, any particular hindrance might be investigated opportunistically when it arises in everyday life.

Observables. Each of the hindrances does not only potentially disrupt practice, but is also categorized as "unwholesome," that is, rooted in greed, hate or delusion. It is significant that the more wholesome states of mind rarely distract us from practice. You might complain, "I was so angry, I just couldn't meditate," but you are not likely to say, "I was so darn overwhelmed with loving-kindness that my mind wouldn't settle."

The hindrances are as follows:

"Sensual desire": neediness for things of the world: food, sex, companionship, money in the bank, status or reputation, one's Oscar.

"Ill-will": hate or aversion, including anger, fear, envy, vexation.

"Sloth and torpor": together constitute a muddled, dull or sleepy mind.

"Restlessness and remorse": represent an overactive mind.

"Doubt": the mind that is not convinced either of the efficacy of the practice, or of your ability to perform it.

For most of the hindrances, you might notice two distinct parts: One is a "narrative," in the case of anger, for instance, a string of thoughts like, "He had no right to do that. I would never do that to anyone. I'm going to get back at him!" The other part is particular sensations in body and mind, for instance, tightness in the chest, flushing of the face, a kind of boiling sensation in the mind. The narrative is conditioned by mundane circumstances that turn to a proliferation of distracting thoughts. The narrative then becomes fuel for the bodily and mental sensations.

The narrative is generally not a subject for contemplation, because doing so would make things worse, much like a lone newsman trying to report in the midst of a barroom brawl. However, if you strip the narrative away, even

momentarily, you can productively focus on the bodily and mental sensations, simply acknowledging their origination in narrative. This is much like the more astute newsman who stands outside of the bar and interviews injured or stunned individuals as they are ejected from the bar though the door or windows. However, deprived of fuel, the bodily and mental impressions will be short-lived.

Contingencies. Clause (b) of each hindrance above asks that we explore its conditionality. A friend of mine was happily meditating one day, when he heard a "beep … beep … beep …." This not only caught his attention, but initiated a narrative, "Why can't that guy answer his phone. Doesn't he know I'm meditating here? …," and inevitably the bodily and mental manifestations of anger followed. Then he realized that it wasn't so much a "beep" as a "peep." It was a bird. The hindrance disappeared immediately and he returned to his happily secluded state. Some circumstances lead to anger and some don't.

Distinctive benefits. If you control the conditioning factors of the hindrances, you will gain the control required to "put away covetousness and grief for the world." You might begin a meditation session by looking for each hindrance in turn and, if it is there, you try to appease it. Sometimes all it takes is noting it, and putting it mentally aside. You will probably find one or two hindrances that are characteristic of your personality. There is an extensive literature on how to address problems that occur with each of the hindrances.

In practice. The "awakening factors" are often claimed to be an antidote to the hindrances. This antidote can be applied simply by putting aside investigation, which starts out with a high degree of energy (as described below as one of the seven awakening factors), and choosing something that is very easy to observe (the breath is almost everybody's favorite). This will generally settle the mind enough to hold the hindrances temporarily at bay. Allow serenity and *samādhi* to settle in, and dwell there for a few minutes. Then pick up the investigation you had intended with a refreshed and clear mind.

One of my favorite means of addressing an insistent hindrance involves this partnership of narrative and sensations of body and mind. Suppose anger intrudes into your peaceful contemplation. Anger has revisited you, typically directed at someone who has just done you wrong. Every time you try to contemplate the breath or visualize the water element as the primary practice, your mind pops back into anger mode. No problem! Put your primary practice aside, and take up contemplation of the second hindrance. But focus exclusively on the sensations in body and mind, which are fortunately

prominent and fascinating to observe, even as you discover that they are quite insubstantial. Stripped of their narratives, the bodily and mental sensations will run out of fuel and dissipate quite quickly. Then go back to the primary exercise. When the anger returns (as it almost always does), simply repeat. You might end up bouncing back and forth between the primary and the hindrance exercises, but you are likely to make progress in each.

The experienced meditator is less commonly vexed by the hindrances. If keeping the hindrances at bay is habituated, their control becomes internalized, automatic and barely conscious.

3.2 The seven awakening factors (satipaṭṭhāna 4.4)

This exercise has to do with the arising of *samādhi*, which is integral to *satipaṭṭhāna* practice . (At one point in the early texts *satipaṭṭhāna* is even referred to as "a *samādhi*.") *Samādhi* is critical to producing optimal results in *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, and similar fruits are attributed to each. For instance, in one discourse we find the following:

> *Bhikkhus*, there are these four developments of *samādhi*. What four?
>
> (1) There is a development of *samādhi* that developed and cultivated leads to dwelling happily in this very life.
>
> (2) There is a development of *samādhi* that developed and cultivated leads to obtaining knowledge and vision.
>
> (3) There is a development of *samādhi* that developed and cultivated leads to mastery-comprehension.
>
> (4) There is a development of *samādhi* that developed and cultivated leads to the destruction of the taints. (AN 4.41)

We also find:

> When right *samādhi* does not exist, for one failing right *samādhi*, the proximate cause is destroyed for knowledge and vision of things as they really are. (AN 10.3)

Samādhi is not mentioned in the *sutta* except with respect to the awakening factors exercise, but the importance of its role is repeatedly made clear in the shorter *satipaṭṭhāna* texts. The text for this exercise is as follows:

> Again, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* abides contemplating *dhammas* among the *dhammas* in terms of the seven awakening factors. And how does a

bhikkhu abide contemplating *dhammas* among the *dhammas* in terms of the seven awakening factors?

(1) Here, there being the mastery awakening factor in him, a *bhikkhu* comprehends, "There is the mastery awakening factor in me"; or there being no mastery awakening factor in him, he comprehends, "There is no mastery awakening factor in me"; and he also comprehends how there comes to be the arising of the unarisen mastery awakening factor, and how the arisen mastery awakening factor comes to fulfillment by development.

(2) There being the *dhamma*-investigation awakening factor in him, …

(3) There being the energy awakening factor in him, …

(4) There being the rapture awakening factor in him, …

(5) There being the tranquility awakening factor in him, …

(6) There being the *samādhi* awakening factor in him, …

(7) There being the equanimity awakening factor in him, … comes to fulfillment by development.

"Comes to fulfillment by development" suggests that through training you will develop a natural propensity for the quick and easy arising of the respective factor.

Context. Like the hindrances exercise, this exercise will generally piggyback on a primary exercise, such as walking meditation or contemplation of a corpse, which will determine the context for practice. You should add occasional monitoring of these additional seven factors to your ongoing investigation as they unfold, in order to fulfill the requirements of the awakening factors exercise.

Observables. The seven awakening factors are:

(1) mastery
(2) *dhamma*-investigation
(3) energy
(4) rapture
(5) tranquility
(6) *samādhi*
(7) equanimity

Notice that the first three factors provide a clear description of *satipaṭṭhāna* practice itself, corresponding respectively to "mastery," "comprehension" and "ardency" in the *satipaṭṭhāna* method. The missing factor, "seclusion," is already implicit as a conditioning factor of *samādhi*. The *Virtue Sutta* (SN

46.3) describes hearing a *Dhamma* teaching (a *dhamma*) from monks of virtue and wisdom, then begins presenting the awakening factors as follows:

> *A bhikkhu* dwelling thus withdrawn recollects that *dhamma* and thinks it over. … on that occasion the awakening factor of mastery is aroused by the *bhikkhu*. …

This brings to mind and reflects on the particular teaching that has been heard.

> Dwelling thus, he examines that *dhamma* with wisdom, investigates it, makes an exploration of it. … on that occasion the awakening factor of *dhamma*-investigation is aroused by the *bhikkhu.* …

This begins the investigation led by comprehension, with explicit reference to the teaching under investigation.

> His energy is aroused without slackening. … on that occasion the awakening factor of energy is aroused by the *bhikkhu.* …

Ardency may have been aroused by listening to the *Dhamma* talk, but will certainly grow with productive engagement in the detailed task of investigation.

The remaining factors arise as a consequence of engagement in *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, beginning with "rapture." Have you ever been totally engaged in some activity, like fly fishing, or playing chess, or hang gliding, in which you think "there is no place else I would rather be, this is what life is all about"? *Dhammic* investigation is like this. You are commonly elated. This state typically arises from an activity in which you have developed a level of mastery, in which your skills are presently challenged, but nonetheless serve the activity well. Concerns have disappeared and you feel completely alive. That's rapture. It is a kind of spiritual pleasure that has a degree of energy or excitement, along with a sense of well-being.

The first four factors are active and energized. With the fifth factor, "tranquility," the trajectory of the mind begins to change toward greater stillness. I suspect this comes from the sense of well-being connected with the confidence that your skills are up to the task. Part of the mind is becoming still, yet part of the mind remains engaged, such that energy and rapture persist. This shift toward greater stillness boosts attentiveness and inhibits distraction. You are "in the groove."

The sixth factor is "*samādhi*" itself, reached at the point at which attention has become "one-centered," that is, reliably single-mindedly centered around the task at hand, along with the relevant teachings and observables, but to the

exclusion of what is not relevant. *Samādhi* differentiates into four *jhānas* of progressively greater depth, which are discussed below.

The seventh awakening factor, "equanimity," is equated with the deep third and fourth *jhānas*.

Contingencies. The primary conditional relations among the seven factors can be summarized as follows: The first three factors condition each other and interwork to constitute the method of *satipaṭṭhāna* described in chapter 1. Working together, these three factors condition the arising of the remaining four in sequence. There are also other, extraneous contributing factors that help enable some of these remaining awakening factors. For instance, sitting cross-legged on a cushion in a quiet room conduces to the arising of *samādhi* and its antecedent factors.

Beyond the first three factors, there is no necessary role for volitional intervention. This is why I maintain throughout this manual that *samadhi* arises spontaneously in *satipaṭṭhāna* practice. It will even assume the depth (*jhāna*) appropriate to the current stage of practice. As Bhante Guṇaratana writes, "you don't even have to wish" for it. As the Buddha said,

> For one of right mastery, right *samādhi* springs up. (SN 5.25-6)

The Buddha affirms elsewhere the spontaneous arising of *samādhi* in cases where we are ardently engaged in skillful Buddhist practice, not necessarily only in *satipaṭṭhāna* practice.

> Monks, for a virtuous person, one whose behavior is virtuous, no volition need be exerted, "Let satisfaction [non-regret] arise in me." It is natural that satisfaction arises in one who is virtuous, one whose behavior is virtuous.
> … It is natural that delight arises in one with satisfaction.
> … It is natural that rapture arises in one who is delighted
> … It is natural that the body of one with a rapturous mind is tranquil.
> … It is natural that one who is tranquil in body feels pleasure.
> … It is natural that the mind of one feeling pleasure is in *samādhi*.
> (AN 11.2)

There are many similar examples in the early texts, in each of which some root practice gives rise to *samādhi* through these same antecedent states of rapture and tranquility, naturally and without effort. This is the *samādhi* that is present in *satipaṭṭhāna* practice.

Notes. The *absence* of a conditioning role for an explicit technique that induces *samadhi* is significant. In certain traditions, *samādhi* requires such an

explicit technique to bring the mind to a single point (for instance, staring at a *kasiṇa*), that results in a virtual shutting down of all mental activity, sometimes even the functioning of the senses. For our purposes, such *samādhi* is overkill, and is suitable only as a warm-up to *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, for it will choke off the process of investigation.

If *samādhi* is already a natural faculty, what makes the fourfold *jhāna* uniquely Buddhist? I think the answer is that the Buddha refined it: he recognized its potential and the processes whereby it could bear fruits, and then taught us to develop and cultivate it accordingly. He made it into an art and a science. "Feeding" similarly comes naturally to humans, but through development and cultivation we get *haute cuisine* and table manners.

3.3 The jhānas

Jhānas differentiate *samādhi* into four levels, which are clearly described and distinguished in the early texts in terms of observable "*jhāna* factors." Presumably, the Buddha wanted us to understand the *jhāna* factors and be able to navigate among them according to the needs of contemplation. All meditators are capable of at least some of the *jhānas*.

One-centeredness. In Buddhist practice, the "scope of attention" should optimally center around the "know-how" and observables relevant to the single primary practice task at hand. To be functionally viable, attention should be as broad or narrow as the task demands and relatively stable but not necessarily fixed, for different stages of the task or different contingencies may require adjustments to the relevant scope. Under optimal conditions the mind is "shrink-wrapped" around the singular theme of the primary practice. Seclusion has secured the base level at which the scope of attention is narrowed to exclude unwholesome distractions. The *jhānas* double down on this effort.

Samādhi fulfills its function and produces its fruits though narrowing the scope of attention beyond mere seclusion. This begins with "one-centeredness."

> *Samādhi* is one-centeredness of mind. (MN 34 i301)

The one-centered (*not* "one-pointed") mind optimally includes whatever is relevant to the performance of that primary task, but in principle excludes all else.

***Jhāna* factors.** You should try to become adept in identifying the observable

"*jhāna* factors" in your own contemplative experience.

> (1st *jhāna*) Here, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first *jhāna*, which is accompanied by thought and deliberation, with rapture and pleasure, born of seclusion. (MN 141 iii 252)

Entry into the first *jhāna* begins when the mind is "secluded." The presence of "thought and deliberation" in the first *jhāna* is particularly important to highlight here. Thought and deliberation are found in normal everyday experience. It is the voice in the head, with its conversational or "discursive" quality. The Buddha says that thought and deliberation are "about to break into speech." Their presence as *jhāna* factors here indicates undiminished cognitive faculties in the first *jhāna*. Their abandonment in the second *jhāna* will indicate a significantly quieter mode of cognitive function. This is not to say that the mind is free in the first *jhāna* to wander into choosing a color for that new addition, into plotting revenge or into worrying about paying off your credit cards. Seclusion constrains the mind from wandering into mundane affairs.

> (2nd *jhāna*) With the stilling of thought and deliberation, he enters upon and abides in the second *jhāna*, which has tranquility and unification of mind, without thought and deliberation, with rapture and pleasure, born of *samādhi*. (MN 141 iii 252)

The use of "born of" in their descriptions, tells us that seclusion conditions the first *jhāna*, and that the *samādhi* attained in the first *jhāna* conditions the second *jhāna*. Entry into the second *jhāna* begins when everyday discursive thought and deliberation are greatly curtailed. The Buddha accordingly calls the second *jhāna* "noble silence," and that silence continues into the third and fourth *jhānas* as well. "Silence" here is best understood as "whisper quiet" rather than as the complete disappearance of conceptual experience, for some level of cognition and conceptualization is subjectively apparent in each of the *jhānas*, as it carries forth investigation.

> (3rd *jhāna*) With the fading away as well of rapture, he abides in equanimity, masterful and comprehending, still feeling pleasure with the body, he enters upon and abides in the third *jhāna*, on account of which noble ones announce, "He has a pleasant abiding, who is equanimous and masterful." (MN 141 iii 252)

In the third *jhāna* the excitement that comes with rapture disappears. What remains is a pleasant contentedness. "Masterful and comprehending," the central factors in the *satipaṭṭhāna* method, indicate that investigation

continues, but little effort is required, as observables and their *Dhammic* conformity appear with crystal clarity. This is generally such a comfortable state that you might feel that you could dwell here forever, that there is nowhere else to go.

> (4th *jhāna*) With the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, he enters and abides in the fourth *jhāna*, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mastery due to equanimity. (MN 141 iii252)

The fourth *jhāna* is recognized as a trance-like, nearly unconscious state in which the sense of time is often distorted. Normal cognition seems to be almost completely shut down. However, the reference to "purity of mastery" is very significant, for it entails further progress in developing and cultivating mastery with regard to the exercise, even in this fourth *jhāna*. Even without explicit, active investigation, something is producing results below awareness.

Cognitive faculties. The *jhānas* participate in the narrowing of attention that progresses as follows (putting most of the more affective factors aside):

> secluded ► one-centered ► silent ► at ease ► equanimous

At each stage a most agitated factor is stripped away. In particular, the progression from one *jhāna* to the next shuts down some aspect of the "explicit system" of human cognition, entailing a further attenuation of everyday cognitive functioning. Proceeding to deeper *jhānas* has an immediate filtering function, in that explicit reasoning, abstraction, presumptions and narratives are no longer sustained, resulting in clarity and intimacy with our direct observables.

Cognitive science tells us that we humans are endowed with (at least) two distinguished systems of cognition: explicit and implicit. The "explicit system" involves slow, deliberate and effortful reasoning, problem solving, conceptual abstraction, sustained narrative, and active discursive thinking. The "implicit system," on the other hand, is lightning fast, silent, for the most part unconscious, effortless, and non-conceptual or intuitive. The implicit system is fast because it works hand in glove with the neural architecture of your brain.

This all sounds academic, but we have all been very aware of these two systems our whole lives, for they are two ends of the famous "learning curve." As we begin to learn any skill, say driving a car, we are overwhelmed with thought and deliberation; it's a lot of work, clumsy and error prone, but we cannot perform the task otherwise. A few months later, it has become effortless, nearly flawless (in the case of driving, often not quite flawless

enough), and, for the most part, intuitive. What happened? The explicit system has trained the implicit system to do what it had been doing, only better. Through familiarity with the domain gained through practice, the developing mastery of driving has been "internalized" by offloading what used to be accomplished in the explicit system, onto the implicit system.

The explicit system is good at dealing with novelty and at figuring things out at a conceptual level, but is slow and expensive in terms of effort. The implicit system is subjectively effortless and fast, but must report to the explicit system if something comes up that is unfamiliar. Although the explicit system has a role in planning the training of the implicit system, the implicit system continues to train *itself* to be sensitive to details in a way that the explicit system cannot even comprehend.

Implicit cognition exhibits some remarkable qualities and often produces insights missed by the explicit system. As a result, implicit intuitions and hunches are surprisingly reliable, and capable of very fine-tuned insight and discovery. This silent/effortless mode is not dependent on conceptualization, and often comprehends a broader and more subtle range of factors, making more accurate choices than explicit thinking ever could. The upshot is that *satipaṭṭhāna* contemplation can continue through all of the *jhānas* (including the fourth, in which the explicit system is all but absent), by relying decreasingly on the explicit system and increasingly on the remarkable capabilities of the silent implicit system.

I repeat: investigation, after sufficient internalization, continues easily in the deeper *jhānas* within the implicit system. Much of the contentiousness around a proper understanding of the role of *samādhi* in wisdom practice has resulted from the failure to recognize this critical point. We tend to sell implicit processing short. It is implicit cognition that is most directly associated with the highest levels of expertise in task performance. For instance, a virtuoso succeeds in a performance by stepping out of the explicit way, and letting her skill play itself out implicitly. In fact, the intrusion of slow-moving thought or deliberation could easily disrupt a performance. Similarly, expert first impressions (intuitive hunches or gut feelings), made literally in the blink of an eye, frequently turn out to be more reliable than subsequent, even months-long deliberate analysis.

The *Dhammic* and observable theme of ongoing investigation seems able to remain constant from one *jhāna* to the next, even if its experience changes markedly. This theme is known as the "*nimitta*" or "*samādhi-nimitta*" in Pali, and becomes *conceptually* more obscure in the deeper *jhānas* as the involvement of the *explicit* system recedes. My sense is that it is important to

hang onto the *nimitta* explicitly to ensure that the barely conscious fourth *jhāna* is continuing to stay on task. What seems to remain in awareness as the *nimitta* in the fourth *jhāna* is a word or an impression of the task, which is like a lifeline to someone who has disappeared under water's surface to perform some task unseen (like swapping out a propeller). Insights tend to bubble up from the depths and make themselves aware to the explicit system. The texts suggest that *samādhi* bears its juiciest fruits through entrusting the continuation of investigation to the deeper *jhānas* and their almost complete dependence on implicit cognition. *Samādhi* seems to require this deep level of contemplation in order to produce full knowledge and vision.

3.4 Samādhi in practice

For years I wondered why the Buddha gave so much repeated attention to teaching the *jhāna* factors. The answer seems to be that *jhāna* is regularly in service of investigation, and the needs of investigation vary from time to time. The adept practitioner is tasked accordingly with steering toward the appropriate *jhāna* at a particular time.

For instance, the initial orientation into an unfamiliar exercise almost certainly calls for the first *jhāna*, in which understandings are provisional, reconciliation may be necessary, and there is work for thought and deliberation. The habituation and internalization of an exercise calls on deeper *jhānas* to stave off distraction and to take advantage of the merits of the individual *jhānas* in support of investigation. But then sometimes we discover a limitation in our understanding of an already well internalized exercise, and it is appropriate to return to the first *jhāna* in order to re-learn it. Remember the golf player trying to improve his swing in the last chapter?

In a handful of passages in the early texts the terms *vipassanā* and *samatha* are used to describe this interplay or balance of explicit investigation and depth of *jhāna*. *Vipassanā* means 'analysis' (literally 'seeing apart,' akin to *anupassanā* 'contemplation'), and can therefore refer to investigation. *Samatha* means 'stilling' and therefore can refer to *samādhi* or to deeper *jhānas*. The ideal application in *satipaṭṭhāna* would be to let *samādhi* track internalization, that is, to reach the deepest *jhāna* that the degree of internalization of the teaching under investigation allows. The texts refer to practicing "*vipassanā* and *samatha* yoked together" when we follow this pattern.

But *jhāna* isn't always in service of investigation, and is sometimes prioritized. Accordingly the texts also refer to practicing "*samatha* before *vipassanā*." For instance, we've seen that *samādhi* is an antidote to the hindrances. If you sit

down on the cushion and find you are too restless to begin your intended practice, a remedy is simply to observe something easy, like the breath, in order to provide conditions conducive to *samādhi*, or alternatively to take up a devotional or ethical practice also conducive to practice (The Buddha recommends that at this juncture you reflect on something inspiring, like the qualities of the *Saṅgha*, or like your own virtue.).

Moreover, we always have the option of enjoying the benefits of calm abiding off-line, that is, suspending investigation altogether for a spell, perhaps to recharge our batteries between bouts of investigation. This may constitute a significant portion of your meditation practice.

Nonetheless, in service of investigation, *samādhi* is an insight factory and right mastery in *Dhamma* provides its raw materials. Accordingly, you should note that *samādhi* and *jhāna* are discussed in the early texts *mainly* in association with "knowledge and vision," or with other attainments that approach awakening:

> When right *samādhi* does not exist, for one failing right *samādhi*, the proximate cause is destroyed for knowledge and vision of things as they really are. (AN 10.3)

"Knowledge and vision" are factors of wisdom attributed to *samādhi* repeatedly in the early texts, where they represent a stage close to final liberation, at which it might be said that we see what the Buddha saw.

> There is no *jhāna* for one with no wisdom, no wisdom for one without *jhāna*. But one with both *jhāna* and wisdom, he's on the verge of *nibbāna*. (Dhp 372)

4. Whose body and mind?

Non-self is one of the most profound teachings of the Buddha, and one known to leave many scratching their heads in bewilderment. Let me clarify from the outset that the self is primarily, for the Buddha, something we *do* mentally, not something about whose existence or non-existence we need to speculate about philosophically . The Buddha often spoke in terms of "I-making." I-making involves the conviction that there is a substantial self and is quite deep-rooted in human thinking. Unfortunately, I-making causes us a lot of problems of a spiritual nature. But if the self is something we do, then it should be something we can *not* do.

The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* mentions neither "self" nor "non-self" directly, and so it is easy to miss the degree to which the *satipaṭṭhāna* is about non-self. In fact, the refrain is structured around a strategy for practicing non-self in experiential terms. It involves, as before, the practice of investigating observables, but in the case of the *Dhamma* of non-self this has a hitch: there are no direct observables that correspond to "self," much less to "non-self." This hugely important teaching requires a special strategy: discovering that the self is incongruent with what we can verify directly among the observables.

4.1 Why is the self a problem?

The untutored worldling presumes that the self exists as a real, substantial and fixed thing, and makes that self a major feature of his experiential world. He thinks and plans in terms of that self. However, in the Buddha's teaching, "the self" is a presumption (*mañña*), a cognitive fabrication (*saṅkhāra*) that is taken as real. The Buddha had a low regard for presumptions:

> Presumption is a disease, presumption is a tumor, presumption is a dart. By overcoming all presumptions, *bhikkhu,* one is called a sage at peace. And the sage at peace is not born, does not age, does not die; he is not shaken and does not yearn. For there is nothing present in him by which he might be born. (MN 140 iii246)

There is no self present in him. Fortunately, to experience things as real, is not to experience real things. If what we experience as real causes us problems, then we may have the option of experiencing otherwise. This is the case with

the self.

Before we go off on a crusade against the self and all other presumptions, let me reflect that the self, like a sharp knife, is both a useful tool and a dangerous hazard, depending on when and how it is wielded. How is it useful? The world is an overwhelmingly complex place, and the network of contingencies relevant to any of life's decisions is impossible to trace reliably. As we try to understand what is going on in the world, there are just too many possible ways of combining the raw data to come to any reliable large-scale interpretation. The usefulness of presumptions is that they abstract away large swaths of conditional relations into unitary objects or views, in order to prune back the network of contingencies, albeit artificially, to a traceable level.

There are many things that we presume exist, so let's consider a more marginal object to see the practical value in presuming: a shadow. Most would agree that a shadow is not really an object. It originates when some physical object intercepts light before it reaches a surface which would otherwise be illuminated. Yet, presuming that the shadow exists as an object has an advantage, in that we can then regard it as stable, attribute properties to it, and reason about it productively. A shadow thereby acquires length and breadth, can prevent sunburn or make a picnic more enjoyable. It can even serve as an essential component of a physical artifact, such as a sundial. Nonetheless, we are not fully convinced that it is "really" a thing, because we can "see through" the illusion.

Resorting in this way to a simpler but only approximate model of the world and ignoring what is thereby lost is a practical, and ubiquitous, strategy in human thinking. In view of the exploding mass of possibilities we would otherwise have to consider, without applying this strategy we would be incapable of making any decision or performing an action in many contexts. "Attention" does something similar for us, by restricting awareness of the world to within a limited scope. Mundane "faith" does this for us, the willingness to accept the authority of another (from dentist to religious persuasion), because it permits us to make *some* choice, and *no* choice is itself generally the *worst* choice. Science subsists on pared-down models of reality, and on the faithful adherence of obstinate individual scientists to presumed paradigms defined around those models (with the proviso that such models be falsifiable).

The presumption that the self exists has a similar practical benefit. The presumption of the self reduces a huge swath of the network of contingencies to a unitary object that possesses agency and percipience. It is easier for a unified object, rather than for a swath of contingencies, to cross the street without getting run over by a UPS truck. But notice that its effectiveness, and

the effectiveness of all presumptions, is based in "ignorance," that is, based on ignoring the mass of subtle factors that are abstracted away by imposing a unitary object. And what is ignored nonetheless remains at play, producing consequences. As a result, the presumption of a self also quite regularly leads to faulty conclusions, for instance, that individual selves are to "blame," and therefore are "wrath-worthy," when something goes awry in human affairs. (We never find the Buddha reaching such a conclusion.) By removing or de-emphasizing the role of "selves" from the network of contingencies, finer causal relations that are otherwise obscured come to light.

Fortunately, it is possible to fabricate something without being convinced of its real existence. Kids do this all the time in play. We can, if we want, abandon the *presumption* of the self, but keep its *fabrication* around. This allows us to use the self when it is useful, and to abandon it when it is not. We catch the Buddha himself repeatedly wielding the expedient of referring to him-*self* as "I" or as "the Tathāgata" in this way, "as if" he himself were also a unitary object in the network of contingencies. We gain the option of "experiencing otherwise" through *satipaṭṭhāna* practice: I'm a unary self now that it is useful, and a swath of contingencies later.

Nonetheless, the Buddha is most interested in revealing the *disadvantages* of the self, and that will be our focus. The presumption of the self is the source of enormous suffering. It easily leads to craving and to a widening circle of appropriation of things as "me" and "mine." It is sobering to realize that everything and everyone we cling to as a result will be lost to us one by one into the network of contingencies … until the ones that remain lose us. The precious world is slipping by like sand through our fingers. As a result, our experiential world is littered with the shards of broken promises. We have been duped, because we have presumed that an enduring substantial self exists, along with other alluring and enduring substantial objects. And we suffer as a result, because, beyond our presumptions, everything is in fact in constant flux. Our presumptions, in their ignorance, simply cannot keep pace with the unfolding of a highly contingent world over time. From the spiritual perspective, the presumption of the self is a scourge to be abandoned. This presumption is deeply ingrained and therefore extremely difficult to abandon, and this is where *satipaṭṭhāna* is critical.

4.2 Non-self in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta

The refrain reads as follows (the "mind" refrain is analogous to the "body" refrain):

(1) In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, or he abides body-contemplating in the body externally, or he abides body-contemplating in the body both internally and externally.

(2) He abides contemplating in the body the nature of origination, or he abides contemplating in the body the nature of vanishing, or he abides contemplating in the body the nature of both origination and vanishing.

(3) Recollection that "the body exists" is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mastery.

(4) He abides independent. He doesn't cling to anything in the world.

… That is how a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body.

Clause (1) is the concise guide for the practice of non-self, but let's take this opportunity to look at each clause of the refrain briefly as well, before coming back to clause (1).

Clause (1) offers you three ways of undertaking the signature exercise: (a) puts aside the self in favor of investigating the direct observables, (b) investigates the experience of the self, and (c) abandons the self after failing to reconcile the self with the direct observables. The self here is represented as a facet of "the body," in the third *satipaṭṭhāna* as a facet of "the mind."

Clause (2) directs you to investigate bodily observables in terms of conditionality and impermanence. You practiced this abundantly in chapter 2. It is the basis of exploring subtle contingencies in internal contemplation.

Clause (3) acknowledges the practical usefulness of the fabrication of the self (in its body facet) to be used when it is useful, as discussed above. Reference to "knowledge and mastery" seems to put us in the context of *satipaṭṭhāna*, for instance, it recognizes that the Buddha would not have been able to provide practice instructions for *satipaṭṭhāna* without referring to the self (at least in one of its facets).

Clause (4) describes the fulfillment of the conditions for ending suffering. The refrain as a whole is clearly about the prominent "three signs" teaching of "impermanence," "suffering" and "non-self." However, the reference to suffering is indirect and cursory, alluding optimistically to its *resolution* in non-clinging.

4.3 The threefold contemplation

Once again, clause (1) of the refrain offers a threefold means of contemplating the observables defined in the signature exercise, and their contingencies. The three folds are "internal contemplation," "external contemplation" and "both internal and external contemplation." These three together constitute non-self practice, for the purpose of freely experiencing otherwise (in fact, non-presumptively) in contrast to the everyday experience of the untutored worldling.

The terminology of (1) is a bit subtle. It clearly relies on a metaphor of containment. "The body" conceived as a unified whole is the container. Within that container are "bodily observables" (breath, elements, etc.). "The body" as the container is identified with "the self," and presumed to exist as a facet of the self. I will call this "the body/self." Similarly in the third *satipaṭṭhāna*, "the mind" is conceived as a container for mental observables, and identified with the self as the "mind/self" facet. There is also a "consciousness/self" facet, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

"Body-contemplating" is translated from Pali literally as a noun-verb compound, which is understood as contemplating the bodily observables and their contingencies. "Contemplating internally" is likewise contemplation of bodily observables and their contingencies on their own terms, without reference to the body/self. In practice you might find it difficult to shake off the self completely. "Contemplating externally" continues this contemplation but focuses on the role of the body/self as a strong conditioning factor. "Contemplating both internally explores the incongruity of the body/self and the bodily observables.

Interestingly, the very first signature exercise, the breath contemplation, anticipates the instructions in the refrain for the threefold contemplation, clearly but in its own words.

> (1) Masterful, he breathes in, masterful he breathes out. Breathing in long, he comprehends, "I breathe in long"; or breathing out long, he comprehends, "I breathe out long." Breathing in short, he comprehends, "I breathe in short"; or breathing out short, he comprehends, "I breathe out short."
>
> (2) He trains thus: "I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body"; he trains thus: "I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body."
>
> (3) He trains thus: "I shall breathe in tranquilizing the bodily fabrication"; he trains thus: "I shall breathe out tranquilizing the bodily

fabrication."

Step (1) describes internal contemplation, adhering closely to the observables, "inside" of "the (whole) body."

Step (2) describes external contemplation, in which the "whole body" represents the container or the body/self. Effectively, "I" am in charge and "I" am doing the breathing."

Step (3) refers to that same whole body as the "bodily fabrication." Recall that the self and its facets are presumptions, and presumptions are fabrications that are taken as real. In step (3), we bring back to mind the finer contingencies of step (1) and allow the dominant role of the whole body to fade away.

Let's look at each of these three steps more closely.

4.4 Contemplating internally

You have already begun "internal contemplation" in the last two chapters. As you settle into the practice of investigating the fine details of the observables and contingencies, and at the same time settle into *samādhi* and into the deeper *jhānas*, you find yourself in a world that would surprise the untutored worldling, but which becomes routine (though still remarkable) for the experienced meditator. All else vanishes or fades into the background (at least much of the time), leaving (in the case of the first exercise) only breaths, observable as sensations in the body, and their contingencies.

The cognitive processes that hold fabrications and presumptions together are largely absent as you reach the deeper *jhānas*. This is an ideal context for losing the experience of the self, and the self is likely to drop away entirely at times. However, you may instead have the continual sense that a self is present, even though not directly observable. This is why you are asked to take care not to invite the self in, why you dispel thoughts of "me" and "mine." You should try strictly to exclude the self as a factor in your exploration of contingencies; for instance, don't entertain thoughts such as "I am the one taking a long breath, now I think I'll take a short breath." Ideally, contemplating internally sticks close to the direct observables, and *samādhi* plays a role in quelling extraneous abstractions. Aware only of the contingency and flux of your observables, you will have developed an intimacy with what is directly experienced.

4.5 Contemplating externally

To abandon the self, we first have to locate the self in experience. This is "external contemplation." We've established that the self is not directly *observed*. However, it can nonetheless be *experienced*. For instance, if you are lying on the sofa and hear purring behind your head, you directly observe the purring, but experience the whole cat; you *presume* the cat is there (he probably is). Similarly, as you directly observe a breath, you might experience that the whole body/self is there doing the breathing, and as you directly observe thoughts and emotions, you might presume that the whole mind/self is doing the thinking and emoting. Virtually all of us presume there is a self as a substantial thing or essence, a "me" that's been there as long as we can remember, and we have difficulty conceiving of a world without this self. We also almost always presume that the following qualities adhere to the self:

(1) **Impermanence.** The self enjoys a reliably fixed or unchanging position at the center of a complex world of evolving circumstances. It is at its core virtually unconditioned.

(2) **Substantiality.** It is presumed that the self is manifest in what you can directly observe, within the "body/self" and within the "mind/self." Direct observables are taken as "evidence" for the existence of the self.

(3) **Contact.** The self is "conscious" of the world "out there." In this way, "the self" is in opposition to "the others." This constitutes a third facet of the self, the "consciousness/self," discussed in the next chapter.

(4) **Conditionality.** The self has managerial control over its observable manifestations in the body, in the mind and in consciousness. The self is a powerful conditioning factor.

"External contemplation" begins in the midst of internal contemplation. The theme of contemplation remains the same, for instance, breath or elements. However, now you purposely insist on being your "self," embracing, rather than ignoring the body/self and its associated thoughts of "me" and "mine." The result is something like being with a group of friends, chatting amiably and spontaneously, sharing the space equally, delighting in the interplay of remarks, then being suddenly invaded by someone named "Ace," an insurance salesman who dominates every conversation, subverting it to be about "him" and "his." It's enough to set the previous interlocutors back a *jhāna* or two, as

they lose the thread of the earlier conversation. Each of them suddenly remembers somewhere else they needed to be.

A warning: external contemplation should be practiced only occasionally and briefly, lest you habituate or internalize this mode of mental behavior. (The assertiveness training class is down the hall.) Your task is simply to learn to *recognize* this experience of being a self. *Internal* contemplation should pervade your practice; you *do* want to habituate and internalize *that* mode of mental behavior.

One way to induce external contemplation is to tell yourself something like, "I am in charge here. I am the one breathing and I am the one watching me breathing." You may have had the feeling, during internal contemplation, that a self was lurking in the shadows. Now you are inviting it to take center stage. You should be able to retain this practice at least in the shallower *jhānas* in external contemplation. In insisting that the body/self be taken into account, you are introducing into your experience a presumed, unified persistent and substantial object, which owns and controls the whole body (or mind). From this perspective, the existing observables generally become viewed as conditioned manifestations of the body/self (or mind/self).

The series of "corpse" exercises (*satipaṭṭhāna* 1.6-14) have a peculiar relation to external contemplation. Recall that the observables in each of these exercises is associated with a corpse in a progressively more advanced state of decay, which you imagine to be *your* corpse. Internal contemplation proceeds much as before. Interestingly, performing external contemplation at all becomes progressively more difficult and eventually impossible in the corpse exercises.

For instance, it is possible that you might image yourself as Uncle Fred as he lies in his casket at the funeral parlor, and visualize Uncle Fred's condition as observables within your own body/self. At this stage you will likely be able to contemplate externally: "My body is lying here, recognizable, but I am no longer breathing or moving. I'm not even supposed to be thinking. Wouldn't it be a shocker if I suddenly stood up?" However, by the skeletal stage, you may find that you can no longer imagine a self there at all. Recall in the film *Dances with Wolves*, after Dunbar and Timmons come across a dried out skeleton on the prairie with an arrow through it, Timmons says, absurdly, "His relatives Back East keep wondering, 'Why doesn't he ever write?'" It is absurd because we no longer see even a hint of a self there. The value of this long series of exercises seems to be its direct challenge to a stable and coherent *concept* of self, by exposing its failure as a product of conceptual imagination. The forces of nature turn out to have no further interest in whether our concept

of self remains intact.

4.7 Contemplating both internally and externally

In the final stage of non-self practice, we evaluate the incongruities associated with the self vis-à-vis the direct observables and their contingencies, and end up "tranquilizing" the self in order to restore coherency in favor of the direct observables. This will bring you back into internal contemplation, having better comprehended the insubstantiality of the self. The practice is to try to hold onto internal and external contemplation at the same time and investigate how the direct observables cohere with this intrusion of the self. A number of circumstances might be noticed:

You might observe that many of the contingencies discovered in internal contemplation are no longer discernible once you insist on being your "self," because the self becomes a powerful conditioning factor. For instance, the in-breath is no longer conditioned by the need for air, but by the self's intention to breath. The presence of the self obscures many of the fleeting observables and finer contingencies that were apparent in internal contemplation. This provides an incentive for abandoning the self in favor of clearer comprehension.

The elements contemplation (*satipaṭṭhāna* 1.5) is a special case in which the self is particularly intrusive. Recall that in internal contemplation within this exercise we observe each of the elements both within "the body" and without. This leads readily to the insight that there is no difference between the earthen smartphone in your hand and the earthen hand. They are both earth element. There is no difference between the water in your glass and the water in your veins, or the water before and after you drink it. It is just water. The insight "there is no difference," is likely to be obscured when you begin external contemplation, after the body/self takes control of the elements within, but not without. The Buddha draws this conclusion:

> Now both the internal earth element and the exterior earth element are simply earth element. And that should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self." (MN 140 iii240)

Even if not obstructive, the self may appear simply irrelevant or out of place among the observables and their constituents. For instance, imagine what it might feel like if you are skydiving for the first time with a friend as instructor, then find yourself surrounded by more and more tiny water droplets, so that

you can barely see your friend two feet away hanging on to a fringe of your jump suit. Your friend manages to get close enough to shout, “Cloud!” You shout back, “Where?” Your concept of a cloud is simply foreign to anything you are currently experiencing. The water droplets are observables, and the cloud is as empty as the self.

Moreover, the Buddha points out that, on close inspection, the self lacks the causal control that is expected of it over its presumed manifestations. What is beyond its control cannot be “me” or “mine.”

> Consciousness is non-self. If consciousness were self, this consciousness would not lend itself to un-ease. It would be possible [to say] with regard to consciousness, “Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.” But precisely because consciousness is non-self, consciousness lends itself to un-ease. And it is not possible [to say] with regard to consciousness, “Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.” (SN 22.59)

Why would the self allow consciousness to cause so many problems? (We will see in the next chapter how it does.)

Finally, when we compare the relative fixed and unchanging nature of the self to the fragmentary, situation-specific, and ever changing nature of the observables revealed in internal contemplation, we question how one can be derived from the other. The observables are the most substantial evidence of the self, but how can we infer what is unchanging from what is impermanent?

> Is what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: “This is mine, this I am, this is my self”?
>
> “No, venerable sir.” (SN 22.59)

There is one remaining way to demonstrate the illusory nature of the self. This is to observe the mind *fabricating* it. This is the topic of the next chapter.

5. Unmasking the world

We look out the window and we see a sunny day, some birds in the oak tree, a car driving by, a house on the other side of the road. This is "contact," by which we are conscious of things in the world "out there." We presume that the "out there" is reliably fixed and very real, and that it would be there even if we were not here to be conscious of it. We have only to look out the window, and our consciousness reflects what is before our eyes. With contact, the world is divided into two parts with a sturdy fence in between, and with consciousness (the "subject") on one side, and the things of the world "out there" ("objects") on the other.

It might surprise many that, for the Buddha, contact (so described) is a "presumption," for seeing things as real is not the same as seeing real things. "Contact" *includes* the presumption of "the self," in this case in its facet as the "consciousness/self," and then goes beyond that to presume the relatively independent world "out there" standing opposite the consciousness/self, with objects that exist from their own side but which are apparent to consciousness from its side.

The subject/object dualism presumed in contact gets us into even more trouble than the body/self or the mind/self, for (as the great Sinhalese scholar-monk Ñaṇananda put it) "Where there is a fence, there is offense and defense," greed and hatred. Moreover, the presumed, reliably fixed and independent nature of the objective world limits our capacity for "experiencing otherwise," which is necessary for progress on the path. We often think, "I am my consciousness," with contact in mind, as if consciousness were a flashlight that we shine out to expose what is already given in the world. In fact, this facet of the self is even *more* compelling to us than "I am my body" or "I am my mind."

There are three exercises in the *sutta* that explore consciousness and contact, which I will call the "consciousness group." These are the single "impression" (*vedanā*) exercise of the second *satipaṭṭhāna*, and the "appropriation-aggregates" and the "sixfold sphere" exercises of the fourth (*dhammas*) *satipaṭṭhāna*. The exercises in the consciousness group serve to dispel the consciousness/self, along with contact, but perhaps even more importantly, these exercises also demonstrate the mentally or subjectively "constructed" nature of what we presume to be the world "out there," securing for us a basis for experiencing otherwise.

5.1 Impressions (satipaṭṭhāna 2.)

'Impression' is *vedanā* in Pali, more commonly translated as 'feeling' or 'sensation.' It is a hugely important factor within the scope of *Dhamma*, and a link in "dependent coarising," where it originates in contact and gives rise to craving. Impressions come in flavors of pleasant or unpleasant, or an indeterminate quality of neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant. Let's begin with an example of where impressions might arise:

> Suppose you are a folk singer (let's just say), you step out on stage, guitar in hand, and survey a sea of faces. Immediately certain faces pop into prominence; these are "impressions." The faces may be attractive or ugly faces, faces that seem wide-eyed and attentive, and faces that you recognize. The other faces make no impression, but rather fade into the background and are largely ignored, while the impressive faces attract your attention repeatedly as you strum and croon, and you get to know them a bit. Suddenly you recognize one of these faces: It's a talent scout for a major record label. It is hugely impressive, and you can't help but give that face much attention, to the extend that you concern yourself with every facial expression and begin to imagine a future in which *he* is impressed by *you*, and to fear a future in which he isn't.

The impression exercise reads as follows:

> Here, when he experiences a pleasant impression, a *bhikkhu* comprehends, "I experience a pleasant impression"; when he experiences an unpleasant impression, he comprehends, "I experience an unpleasant impression"; when he experiences a neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant impression, he comprehends, "I experience a neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant impression."
>
> When he experiences a worldly pleasant impression, he comprehends, "I experience a worldly pleasant impression"; when he experiences an unworldly pleasant impression, he comprehends, "I experience an unworldly pleasant impression."
>
> When he experiences a worldly unpleasant impression, he comprehends, "I experience a worldly unpleasant impression." When he experiences an unworldly unpleasant impression, he comprehends, "I experience an unworldly unpleasant impression."
>
> When he experiences a worldly neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant impression, he comprehends, "I experience a worldly neither-

> unpleasant-nor-pleasant impression"; when he experiences an unworldly neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant impression, he comprehends, "I experience an unworldly neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant impression."

Internal contemplation. We see that impressions are classified in two ways. First, an impression is either "pleasant," "unpleasant" or "neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant." In the folk music example, most faces make no impression. Of those that do, attractive faces are likely to be pleasant impressions, and ugly faces unpleasant impressions. Other faces may support interest, apprehension or curiosity, or possess some other quality that is difficult to classify as either pleasant or unpleasant. In all cases, however, impressions somehow "matter." Second, an impression is either "worldly" or "unworldly." The impressions of the narrative above are all worldly, or sense-based. Notably, unworldly impressions, such as rapture or *jhāna*, apply to no specific objects "out there," but are confined to the subjective realm. Impressions function to "select or ignore" things of the world, and relatively few objects are impressive.

Impressions are ubiquitous, they arise in virtually any context, so you will not lack in opportunities to observe them. Music evokes many impressions, likewise a meal, natural surroundings or *satipaṭṭhāna* practice itself. During the period when you are waking up, before you are capable of thought or recognition, impressions begin to arise in connection with certain fuzzy sensations to mark the onset of conceptual processing. Later in the day, a bee sting or the taste of chocolate might make a strong impression.

To investigate impressions, the ideal context would be one rich in impressions, yet supportive of seclusion. Consuming a meal alone in a quiet environment or simply sitting outdoors letting nature arise and vanish all around you might suffice. Or, on the cushion, center your attentiveness around sensations in the body, from that nagging toothache to the feel of a gentle breeze against your cheek. Or you might close you eyes and attend strictly to the auditory sphere: birds, passing cars, voices and so on. Be aware of objects as they come and go, and observe when some of those objects stand out from the background as impressions. But beware, because impressions are often alluring and thereby distracting.

Impressions are rich in conditionality. The Buddha tells us that:

> All things … come together in impression. (AN 9.14)

To begin with, impressions are natural attractors of attention; the mind wants to go there, the eyes want to look in that direction. Then once attention alights on a impression, further investigation almost always ensues, setting cognitive

wheels in motion, which then spin easily out of control.

> With contact as condition there is impression. What impresses one, that one perceives. What one perceives, that one thinks about. What one thinks about, that one mentally proliferates. With what one has mentally proliferated as the source, perceptions and notions [born of] mental proliferation beset a man with respect to past, future, and present …. (MN 18, i112-3)

The mediation of attention between the initial impression and perception is not mentioned here, but you can easily verify it. Alternatively, attention can be directed to pursue something other than impressions. But once attended to, impressions grow into so much more, enabling most of your consciousness of the world.

External contemplation. Your job is now to quell the dual presumptions: the consciousness/self and contact. You dissipate the presumption of the consciousness/self in the by-now familiar way, when you recognize the fragmentary, situation-specific, ever changing and contingent nature of impression, that is in marked contrast to the substantial fixedness we presume the self to have.

> A pleasant impression is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, bound to decay, to vanish, to fade away, to cease, and so too is an unpleasant impression and a neither pleasant not unpleasant impression. So anyone who, on experiencing a pleasant impression, thinks, "This is my self," must, at the cessation of that pleasant impression think, "My self has gone!" and the same with an unpleasant and a neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant impression. Thus whoever thinks "Impression is my self," is contemplating something in this present life that is impermanent, a mixture of happiness and unhappiness, subject to arising and passing away. Therefore it is not fitting to maintain, "impression is my self." (DN 15 ii66-7).

The constructed world. Under close investigation, you will see the ways in which impression is a "constructive" process. It is not like a mirror that immediately reflects exactly what is "out there." In fact, impressions are a powerful conditioning factor shaping the "objective" content of consciousness through the process of "selecting or ignoring." It is striking that, with further analysis, impressions for the most part seem to be *subjectively* conditioned, then "projected" onto the world "out there," to be experienced as if they were real. We have a saying, "Beauty in the eye of the beholder" to remind ourselves of "subjective projection," but you should investigate this

thoroughly. Seeing beauty as real is not the same as seeing real beauty. Similarly, is the pleasing taste of vanilla really a quality of the complex vanillin molecule “out there,” or does it belong to your subjective experience “in here”? After the vanillin molecule encounters the tongue, isn’t the subjective experience then projected back “out there” as a quality of the vanilla yoghurt you are eating? “Mmmm, *this* tastes good.” Consider that maybe dung tastes to a dung beetle exactly like vanilla tastes to you.

There is an interesting corollary of projection you might notice. Wordlings readily acknowledge that *subjective* attitudes, emotions and thoughts are rather random, but insist that they see the *objective* world “out there” accurately, in a mirror-like manner. As a result, once an impression is projected “out there,” it becomes very real, as well as accurately reflected in consciousness, and can only with difficulty be experienced otherwise. Therefore, when two worldlings have projected contrary impressions on the same object, they seem to be incapable of reconciling the difference in any rational manner. This sometimes turns to interminable arguments: “He’s nice.” “No, he’s not. You’re crazy.” “This car is snazzier that that one. You don’t know what you’re talking about!” Once convinced that they belong to the things themselves “out there,” they seem oblivious to the haphazard subjective origin of these impressions.

5.2 How do we know?

Consciousness is highly presumptive. The Buddha compares it to a magic show, in which the magician, through all of the tricks of the trade, convinces us of an illusory version of the world, and it is the Buddhist practitioner's job to see through the illusion.

> Now suppose that a magician or magician's apprentice were to display a magic trick at a major intersection, and a man with good eyesight were to see it, observe it, and appropriately examine it. To him, seeing it, observing it, and appropriately examining it, it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in a magic trick? In the same way, a monk sees, observes, and appropriately examines any consciousness that is past, future, or present; inner or outer; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near. To him, seeing it, observing it, and appropriately examining it, it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in consciousness? (SN 22.95)

You should try to get behind the stage, figuratively, where you have a view of the props (mirrors, black boxes, secret passage ways, and so on) and slight of

hand that create the illusion that is consciousness. How do you do that? You have already begun to do that in your investigation of impression, and in observing how impression is a strong conditioning factor for consciousness. We will see that the other two exercises of the consciousness group carry this project forward by investigating intermediate "awareness events" that are integral to the arising of consciousness.

An "awareness event" is a mental factor that "means" something. That is, it "refers" to something outside of itself, generally something "out there." We are not just aware, we are aware *of* a house or *of* a horse. "Awareness" is always "awareness *of*" something. Consciousness is an awareness event: we are "conscious" of something. But likewise, we have an "impression" *of* something, we "perceive" something, we "smell" something, we infer something. We even have a "presumption" *of* something. These are all awareness events. We will call the "something" the "content" of the event. Awareness is observable: even if we are "aware" of water that turns out to be a mirage, we can still observe that we are aware of water. Moreover, the content is generally physical. Words and sentences also have the quality of referring to something outside themselves. Heck, even a mirror does. Our tendency is to presume that anything we are "conscious of" will accurately reflect something "out there" in the world, barring certain anomalies, like optical illusions or mirages.

In investigating consciousness from behind the stage, you do not simply take the world that consciousness says is "out there" at face value. Rather than asking, "*What* do I know?" you ask, "*How* do I know?" Let's look at an analogy:

> Suppose we see a UFO "out there." We see lights moving in the sky, say, in a bizarre pattern, and infer it is a UFO. We might seek to explain what we have seen in either of two ways.
>
> First, we might seek to explain the UFO *objectively*: "It must be of extraterrestrial origin, because the technology to produce that pattern is unknown on earth. But from what planet did it come? How did it get here?" This is to be credulous.
>
> Alternatively, we might seek to explain it *epistemically*: "Am I hallucinating? Did I pop one too many pills? Is a twiddle bug larva creeping across my glasses? Can weather or optical effects explain what I am seeing?" This is to be skeptical.

Worldlings tend to be credulous. The skeptical man with good eyesight watching from behind the magician's stage employs an "epistemic" approach. He holds off accepting what he at first experiences as real, and instead

investigates the processes that led to that experience. These are for the most part mental processes, in particular various kinds of awareness events that accrue in support of consciousness. This is exactly what we do in the appropriation-aggregates and in the sixfold sphere exercises. The purpose is not to recognize what is really real, but to recognize how the world "out there" that you *presume* to be real was substantially constructed in the mind, and then projected "out there."

5.3 Appropriation-aggregates (satipaṭṭhāna 4.2)

The five "appropriation-aggregates" (aka, 'aggregates of clinging') are the topic of many discourses. Let's begin with a little story.

> Suppose you are slow to wake up. At first, the world is a conceptual blur, like abstract art: colors, sounds, but with no sense to it. Then certain patterns begin to stand out and draw your attention. Some of these materialize into recognizable objects: your alarm clock, and it's ringing. Then thinking kicks in: "Alarm clock. Gotta get up. Oh no! Gotta be at work by 8:00." It might take a few minutes more before you become conscious of the world in all its details (maybe fully so only after a cup of coffee).

This describes how five cognitive faculties start up one by one, from the simplest to the most complex. Once set in motion, they will all be active and mutually conditioning throughout the day. They belong to the "five aggregates" as awareness events big and small.

The text lists the five aggregates, without defining them, and invites you to explore their contingencies.

> Again, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* abides contemplating *dhammas* in *dhammas* in terms of the five appropriation-aggregates. And how does a *bhikkhu* abide contemplating *dhammas* among the *dhammas* in terms of five appropriation-aggregates?
>
> Here a *bhikkhu* comprehends, "Such is form, such form's origination, such form's disappearance.
>
> Such is impression, such impression's origination, such impression's disappearance.
>
> Such is perception, such perception's origination, such perception's disappearance.

> Such are fabrications, such fabrications' origination, such fabrications' disappearance.
>
> Such is consciousness, such consciousness's origination, such consciousness's disappearance."

Internal contemplation. In general, an "aggregate" is an unordered heap of something: an aggregate of rice, an aggregate of firewood, and so on. "Appropriation" (often translated as 'attachment' or 'clinging') is the presumption of certain things as "me" and "mine." In the *sutta*, the heaps are identified as having to do with form, impressions, perception, fabrications and consciousness. We are dealing with heaps of "awareness events" of five kinds, ranked from the simplest to the most complex. Our observables are the instances of these aggregates.

- "Form" refers to the raw, largely pre-conceptual "sensations" within sense fields: visual appearances (shapes and colors), sounds, odors, tastes and bodily sensations. Isolated, form awaits further conceptual analysis to be performed by the other four aggregates.

- "Impressions," as discussed earlier, arise from forms, but also from perceptions, fabrications and consciousness itself. They "matter, are thus a precursor to attention and further analysis.

- "Perception" is the spontaneous recognition of objects and qualities in the world of experience. For instance, a pattern of shapes and colors in the visual sense field in an instant becomes a familiar face, or your coffee mug.

- "Fabrications" are literally "puttings together" in Pali, the compounding of experiential factors to derive new factors, often by inference or by assembling parts into wholes. They often take the form of calls to action or volition as well. Recall that "presumptions" are fabrications that are taken as real.

- "Consciousness" is a deeply fleshed out sense of what we presume is "the world out there," an immediate awareness of "reality" in all its depth, far beyond, but including what is "directly" experienced. It feels like the world "out there" is immediately present; we just show up and decide what we want to look at or do. Consciousness depends on, and can be understood as, a process that integrates within itself all of the previous aggregates, to "magically" construct this illusion.

Warning: the aggregates are not as distinct from one another as advertised, but

rather merge and flow in association with each other.

> Impression, perception, and consciousness, friend: these states are conjoined, not disjoined, and it is impossible to separate each of these states from the others in order to describe the difference between them. For what one feels, that one perceives; and what one perceives, that one is conscious of. (M 43 i293)

A river of all these kinds of awareness events is passing by you right now, as you perceive the words on this page, then piece together their meanings to produce deeper meanings, and so on. Close analysis often reveals the fabricated character of impression, perception and consciousness. For instance, that great impression associated with the talent scout in the earlier narrative is explained with confidence as a projection from complex subjective interests and emotions with regard to the future potentialities the talent scout might enable. The big question is: to what extent do the other aggregates make subjective projections?

An effective strategy for investigation is to focus on one aggregate at a time, starting with form. To observe form alone you experience a world prior to any differentiation into things. Because all five kinds of awareness events tend to flood the world at once, this is best achieved in deeper *jhānas*, meditative states in which your mind's ability to produce fabrications or (full) consciousness is attenuated. You might try closing your eyes in order to reduce awareness to sounds, and with practice you can also learn to witness your visual field directly as mixed shapes and colors. You don't have to perfect this, and few of us can: occasional pleasant impressions will arise followed by recognition of objects, but this gives you a perspective in which form is clearly distinguished from the more conceptual aggregates. Unfortunately, if we remain in a deeper *jhāna*, we will have little opportunity to observe fabrications or instances of deeper consciousness. your explicit experience of the world will thus remain somewhat flat.

Investigating the aggregates can also be done in conjunction with body exercises. For instance, in walking meditation, try to identify which observable experiences are form, or impression, etc. You may discover that you have in mind a running fabrication representing the mechanics of walking: the foot pushing backward against the floor, thus moving the body forward, etc. You can play with such fabrications. For instance, try replacing it with an alternative in which your body is relatively still, the foot reaches out, grabs the floor and moves it backward under you.

External contemplation. The consciousness/self is disassembled into the five

aggregates, much like the body/self is disassembled through contemplation of the body parts. In a short discourse in the early texts, the *bhikkhunī* Vajirā, an early disciple of the Buddha, was sitting in meditation when she was visited by the demon Māra, whose mission in life seems to have been to disrupt the practice of Buddhists. Māra, desiring to arouse fear, trepidation, and terror in Vajirā, desiring to make her fall away from *samādhi*, approached her and addressed her in verse:

> "By whom has this being been created?
> Where is the maker of the being?
> Where has the being arisen?
> Where does the being cease?" (SN 5.10)

Māra was trying to confuse her with questions about the thorny issue of the self ('this being'), but she immediately recognizes who he is, and her brilliant reply, also in verse, has had an enduring influence on Buddhist thought:

> "Why now do you assume 'a being'?
> Māra, is that your speculative view?
> This is a heap of sheer fabrications:
> Here no being is found." (SN 5.10)

The self is fabricated, it is a speculative view, a presumption. Then she offers her famous analogy:

> "Just as, with an assemblage of parts,
> The word 'chariot' is used,
> So, when the aggregates exist,
> There is the convention 'a being.'
>
> "It's only suffering that comes to be,
> Suffering that stands and falls away.
> Nothing but suffering comes to be,
> Nothing but suffering ceases." (SN 5.10)

Sad and disappointed, Māra disappears. The point is that where worldlings think they see the unitary and enduring consciousness/self, it is only the aggregates of awareness events arising and vanishing. Only by convention do we call that a self.

The constructed world. We've seen that the analysis of projection from subject to object in the case of impressions reveals that the fence between them is highly permeable. This analysis carries over productively into the aggregates. For instance, it is striking how repeatedly "serviceable" the objects

of perception are. A door knob is not merely materiality of such composition and shape, it is an invitation, “Open me.” A tree stump is perceived as a chair if its dimensions are appropriate for sitting. If you have a hammer everything looks like a nail. The same piece of land is perceived differently by a realtor, by a geologist, or by a hiker. Each will project an overlay of serviceability, which will become a strong conditioning factor for impressions, and thereby for attention, perception and so on, all presumed objectively to be “out there.”

The aggregates of appropriation give us a wonderfully rewarding exercise, productive of many insights and will eventually produce a radical shift in how you view your world of experience. In particular, they reveal the constructed nature of what you *take* to be a world that is “out there,” that you presume exists independently of whether you look or not. Attention to the awareness events that enable your consciousness reveal your own mind’s props and slight of hand, so that you begin to see the cognitive stitches that hold your world together.

Notes. We’ve been talking about aggregates, but the text calls them “appropriation-aggregates.” “Appropriation” (a technical term and another of the factors of dependent coarising) is the presumption of something as “me” or “mine,” that is often translated as ‘attachment’ or ‘clinging.’ We extend the scope of the self by appropriating things “out there” as “me” or “mine.” The worldling’s habitual experience of contact is the beginning of appropriation. However, like the observables in other exercises, awareness events are fragmentary, situation-specific, ever changing and contingent, and therefore cannot provide evidence for the existence of something as fixed and substantial either as the consciousness/self, or as the thing “out there” that consciousness refers to.

5.4. The sixfold sphere (satipaṭṭhāna 4.3)

The “sixfold sphere” (often translated as ‘six sense spheres’) is a very prominent *Dhamma* teaching, and is yet another link in the twelvefold chain of dependent co-arising. Central to this teaching is the role of the eye, ear, nose, and so on, the role of the “senses.” According to the Buddha, the eye is important to understand.

> Without directly knowing and fully understanding the eye, without developing dispassion for it and abandoning it, one is incapable of destroying suffering. (SN 35.111)

This is then said of ear, nose, etc. The importance both of the aggregates and of the sixfold sphere is that, in investigating them, we actually gain insight into

the process whereby our presumptions are constructed. From here we go on to the realization that these presumptions are "fetters" to well-being and spiritual progress; and then we proceed to abandon them.

Say, for instance, you look out the window and see your neighbors getting into their car. You presume that your eye makes "contact" with people and car to produce your consciousness of the situation. But it *cannot* happen that way. Brain science tells us that your retina possesses an array of photo receptors that in this situation will activate in a certain pattern. These communicate with the brain through the optic nerves. The brain sits in complete darkness and silence, but begins the task of interpreting this neural pattern, which it does almost immediately, largely on the basis of previous experiences that have been "internalized" by adjusting weights in neural connections. Parts of the interpretive results percolate into awareness and some kind of three-dimensional model appears in consciousness (I think of it as a hologram), with the "presumption" of contact built into this interpretation. At no point does your eye (seen as the whole process) make contact with the "objects" of the world "out there." Rather, your eye makes them up and presents them to you as consciousness.

The text is as follows:

> Again, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* abides contemplating *dhammas* in *dhammas* in terms of the six internal and exterior spheres. And how does a *bhikkhu* abide contemplating *dhammas* in *dhammas* in terms of the six internal and exterior spheres?
>
> (1) Here a *bhikkhu* comprehends the eye, he comprehends forms, and he comprehends the fetter that arises dependent on both; and he also comprehends how there comes to be the arising of the unarisen fetter, and how there comes to be the abandoning of the arisen fetter, and how there comes to be the future non-arising of the abandoned fetter.
>
> (2) He comprehends the ear, he comprehends sounds, and he comprehends the fetter that arises dependent on both; …
>
> (3) He comprehends the nose, he comprehends odors…
>
> (4) He comprehends the tongue, he comprehends flavors…
>
> (5) He comprehends body, he comprehends tangibles…
>
> (6) He comprehends mind, he comprehends phenomena, and he comprehends the fetter that arises dependent on both; and he also comprehends how there comes to be the arising of the unarisen fetter,

> and how there comes to be the abandoning of the arisen fetter, and how there comes to be the future non-arising of the abandoned fetter.

Internal contemplation. The following gives a quick overview of what we are asked to comprehend.

Internal sphere	exterior sphere	
Eye	forms	fetter dependent on both
Ear	sounds	fetter dependent on both
Nose	odors	fetter dependent on both
Tongue	flavors	fetter dependent on both
Body	tangibles	fetter dependent on both
Mind	phenomena	fetter dependent on both

In many alternative versions of this teaching in the early texts, the following are listed instead as the relevant factors:

Internal sphere	exterior sphere	
Eye	forms	eye-consciousness
Ear	sounds	ear-consciousness
Nose	odors	nose-consciousness
Tongue	flavors	tongue-consciousness
Body	tangibles	body-consciousness
Mind	phenomena	mind-consciousness

“Forms,” “sounds,” “odors,” “flavors” and “tangibles” are differentiated sensations mediated by the senses. In the aggregates, these are undifferentiated, and all grouped under “forms.” Differentiated, they are grouped as the “exterior sphere,” “exterior” because they seem not to be conditioned by other observables, as if emanating from outside.

This exercise is most easily practiced through attention to consciousness. Fetters are getting ahead of the game. Consciousness is a fetter because its presumptive nature holds back progress in your practice. Consciousness always has something to sell: It offers us alluring content, something that is “out there” and that is more substantial than a mere transitory awareness event. It presumes its content in an unrealistically favorable light as substantial, discrete, relatively fixed, existing independently, reliable, ripe for craving and appropriation. And most of us believe it all, for it is undergirded by the subject-object duality. It is this duality you want to understand.

Like the exterior sphere, consciousness is differentiated into six channels. We generally have no difficulty distinguishing that certain aspects of consciousness are visually based, or audibly based, etc. Functionally, we can think of the

eye (and each of the other elements of the internal sphere) as a "probe," comparable to a thermometer, an oscilloscope, or even a Mars probe. A probe is something we place into a rich sense field (where sense data can be detected: auditory, visual, electrical, temperature, pressure, and so on) in order to gain meaningful intelligence (a "reading," such as degrees Fahrenheit, a three-dimensional MRI scan, DNA sequences, and so on). A probe performs some degree of analysis for us in order to produce a meaningful result, sometimes quite sophisticated analysis as in the case of an MRI scanner.

Similarly, an eye is a probe that is observable, since it arises at a given time as observable form and ceases as observable consciousness: if we place the eye into a visual field (form), it returns a reading as an instance of eye consciousness of some object or situation. The eye is effectively the conditional relation that links the two. For instance, a small vague red shape within a bright color scheme appears within the visual field as form, and immediately eye-consciousness of a bird, a cardinal, a full-fledged 3D living, breathing object in the world arises. The eye explains how a simple raw form is turned into consciousness of a full-blown object. The entire process is "contact."

> The six classes of contact should be understood …Dependent on the eye and form, eye-consciousness arises; the meeting of the three is contact. (MN 128 iii 281)

Similarly for ear/sound, nose/odor, tongue/flavor, body/tangible, and mind/phenomena. Notice that this definition describes contact in terms of its conditioning factors. The definition I gave earlier was in terms of the subject-object dualism. But the two are equivalent *under* the presumption of subject-object dualism, which, you will recall, is for the worldling almost always built into the content of consciousness. In this case, the following is true:

> The eye is that in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world. (SN 35.116)

The perceiver/conceiver is the consciousness/self.

External contemplation. Investigation of the impermanence of the eye helps dispel the presumption of the consciousness/self as well as of contact.

> "*Bhikkhus*, I will teach you the way that is suitable for uprooting all presumptions. Listen to that. … And what, *bhikkhus*, is the way that is suitable for uprooting all presumptions? What do you think, *bhikkhus*, is the eye permanent or impermanent?"
>
> "Impermanent, venerable sir."

> "Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?"
>
> "Suffering, venerable sir."
>
> "Is what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'?"
>
> "No, venerable sir."
>
> If anyone says, "The eye is self," that is not tenable. The rise and fall of the eye are discerned, and since its rise and fall are discerned, it would follow: "My self rises and falls." That is why it is not tenable for anyone to say, "The eye is self." Thus the eye is not self. (SN 35.32)

The constructed world. The Buddha made a claim about the eye that further reveals how it functions:

> And what, *bhikkhus*, is old *kamma*? The eye is old *kamma*, to be seen as generated and fashioned by intention, as something to be experienced. (SN 35.146)

Equivalent statements are made for ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. "Old *kamma*" refers to learned "dispositions" or past conditioning. These result from previous actions (including mental actions) that dispose us to repeat those actions. Within the eye are impressions, perception and fabrications, and these depend on learned dispositions. Learned dispositions are also projections of a sort, from past experience onto the current world "out there." Virtually all of the content of the world "out there" depends on such past conditioning.

The Buddha is adamant that our whole experience of the world can be traced back to what happens in the sixfold sphere. Here he calls it "The All."

> And what, *bhikkhus*, is the all? The eye and forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and odors, the tongue and tastes, the body and tangibles, the mind and mental phenomena. This is called "the all." If anyone, *bhikkhus*, should speak thus: "Having rejected this all, I shall make known another all," that would be a mere empty boast on his part. (SN 35.23)

And similarly,

> In the six the world has arisen,
> In the six it holds concourse.
> On the six themselves depending,
> In the six it has woes. (SN 1.70)

Ultimately, liberation comes not from seeing what is "out there," but from realizing how the eye fabricates a consciousness that presumes to see things "out there."

> If one is intent on renunciation and solitude of mind; if one is intent on non-affliction and the destruction of appropriation; if one is intent on craving's destruction and non-confusion of mind: when one sees the spheres' arising, one's mind is completely liberated. (AN 6.55)

The final step toward complete liberation occurs "…when one sees the [sense] spheres' arising…," that is, one sees that the eye is fabricating the world.

Perhaps the Buddha's greatest insight is that we cannot get beyond our own "presumptions" to how things actually are in the world "out there." How things are is that we *presume* to know how things are in the world "out there." Although our concepts are designed to refer to things beyond themselves, with regard to the world "out there" they come up "empty" of *real* content. This is good to realize, because our woes are not "out there," they are in the world "as we experience it." If how we experience it is not tied to how it actually is, we are free to experience otherwise. "By overcoming all presumptions, *bhikkhu,* one is called a sage at peace."

6. Afterword

> "*Bhikkhus*, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of *nibbāna*, namely, the four *satipaṭṭhānas*." (*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*)

Satipaṭṭhāna starts with the "*satipaṭṭhāna* method," the arousing of "ardency," "comprehension," "mastery" and "seclusion." This method is simply the general art of skillfulness. It is a set of factors usefull for acquiring almost any skill, from chess to birdwatching. In the case of *satipaṭṭhāna* the skill is that of investigation of a highly contingent world under the guidance of *Dhamma*, much as we might learn to investigate the feathery realm under the guidance of Perterson's field guides. Both return to the "natural" world, prior to adulteration by human artifice.

A difference is that *satipaṭṭhāna* supplements the skill of investigation with profound states of meditative composure. This is comparable to experiences of "flow" shared in the performance of many virtuoso-level skills, but in Buddhist practice, we cultivate such meditative composure as *samādhi*, to the degree that we can dwell in such states readily and for long periods of time. Moreover, this *samādhi* completes the achievements of *satipaṭṭhāna* practice by providing the deepest insights and enabling the realization of "knowledge and vision."

Based on the skilled observations within the network of contingencies, *satipaṭṭhāna* engages that which stands apart from that realm, that which we are convinced is permanent, substantial and reliable, the very things we crave and then appropriate as "me" and "mine" to our peril. We discover that "the self" in particular, the seat of body, mind and consciousness, is a presumption and a hazard that is out of step with nature's contingencies, and we train to experience the world "empty" of the self. We then broaden our scope to investigate consciousness itself and discover that it emanates from the network of subjective, but is productive of sweeping illusions.

"Knowledge and vision of things as they are" (*yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana*). Knowledge and vision give rise to disenchantment and dispassion with regard

to what once seemed so true, substantial and alluring, and disenchantment and dispassion in turn give rise to liberation. It is *not* the attainment of insight into something happening in the world "out there," but is rather the realizing of its mental constructedness. We learned in the last chapter that, "when one sees the spheres' arising, one's mind is completely liberated."

Let me illustrate this principle with a final passage that concerns not the things presumed to be "out there," but the equally presumptive nature of "views" about the nature of the world "out there." This discourse begins when the wanderer Kokanada approaches an unknown monk (who would later turn out to be famous Ānanada) to ask some questions about Buddhist doctrine.

> "How is it, sir? Do you hold the view 'The world is eternal; this alone is true, anything else is wrong'?"
>
> "I don't hold such a view, friend."
>
> "Then do you hold the view 'The world is not eternal; this alone is true, anything else is wrong'?"
>
> "I don't hold such a view, friend."

Kokanada continues to ask questions in this vein, such as whether the world is finite or infinite, whether the self and the body are the same or different, whether or not the Tathāgata exists after death, and in each case Ānanda replies, "I don't hold such a view, friend." Kokanada then asks,

> "Could it then be that you do not *know* and *see*?"
>
> "It isn't the case, friend, that I do not know and see. I know and see."
>
> "How, friend, should the meaning of this statement be understood?"
>
> "'The world is eternal; this alone is true, anything else is wrong,' friend: this is a speculative view."

Ānanda repeats this for the other views Kokanada had proffered, then concludes,

> "To the extent, friend, that there is a speculative view, a basis for views, a foundation for views, obsession with views, the origination of views, and the uprooting of views, I know and see this. When I know and see this, why should I say: 'I do not know and see.' I know, friend, I see." (AN 10.96)

Glossary

ajjhatta, ‘internal.’

anupassanā, ‘contemplation.’

appropriation, *upādāna*.

ardent, *ātāpī*.

āsava, ‘taint.’

ātāpī, ‘ardent.’

attentive mastery, *upaṭṭhita sati*.

attentiveness, *upaṭṭhāna*.

centered, *ekagga*, = ‘one-centered.’

comprehending, *sampajāna*.

comprehension, *sampajāñña*.

bahiddhā, ‘external.’

bāhira, ‘exterior.’

body, *kāya*.

body/self, facet of self based in bodily evidence.

composed, *samāhita*.

composure, *samādhi*.

consciousness/self, facet of self based in awareness of the world “out there.”

contemplation, a*nupassanā*.

delight, *pāmujja*.

development and cultivation, *bhavanā-bahuli-kata*.

dhamma, ‘*Dhamma* teaching,’ ‘factor of experience’ or ‘observable.’

discursive thought, *vitakka-vicāra*, = ‘thought and deliberation.’

ekagga, ‘(one-)centered.’

ekodhibhāva, ‘equipoise.’

equipoise, *ekodhibhāva*.

evidence, observables that potentially support a presumption.

explicit (cognition, system), deliberate, conscious.

fabrication, *saṅkhāra*.

facit (of self), basis for presumption of self in distinct type of evidence.

implicit (cognition, system), (nearly) unconscious, effortless.

impression, *vedanā*, commonly ‘feeling,’ ‘sensation.’

internalize, shift from explicit to implicit cognition through training.

jhāna, untranslated.

maññati, ‘presume.’

maññita, ‘presumption.’

masterful, *satimā*.

mastery, *sati*.

mastery-comprehension, *sati-sampajāñña*.

mind, *citta*.

mind/self, facet of self based in mental evidence.

nimitta, 'theme,' otherwise untranslated.

observable, arising in (direct) experience.

one-centered, *ekagga*, = 'centered.'

origination, *samudaya*.

passaddhi, 'tranquility.'

pāmujja, 'delight.'

pīti, 'rapture.'

presume, *maññati*, fabricate with conviction of validity, substantiality.

presumption, *maññita*, fabrication with conviction of validity, substantiality.

projection, subjectively originated content presumed to be objectively real "out there."

rapture, *pīti*.

reconciliation, adjusting understanding to match teachings to observables.

right mastery, *sammāsati*.

rūpa, 'form' (not 'body').

samatha, 'settling,' '(deeper) *jhāna*.'

samādhi, untranslated

samāhita, composed, in *samādhi*.

sampajāna, comprehending.

sampajāñña, comprehension.

samudaya, origination.

saṅkhāra, fabrication.

sati, mastery.

satimā, masterful.

satipaṭṭhāna, untranslated, *sati* + *upaṭṭhāna*.

satipaṭṭhāna method, "ardent, comprehending, masterful, secluded."

sati-sampajāñña, mastery-comprehension.

secluded, with hindrances at bay.

separation, *viveka*.

taint, *āsava*.

teaching, *Dhamma* teaching, sometimes '*dhamma*.'

thought and deliberation, *vitakka-vicāra*.

three signs, *tilakkhaṇa*.

tilakkhaṇa, 'three signs.'

tranquility, *passaddhi*.

upaṭṭhāna, 'attentiveness.'

upaṭṭhita sati, 'attentive mastery.'

upādāna, appropriation, commonly attachment.

vedanā, 'impression,' commonly 'feeling,' 'sensation.'

vipassanā, active practice for comprehension of *Dhamma*.

vitakka-vicāra, ‘thought and deliberation.’

viveka, ‘seclusion.’

vivicca, ‘secluded.’

world “out there,” what is experienced as objectively real.

worldling, *puthujjana*, untought in the practice of *Dhamma*.

Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10)

[Opening.] Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living in the Kuru country where there was a town of the Kurus named Kammāsadhamma.

There he addressed the *bhikkhus*, "*Bhikkhus*."

"Venerable sir," they replied.

The Blessed One said this:

This is the one way, *bhikkhus*, a path for the purification of beings **[i56]**, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of *nibbāna*, namely, the four *satipaṭṭhānas*.

What are the four? Here, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body, ardent, comprehending, and masterful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides impression-contemplating among the impressions, ardent, comprehending, and masterful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides mind-contemplating in the mind, ardent, comprehending, and masterful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas*, ardent, comprehending, and masterful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world.

[First satipaṭṭhāna, contemplation of body.] And how, *bhikkhus*, does a *bhikkhu* abide body-contemplating in the body?

[1.1 Breath exercise.] Here a *bhikkhu*, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, sets his body erect, masterfully attending to what is in front. Masterful, he breathes in, masterful he breathes out. Breathing in long, he comprehends, "I breathe in long"; or breathing out long, he comprehends, "I breathe out long." Breathing in short, he comprehends, "I breathe in short"; or breathing out short, he comprehends, "I breathe out short." He trains thus: "I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body"; he trains thus: "I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body." He trains thus: "I shall breathe in tranquilizing the bodily fabrication"; he trains thus: "I shall breathe out tranquilizing the bodily fabrication." Just as a skilled lathe-operator or his apprentice, when making a

long turn, comprehends, “I make a long turn”; or, when making a short turn, comprehends, “I make a short turn”; so too, breathing in long, a bhikkhu comprehends, “I breathe in long” … he trains thus: “I shall breathe out tranquilizing the bodily fabrication.”

[Refrain.] In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, or he abides body-contemplating in the body externally, or he abides body-contemplating in the body both internally and externally. He abides contemplating in the body the nature of origination, or he abides contemplating in the body the nature of vanishing, or he abides contemplating in the body the nature of both origination and vanishing. Recollection that “the body exists” is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mastery. He abides independent. He doesn’t cling to anything in the world. That is how a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body.

[1.2 Postures exercise.] Again, *bhikkhus*, when walking, a *bhikkhu* comprehends, “I am walking.” When standing, he comprehends, “I am standing.” When sitting, **[i57]** he comprehends, “I am sitting.” When lying down, he comprehends, “I am lying down.” Or he comprehends accordingly however his body is disposed.

[Refrain.] In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, … That is how a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body.

[1.3 Activities exercise.] Again, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* is one who acts with comprehension when going forward and returning, who acts with comprehension when looking ahead and looking away, who acts with comprehension when flexing and extending his limbs, who acts with comprehension when wearing his robes and carrying his outer robe and bowl, who acts with comprehension when eating, drinking, consuming food, and tasting; who acts with comprehension when defecating and urinating; who acts with comprehension when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent.

[Refrain.] In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, … That is how a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body.

[1.4 Body parts exercise.] Again, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* reviews this same body up from the soles of the feet and down from the top of the hair, bounded by skin, as full of many kinds of impurity thus: “In this body there are head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, snot, oil of the joints, and urine.”

Just as though there were a bag with an opening at both ends full of many sorts of grain, such as hill rice, red rice, beans, peas, millet, and white rice, and a man with good eyes were to open it and review it thus: "This is hill rice, this is red rice, these are beans, these are peas, this is millet, this is white rice"; so too, a *bhikkhu* reviews this same body… as full of many kinds of impurity thus: "In this body there are head-hairs … and urine."

[Refrain.] In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, … That is how a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body.

[1.5 Elements exercise.] Again, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* reviews this same body, however it is placed, however disposed, by way of elements thus: "In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element." **[i58]**

Just as though a skilled butcher or his apprentice had killed a cow and was seated at the crossroads with it cut up into pieces; so too, a *bhikkhu* reviews this same body, however it is placed, however disposed, by way of elements thus: "In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element."

[Refrain.] In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, … That is how a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body.

[1.6 Corpse exercise.] Again, *bhikkhus*, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, one, two, or three days dead, bloated, livid, and oozing matter, a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate."

[Refrain.] In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, … That is how a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body.

[1.7 Corpse exercise.] Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, being devoured by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, or various kinds of worms, a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate."

[Refrain.] In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, … That is how a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body.

[1.8 Corpse exercise.] Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, a skeleton with flesh and blood, held together with sinews, a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate."

[Refrain.] In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, … That is how a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body.

[1.9 Corpse exercise.] Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, held together with sinews, a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate."

[Refrain.] In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, … That is how a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body.

[1.10 Corpse exercise.] Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, a skeleton without flesh and blood, held together with sinews, a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate."

[Refrain.] In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, … That is how a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body.

[1.11 Corpse exercise.] Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, disconnected bones scattered in all directions—here a hand-bone, there a foot-bone, here a shin-bone, there a thigh-bone, here a hip-bone, there a back-bone, here a rib-bone, there a breast-bone, here an arm-bone, there a shoulder-bone, here a neck-bone, there a jaw-bone, here a tooth, there the skull—a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate."

[Refrain.] In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, … That is how a bhikkhu abides body-contemplating in the body.

[1.12 Corpse exercise.] Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, bones bleached white, the color of shells, a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate."

[Refrain.] In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, … That is how a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body.

[1.13 Corpse exercise.] Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, bones heaped up, more than a year old **[i59]**, a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate."

[Refrain.] In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, … That is how a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body.

[1.14 Corpse exercise 9.] Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, rotted and crumbled to dust, a *bhikkhu* compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate."

[Refrain.] In this way he abides body-contemplating in the body internally, … That is how a *bhikkhu* abides body-contemplating in the body.

[Second *satipaṭṭhāna*, contemplation of impressions.] And how, *bhikkhus*, does a *bhikkhu* abide impression-contemplating among the impressions?

[2. Impressions exercise.] Here, when experiencing a pleasant impression, a *bhikkhu* comprehends, "I experience a pleasant impression"; when experiencing a painful impression, he comprehends, "I experience a painful impression"; when experiencing a neither-painful-nor-pleasant impression, he comprehends, "I experience a neither-painful-nor-pleasant impression."

When experiencing a worldly pleasant impression, he comprehends, "I experience a worldly pleasant impression"; when experiencing an unworldly pleasant impression, he comprehends, "I experience an unworldly pleasant impression."

When experiencing a worldly painful impression, he comprehends, "I experience a worldly painful impression"; when experiencing an unworldly painful impression, he comprehends, "I experience an unworldly painful impression."

When experiencing a worldly neither-painful-nor-pleasant impression, he comprehends, "I experience a worldly neither-painful-nor-pleasant impression"; when experiencing an unworldly neither-painful-nor-pleasant impression, he comprehends, "I experience an unworldly neither-painful-nor-pleasant impression."

[Refrain.] In this way he abides impression-contemplating among the impressions internally, or he abides impression-contemplating among the impressions externally, or he abides impression-contemplating among the impressions both internally and externally.

He abides contemplating among the impressions the nature of origination, or he abides contemplating among the impressions the nature of vanishing, or he abides contemplating among the impressions the nature of both origination and vanishing.

Recollection that "the impressions exist" is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mastery.

He abides independent. He doesn't cling to anything in the world. That is how a *bhikkhu* abides impression-contemplating among the impressions.

[Third *satipaṭṭhāna*, contemplation of mind.] And how, *bhikkhus*, does a *bhikkhu* abide mind-contemplating in the mind?

[3. Mind exercise.] Here a *bhikkhu* comprehends mind affected by lust as mind affected by lust, and mind unaffected by lust as mind unaffected by lust. He comprehends mind affected by hate as mind affected by hate, and mind unaffected by hate as mind unaffected by hate. He comprehends mind affected by delusion as mind affected by delusion, and mind unaffected by delusion as mind unaffected by delusion. He comprehends attentive mind as attentive mind, and scattered mind as scattered mind. He comprehends distinguished mind as distinguished mind, and undistinguished mind as undistinguished mind. He comprehends superior mind as superior mind, and unsurpassed mind as unsurpassed mind. He comprehends composed mind [mind in *samādhi*] as composed mind, and uncomposed mind as uncomposed mind. He comprehends liberated mind as liberated mind, and unliberated mind as unliberated mind.

[Refrain.] In this way he abides mind-contemplating in the mind internally, or he abides mind-contemplating in the mind externally, or he abides mind-contemplating in the mind both internally and externally. He abides contemplating in the mind the nature of origination, or he abides contemplating in the mind the nature of vanishing, or he abides contemplating in the mind the nature of both origination and vanishing. Recollection that "the mind exists" is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mastery. He abides independent. He doesn't cling to anything in the world. That is how a *bhikkhu* abides mind-contemplating in the mind.

[Fourth *satipaṭṭhāna*, contemplation of *dhammas*.] And how, *bhikkhus*, does a *bhikkhu* abide *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas*?

[4.1 Hindrances exercise.] Here a *bhikkhu* abides *dhamma*-contemplating among *dhammas* in terms of the five hindrances. And how does a *bhikkhu* abide dhamma-contemplating among *dhammas* in terms of the five hindrances?

Here, there being sensual desire in him, a *bhikkhu* comprehends, "There is sensual desire in me"; or there being no sensual desire in him, he comprehends, "There is no sensual desire in me"; and he also comprehends how there comes to be the origination of unoriginated sensual desire, and how there comes to be the abandoning of originated sensual desire, and how there comes to be the future nonorigination of abandoned sensual desire."

There being ill will in him…
There being sloth and torpor in him…

There being restlessness and remorse in him…
There being doubt in him, a *bhikkhu* comprehends, "There is doubt in me"; or there being no doubt in him, he comprehends, "There is no doubt in me"; and he comprehends how there comes to be the origination of unoriginated doubt, and how there comes to be the abandoning of originated doubt, and how there comes to be the future non-origination of abandoned doubt.

[Refrain.] In this way he abides *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* internally, or he abides *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* externally, or he abides *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* both internally and externally. He abides contemplating among the *dhammas* the nature of origination, or he abides contemplating among the *dhammas* the nature of vanishing, or he abides contemplating among the *dhammas* the nature of both origination and vanishing. The recollection that "there are the *dhammas*" is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mastery. He abides independent. He doesn't cling to anything in the world. That is how a *bhikkhu* abides *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* in terms of the five hindrances.

[4.2 Aggregates exercise.] Again, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* abides *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* **[i61]** in terms of the five appropriation-aggregates. And how does a bhikkhu abide *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* in terms of five appropriation-aggregates? Here a *bhikkhu* comprehends, "Such is form, such form's origination, such form's disappearance. Such is impression, such impression's origination, such impression's disappearance. Such is perception, such perception's origination, such perception's disappearance. Such are fabrications, such fabrications' origination, such fabrications' disappearance. Such is consciousness, such consciousness's origination, such consciousness's disappearance."

[Refrain.] In this way he abides *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* internally, … That is how a *bhikkhu* abides dhamma-contemplating among the *dhammas* in terms of the five appropriation-aggregates.

[4.3 Sense-spheres exercise.] Again, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* abides dhamma-contemplating among the *dhammas* in terms of the six internal and exterior spheres. And how does a *bhikkhu* abide *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* in terms of the six internal and exterior spheres? Here a *bhikkhu* comprehends the eye, he comprehends forms, and he comprehends the fetter that originates dependent on both; and he also comprehends how there comes to be the origination of the unoriginated fetter, and how there comes to be the abandoning of the originated fetter, and how there comes to be the future non-origination of the abandoned fetter.

He comprehends the ear, he comprehends sounds…
He comprehends the nose, he comprehends odors…
He comprehends the tongue, he comprehends flavors…
He comprehends body, he comprehends tangibles…
He comprehends mind, he comprehends *dhammas*, and he comprehends the fetter that originates dependent on both; and he also comprehends how there comes to be the origination of the unoriginated fetter, and how there comes to be the abandoning of the originated fetter, and how there comes to be the future non-origination of the abandoned fetter.

[Refrain.] In this way he abides *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* internally, … That is how a *bhikkhu* abides *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* in terms of the six internal and exterior spheres.

[4.4 Awakening factors exercise.] Again, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* abides *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* in terms of the seven awakening factors. And how does a *bhikkhu* abide *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* in terms of the seven awakening factors?

Here, there being the mastery awakening factor in him, a *bhikkhu* comprehends: “There is the mastery awakening factor in me”; or there being no mastery awakening factor in him, he comprehends: **[i62]** “There is no mastery awakening factor in me”; and he also comprehends how there comes to be the origination of the unoriginated mastery awakening factor, and how the originated mastery awakening factor comes to fulfillment by development.

There being the investigation-of-*dhammas* awakening factor in him, …
There being the energy awakening factor in him, …
There being the rapture awakening factor in him, …
There being the tranquility awakening factor in him, …
There being the *samādhi* awakening factor in him, …
There being the equanimity awakening factor in him, … comes to fulfillment by development.

[Refrain.] In this way he abides *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* internally, … That is how a *bhikkhu* abides *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* in terms of the seven awakening factors.

[4.5 Noble truths exercise.] Again, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* abides *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* in terms of the Four Noble Truths. And how does a *bhikkhu* abide *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* in terms of the Four Noble Truths? Here a *bhikkhu* comprehends as it actually is: “This is suffering”; he comprehends as it actually is: “This is the origin of

suffering"; he comprehends as it actually is: "This is the cessation of suffering"; he comprehends as it actually is: "This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering."

[Refrain.] In this way he abides *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* internally, … That is how a *bhikkhu* abides *dhamma*-contemplating among the *dhammas* in terms of the Four Noble Truths.

[Conclusion.] *Bhikkhus*, if anyone should develop these four *satipaṭṭhānas* in such a way for seven years, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return. Let alone seven years, *bhikkhus*. **[i63]** If anyone should develop these four *satipaṭṭhānas* in such a way for six years … for five years … for four years … for three years … for two years … for one year, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return. Let alone one year, *bhikkhus*. If anyone should develop these four *satipaṭṭhānas* in such a way for seven months … for six months … for five months … for four months … for three months … for two months … for one month … for half a month, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return. Let alone half a month, *bhikkhus*. If anyone should develop these four *satipaṭṭhānas* in such a way for seven days, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return.

So it was with reference to this that it was said: "*Bhikkhus*, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of *Nibbāna*, namely, the four *satipaṭṭhānas*."

That is what the Blessed One said. The *bhikkhus* were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One"s words.

Other books by Bhikkhu Cintita

Buddhist Life/Buddhist Path: the foundations of Buddhism based on earliest sources, second edition. (2019)

Mindfulness, where Dharma meets practice: an *introduction to Early Buddhism.* (2020)

Dependent Coarising: meaning construction in the twelve links. (2021)

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Upcoming

Rethinking Satipaṭṭhāna.

Draft chapters currently available at:

https://sitagu.org/cintita/satipatthana/

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Satipaṭṭhāna (often translated as "Foundations of mindfulness") is the Buddha's method of wisdom contemplation, best known through the ancient practice tutorial The Satipaṭṭhana Sutta. It is recognized as the basis of modern vipassanā or insight meditation and of many other modern and historical practices. Unfortunately, the complexities of Buddhist intellectual history have not been kind to this early teaching.

Satipaṭṭhana Rethought is a short meditation manual for the modern student that covers the same exercises found in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, and is based entirely on a critical rereading of the earliest Buddhist texts, undertaken to recover a doctrinally coherent, cognitively realistic and etymologically sound interpretation of this ancient wisdom practice. Satipaṭṭhāna as taught here extends Dhamma study to investigation in terms of direct experience, actualizing the Buddha's instruction to "come and see." It integrates samādhi or jhāna as a necessary and critical factor in this practice. Its fruit is "knowledge and vision of things as they are," declared by the Buddha as close to awakening. Widely neglected aspects of the ancient practice are highlighted in this manual, including its sophisticated exploration of non-self and of the mental constructedness (emp tiness) of the "objective world."

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