

Abstract of Dissertation
entitled

**On Mind and Matter: A psychological and philosophical exploration of
satipaṭṭhāna practice**

Submitted by

Sasha Alexander Manu

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the practice of satipaṭṭhāna, situates it within a modern understanding of cognition, and shows the confluence of its core elements with theories of the psychological unconscious. This culminates by examining the importance of feeling (*vedanā*) in the practice, and how the primacy of this element is corroborated by philosophical and empirical claims from the Western psychological canon. The introductory chapter sets the stage by examining the touch points between Buddhist meditation and psychology, while highlighting some of the structural limitations of their current intersection. Chapter Two turns to cognitive science, substantiating the ‘self’ concept and connecting its emergence to the ways in which our lived experience is mediated by unconscious processes. Chapter Three introduces the Buddhist account of suffering, drawing from the four primary *Nikāyas* of the *Sutta Piṭaka*. Turning to the actual practice of satipaṭṭhāna, Chapter Four introduces the technique with reference to modern

scholarship, including writings by Bhikkhu Anālayo, Bhikkhu Bodhi, and Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Subsequently, I turn to teachings from surviving Vipassana lineages, exploring ideas from teachers such as Mingun Jetavan Sayādaw, Mahasi Sayādaw, Sunlun Vinaya, S.N. Goenka, Ajahn Chah, and the Venerable Pa-Auk Sayādaw. Following this, core elements of satipaṭṭhāna are examined, including: equanimity, concentration, mindfulness, diligence, clear comprehension, and feeling. Finally, Chapters Five and Six demonstrate a concurrence among these core elements and theories of the unconscious stemming primarily from thinkers Benjamin Libet and Carl Jung.

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation, portfolio, individual project or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

Signed: _____

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations

SN *Samyutta Nikāya*

DN *Dīgha Nikāya*

MN *Majjhima Nikāya*

AN *Aṅguttara Nikāya*

Dhp *Dhammapada*

Thag *Theragātā*

Chapter 1: Introduction

“I, a stranger and afraid, in a world I never made” -A.E. Housman¹

1.1 Our Immediate Predicament

We are all confronted with immediacy. We have found ourselves in a world that necessitates our active and continual participation. From moment to moment, whether sleeping or awake, there is a never ending stream of interactions taking place between ourselves and the environment. We awoke to this human predicament without any guidance, yet we all slowly develop proficiency in dealing with the world. However, as we continue to grow more competent, in many of us, there remains a sneaking suspicion. A gnawing sense, that true contentment lies forever around the corner. No matter how adequately our basic physiological needs are satisfied, no matter how successful we are in our material pursuits, a perpetual, insidious and often neurotic tendency to seek fulfillment persists. No matter what we experience – it is never enough. The world is forever deficient, and we are forever lacking. This discontent can manifest acutely as depression, anxiety, or as a subtle sense that *something is missing*. Our mode of interfacing with the world, of coping with immediacy, has gone awry.

Twenty five centuries ago, in search of an answer to this sense of lack, Gautama the Buddha discovered and put forward what has been referred to as “the direct path for the disappearance of our pain & distress” (MN 10). He diagnosed our predicament with the First Arya Satya, the Noble truth of *dukkha*. With translations ranging from stress, suffering, discontent and dissatisfaction, no English word captures the true range of *dukkha*. Yet, what is certainly conveyed, is an acknowledgement of a perennial observation that life is a stressful experience.

¹ (Housman 2009, XII)

Following this diagnosis, the Buddha put forward a cause for this suffering, and a path that ultimately leads to its cessation. There are many traditions that attempt to tackle the problem of human suffering, and it is their convergence that this dissertation will explore.

1.2 Literature Review

When attempting to find concurrence between two fields of study, one runs the risk of tending too sharply towards a theory of total unification.² It appears that a premise for such projects is that the more independent lines of reasoning that converge towards a given point, the more likely said point represents an actual and accessible feature of experience. As such, the intersection of psychology³ and Buddhist practice is of prime interest. Despite having emerged from independent ideological milieus, they are both existentially relevant in modern times.

Much has been written on the compatibility, or lack thereof, of Buddhism and science, and this is a debate that this paper will not engage in. My primary area of focus is in the practical and pragmatic congruence of certain ways of understanding experience, such that progress along the path of satipaṭṭhāna is attained. This paper takes *prima facie* both satipaṭṭhāna methodology, and the traditional stages of path progression – and as such does not hold them to the scrutiny of empirical reduction. It is nevertheless of great interest that in the initial contact between these fields, scientists found that regular meditation induces structural changes in the brain, as studied through pioneering programs such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) (Segal 2013, 416). In a 2015 study, Britta Hölzel and colleagues found that regular MBSR practice resulted in the thickening of brain

² Such projects may inadvertently remove or ignore essential components of a tradition. As in the case of Buddhism in relation to psychology, it can be argued that mindfulness (*sati*) has been overemphasized and divorced from its soteriological framework.

³ Referring to psychology as a monolithic field is a misnomer, and further granularity with regard to scope of study will be outlined in the section to come. Similarly, referring to ‘Buddhism’ as if it represents a singular set of beliefs is also misleading.

structures associated with mind wandering, self-referential processing, perspective taking and emotional regulation (Holzel et al., 2012). It should be noted that MBSR and MBCT are multifaceted meditation programs, and their techniques are derived from an amalgam of *Mahāyāna* practices. As such, they do not speak directly to the efficacy of satipaṭṭhāna, which is grounded firmly in the *Theravadin* tradition.⁴ There is a plethora of other studies that indicate a fascinating correspondence between practice and the topology of our brains. Such a correspondence certainly piques one’s curiosity, and finding neural correlates of subjective states is certainly of value, but as Geoffrey Samuel writes in his piece on the compatibility of Buddhism and science: “No amount of brain-scanning meditating yogis will either prove or disprove *Mādhyamika* philosophy” (Samuel 2014, 10).⁵

In a movement away from this focus on brain scans, Jay Garfield writes in his article on cognitive science and Buddhism that scientists should not be impressed that the brain scans of practitioners show structural brain changes. Not only are such changes subjectively self-evident to practitioners, but all activities that require training facilitate changes in corresponding brain areas (Garfield 2011, 15). In a similar vein, my presentation of the convergence of these traditions will not be in terms of the reduction of Buddhist meditation to empirical datum. Instead, it will be an exploration of certain theoretical correspondences between the meditative framework of satipaṭṭhāna, and its relation to theories held by psychologists and cognitive scientists. I will consult a variety of thinkers from interrelated disciplines, with primary goals including: surveying theories related to the cognitive unconscious and exploring the generation

⁴ Many of the studies isolate one of the many components of satipaṭṭhāna, namely, mindfulness (*sati*) – however they have not given a comprehensive treatment to this unique technique.

⁵ While this quote relates to a *Mahāyāna* school of thought – its sentiment rings true for all philosophies that are grounded in subjective experience.

of our notion of ‘self’ from a neuroscientific perspective. To my knowledge, there exists no comparison of the core practical tenets of satipaṭṭhāna with ideas stemming from the Western psychological canon. While psychologist Rune E. A. Johansson has written on the dynamics of early Buddhist psychology, their work focused primarily on importing *pratītyasamutpāda* into a modern psychological framework (Johansson 1979, 7). Similar work has been done with regards to importing dependent origination into the modern framework of operant conditioning by Judson Brewer and colleagues (Brewer 2018, 114). Padmasiri de Silva also explores Buddhist psychology with respect to counselling practices, and while his text explores satipaṭṭhāna, it is focused on the modern clinical setting rather than finding philosophical correspondences (De Silva 2014, X).

Turning to Buddhism, much has been written on satipaṭṭhāna. With regard to isolating elements of this practice, I turn to Bhikkhu Anālayo’s comprehensive work entitled *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization*. I aim to present a wholistic picture of satipaṭṭhāna, drawing from key texts from various surviving Vipassana traditions, including those of Mingun Jetavan Sayādaw, Mahasi Sayādaw, Sunlun Vinaya, Ajahn Chah, S.N. Goenka and the Venerable Pa-Auk Sayādaw. There is an increasing amount of scholarship on the popularization of lay meditation, particularly arising from Burmese teachers Ledi Sayādaw and the Mingun Jetavan Sayadaw (Stuart 2017, 162).⁶ However, alongside Burmese lineages, I will consult works based directly on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, as well as on masters from the Thai Forest tradition. Finally, it should be noted that a comparison between Vipassana teachers can be found with respect to the Noble Eightfold Path in the dissertation of Tyler J. Carter. In his work on the

⁶ In a footnote on page 162, Stuart notes that author Jake Davis writes that Mingun Sayadaw’s teacher based his teachings on the *Visuddhimagga*. This raises questions pertaining to the interpretation of satipaṭṭhāna teachings – as there are differences between *Buddhaghosa*’s writings and the Nikaya presentation of the practice. However, this issue lies beyond the scope of this paper.

rhetorical methods of Vipassana meditation, he constructs a comparative diagram between the lineages of S.N. Goenka, Mahasi Sayādaw, and Pa Auk in regards to their emphasis on *sila*, *samadhi* and *paññā* (Carter 2017, 106). However, my paper will focus on the elements of the meditation practice, not on the path factors.

1.3 Scope

This dissertation will explore the Buddhist teaching of satipaṭṭhāna, a meditative practice of mind-body contemplation. I will begin by surveying its roots in the early suttas, and subsequently assess texts from surviving practice lineages, and key exegetical works. A discussion highlighting elements of practice will follow, and I aim to demonstrate that the importance of feeling (*vedanā*) in satipaṭṭhāna can be accentuated using philosophical and empirical claims from the Western psychological canon. Within Buddhist literature, my comparisons aim to emphasize an overarching sentiment with regard to practice, and I will not be engaging in a nuanced *Abhidhammic* analysis.

In Chapter Two, I will begin by setting the stage with a phenomenological exploration that grounds the experience of *dukkha* within a modern conceptual landscape. Utilizing some of the explanatory paradigms of embodied cognition and depth psychology, I will highlight the difference between introspectively accessible states, and underlying cognitive processes that lie beyond our range. Building off of this, I will present some explanations as to the purpose and origin of our notion of a ‘self’. At a high-level, this ‘self’ is the deeply internalized feeling that we exist as stable, coherent, and independent agents in the world. In Chapter Three, I will turn to the early Buddhist assessment of our lived experience, starting by outlining the Four Noble Truths, and ultimately honing in on the ‘self’ as the nexus of suffering, and focal point of

Buddhist practice. In Chapter Four I will provide an overview of satipaṭṭhāna practice by drawing from the *Nikāyas*, surviving Vipassana lineages, and modern scholarship. I will present some of its core features, and substantiate the view that satipaṭṭhāna facilitates a psychophysical reorientation from illusory self-clinging, to seeing reality as it is (*yathābhūtam*). Chapters Five and Six are devoted to demonstrating a congruence among several key psychological theories and the core elements of satipaṭṭhāna. Some of the major parallels drawn will include: Benjamin Libet’s ‘Time-On’ hypothesis and its relation to *sati* and *samadhi*, and the importance of *atapi* and *upekkhā* in relation to Carl Jung’s notion of the transcendent function.

Chapter 2: The Field

*“When one tugs at a single thing in nature,
he finds it attached to the rest of the world” -John Muir⁷*

2.1 The All

This section will begin exploring the ways in which psychology and Buddhism categorize lived experience. Given that this project aims at exploring an intersection, it is vital that both fields of study agree on some semblance of first principles. Outlined in the *Sabba Sutta*, the Buddha describes what is referred to as the “All”. “What is the All? Simply: the eye and forms, ear and sounds, nose and aromas, tongue and flavors, body and tactile sensations, intellect and ideas” (SN 35.23). This is an introduction to the six internal sense bases (*saḷāyatana*), and their respective sense objects. Such a schematization appears to account for all of the diversity of our lived reality. However, advancements in the cognitive sciences have made it possible to probe into phenomenologically inaccessible processes that appear to underlie, and enable this lived experience. What appears to be empirically revealed through modern assessments is the following: our internal representations (thoughts, emotions, the way we perceive phenomena) are not a copy of an independently existing external world, and we are not passive recipients of sense perceptions. The world is not static and inert, waiting to be ‘picked up’ by our senses. As will be shown, experience is fundamentally interactional. The coming discussion will only skim the surface in terms of the complex interrelated processes that underlie our experience. Yet, the salient point is that in the realm of accessible phenomena, no matter what viewpoint we have on a given matter, that view is highly contingent on the immensity of unconscious events that underlie it. Venerable Ananda speaks of something similar in the *Kokanuda Sutta*. When

⁷ (Coleman 2006, 105).

asserting his knowledge, he claims it only in regards to the following: “The extent to which there are viewpoints, view-stances, the taking up of views, obsessions of views, the cause of views, and the uprooting of views: that’s what I know” (AN 10.96). He was following a similar thread, interested in underlying mechanisms of *how* views are formed, as opposed to the views themselves. The processes we will examine are from a discipline far off from Buddhism – yet answering a similar question: what underlies our views? Importantly, we will arrive at an explanation of the arising of the ‘self’, which is a focal point for how we orient ourselves in the world.

2.2 On Vision

This section will demonstrate that what are often considered normal perceptions, are in fact the result of a highly complicated set of interrelated processes. These processes are highly sensitive to their initial conditions and ripe with contingent and circumstantial biases. There is no better example of this than vision, and the purpose of vision is stated plainly in Hermann von Helmholtz’ paper entitled *On Perceptions in General*. He writes: “the sensations aroused by light in the nervous mechanism of vision enable us to form conceptions as to the existence, form and position of external objects” (Helmholtz 1962, 1). Remaining agnostic as to the ontological status of these external objects, let us examine the processes that mediate our perception of a red apple. Seeing a red apple is not as mundane as we would think – and we will now go over the events that occur in between initial sensory contact and conscious perception. Right from the start, the complexity of information our brains are given to process is reduced by a factor of one hundred, as our eyes “have 100 million light-sensing cells, but only 1 million fibers leading to the brain” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 57). Regardless of the external reality, we are given

incomplete information from the outset. Now, after this initial reduction, as outlined by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their text *Philosophy in the Flesh*, four elements stand out in terms of how we see color: the wavelength of the light, the lighting conditions, the sense receptors, and the neural circuitry connected to those receptors (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 68). We take for granted that when we see an apple, it appears as a consistent shade of red. However, the wavelengths being processed by our eyes are actually different depending on which part of the apple the light comes from. While certain surface level deformations and external lighting patterns might alter the actual wavelength of light that reaches our receptors, the brain processes this, corrects for any discrepancies, and outputs a perfectly symmetrical red apple in our visual field. Summarized aptly by Lakoff and Johnson, “the concept of the color red is not just a word pointing to a thing external...color is a function of the world and our biology interacting” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 72).⁸

The situation only becomes more complex from here. Outlined by Jay Garfield in his writings on Buddhism and cognitive science, he notes that only the central 10% of our visual field is actually processed in color, while the remainder is black and white and our brains superimpose the color. (Garfield 2011, 19). Moreover, the optic nerve that connects our eye to our brain actually causes there to be a hole in our visual field. Yet this isn't perceived, as our brain “fills in” the empty space using information from adjacent areas. As such, a great deal of processing happens after the initial sensory stimulation. Moving a level deeper than our perception of color, the fact that we see particular forms occupying particular regions in space is itself an act that is constructed in the mind. This stems from the observation that *all* we have access to, all that is directly perceived by our physiology, are stimulations of the nervous system

⁸ In their seminal work *The Embodied Mind* - Varela, Thompson and Rosch give an exhaustive treatment to the nuances of color perception (157-171).

(Helmholtz 1962, 5). Helmholtz goes on to assert that given this, we then create unconscious patterns of association that tell us, roughly, that if a certain area of our eye is stimulated, this corresponds to “some form” being located at “some position” external to us (Helmholtz 1962, 3).⁹ Helmholtz then makes the radical claim that our visual perceptions are “of the nature of ideas and activities of our psychic energy” (Helmholtz 1962, 1). Given the highly contextual and idiosyncratic nature of our individual perceptions, humans are not merely passive recipients of sense perceptions – but play an active, albeit mostly unconscious role in facilitating their manifestations. It is this unexpectedly amorphous quality of vision that leads Helmholtz to compare them to ideas. Relegating visual perceptions to the domain of mind, and attributing their appearance to myriad unconscious processes leads to two questions: what exactly are these unconscious occurrences, and what determines them.

2.3 On the Unconscious

It is postulated that at least 95% of all thought is unconscious (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 46). This notion of an unconscious, and particularly giving it primacy, was first postulated by the founders of depth psychology, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung (Miller 2004, 2). A succinct and useful definition of the unconscious is provided by neuroscientist Benjamin Libet, whose work will be further examined in Chapter Five. He states: “We regard a psychological function or event as unconscious when the person has no reportable awareness for the event” (Libet 2004, 92). Some clear examples thereof are the regulation of our heartbeat, food digestion, and, as

⁹ To clarify this point, suppose we have 10 light sensing cells labeled 1-10. If light hits sensors 2,4,6 – our brain then assumes that this corresponds to an object existing, say, 1 meter away from us. It associates the way in which light stimulates the nerves with where that object is located external to us. If the light hits sensors 2,4,5,9 – our brain would assume the object existed at a different external position. Importantly, it learns what sensors correspond to what external locations through trial and error.

stated by Helmholtz, our brain mapping *where* an object is based on *what* retinal cells are stimulated. The majority of cognitive processes occur below the level of our awareness, and as such, the immediate reality that we are confronted with is heavily mediated. Much of this mediation is contingent on our evolutionary circumstances, and these cognitive filtering processes continue to adapt to the environment to this day. Renowned neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp highlights the mechanism that continues to drive this adaptation.

[we] seek to simultaneously deal with the issue of how environmentally acquired representations of our present world, interact with the evolutionarily provided neural representations of worlds past that still exist within the genetically dictated connections and neurodynamics of our brains (Panksepp 1998, 21).

An example of an environmentally acquired way in which we see the world is through the lens of causality with regard to things that are proximate in space and time (Panksepp 1998, 21).¹⁰ New cognitive filters continue to emerge in response to our changing environments, while not disregarding previously evolved systems that were created to cope with more primal landscapes. In the text *Metaphors We Live By*, it is argued that many of our novel linguistic cognitive filters are metaphorical in nature. An example of this, is the orientational metaphor “HAPPY IS UP” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 15). Lakoff and Johnson claim such speech is based on the fact that in healthy humans, well-being is regarded as standing up and being awake, whereas sickness often causes one to lie down. This metaphor is embedded in phrases such as: my spirits are *boosted*, I feel *lifted*, I feel *down*, I *fell* into a depression, and so on (16). The salient point here is that while cognitive filters tend to be unconscious, many of them appear to rest on metaphors, and these metaphors originate from the way our physiology interacts with the environment. This

¹⁰ Consider a scenario where objects A and B are one hundred meters apart, and object A and B both fall down in rapid succession. They are likely too far away from each other for us to infer causality of any sort. However, the exact distance whereby we would call their falling causally related is not predetermined, and is in fact a boundary that is arguably created within our minds.

leads to another question, namely, is there an organizing principle that centralizes, or at least seemingly localizes, our unconscious behaviors. What brings together all of these metaphors and all of these unconscious tendencies? On this matter, Helmholtz says that there is only *practical truth*. Our ideas are merely things which we: “learn how to use in order to regulate our movements and actions [and] we are enabled by their help to adjust our actions so as to bring about the desired result; that is, so that the expected new sensation will arise” (Helmholtz 1962, 23). It can thus be argued that a guiding principle of the human animal is goal orientation. Our being has a set of desired sensory contacts, be it consumption of food or water, copulation, or seeking shelter. Based on the goal, reality is then bifurcated into true/untrue, right/wrong, with respect to that specific aim. Consider a red apple being a certain distance away from us. If we are hungry and have a goal of obtaining that apple, then an action is ‘wrong’ if it gets us further from eating (walking a direction opposite to where the apple is) and an action is ‘right’ if it moves us closer.¹¹ As a brief aside, we notice this dichotomy within early Buddhist writings. The Noble Eightfold Path is qualified by certain actions being right (*sammā*), and others being wrong. These are not absolute assessments about reality, but pragmatic claims, in that certain actions are skillful (*kusala*) with respect to facilitating progress on the Buddhist path, and others are not. This schema of ‘practical truth’ is used by Jaak Panksepp, and he incorporates emotions into this framework of goal orientation. He writes, echoing Helmholtz’ sentiment, that emotions are not merely irrational waves of affect, but serve a concrete purpose as, “they arise from experiences that thwart or stimulate our desires, and they establish coherent action plans for the organism that are supported by adaptive physiological changes” (Panksepp 1998, 166). External events

¹¹ The previous example regarding causality can now be understood such that the dividing line would appear to be *practicality*. Causality is inferred when is it *practical* for the human animal to think so, and this is in relation to a goal that is to be attained.

provoke internal emotional states which arise from our ancient mammalian brain (Panksepp 1998, 42). We see that much of our body-mind system is designed with goal acquisition as a motive. To conclude, in order to survive in the once harsh environment, reality was differentiated such that ends and means were distinct. However, when we appropriate this automated way of interacting with the world, and give it ontological gravitas, we begin to encounter a problem. When we think of this differentiation as having a truth value greater than mere practicality, we encounter suffering. As such, we turn to the final point of inquiry – the frame of reference that all goals and objectives are in relation to, our internal representation of ‘self’.

2.4 The Self

Let us now turn to one of the most intriguing unconscious processes, one that Buddhist say is greatly involved in our suffering – the ‘self’. Jaak Panksepp says it is not merely awareness of external events, “but as an ineffable feeling of experiencing oneself as an active agent” (Panksepp 1998, 310). He postulates that the origin of this embodied sense of agency and self-representation stems from a primordial self-schema that “may be critically linked to a primitive motor representation” (Panksepp 1998, 309). In other words, the initial concept of ‘self’ was created to spatially map where the body is in the landscape, and how it interacts. For instance, the brain is aware of where all limbs are located in space at a given time. Through this awareness, the boundaries of one’s separateness from the environment are internally represented. The self-schema is a sort of unifying conceptual framework, with a clear adaptive purpose in the development of humans. Erich Neumann writes on the peculiarities of this complex, and speaks to how “unlike all other complexes, it tends to aggregate as the center of consciousness and to group the other conscious contents about itself” (Neumann 1954, 298). This is echoed by Panksepp as he writes that: “self-referential coherence provided by ancient and stable motor

coordinates may be the very foundation for the unity of all higher forms of consciousness” (Panksepp 1998, 309). Both authors speak to the unifying tendency of this ‘self’, with Neumann addressing the psychological component, and Panksepp referencing its physiological basis. The ‘self’ is the set of cognitive processes that are responsible for coherence and apparent stability. As such, we can now begin to turn to the Buddhist problem, which is the conflation of these processes with something ontologically stable, independent and permanent. It is this confusion that leads to *dukkha*.

Firstly, it should be noted that the Buddha acknowledges the former ‘self’ as a conventional truth in the *Attakari Sutta*. He states that one cannot deny that there *appears* to be a ‘self-doer’ (AN 6.38). Confusion and suffering arises due to an imputation of solidity onto these ‘self’ processes, and the problem is aggravated by the fact that our current mode of interfacing with reality constantly reinforces our notions of separateness and individuality. Some of the reasons include: that we enact our will and attain what we desire, that we treat others as if they have full agency and control over their actions, and, importantly, that we attend strictly to the phenomena around us, and *not* to the internal mechanisms that give rise to them (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 1207). Helmholtz also makes the critical observation that we are exceptionally well-trained in *not* attending directly to our sensations, but rather to immediately associating them to external objects (Helmholtz 1962, 12). We rarely attend to our organs of perceptions, and instead fixate on the ‘external’ object of perception, and not on the act of perceiving. On this matter, Thai Buddhist Ajahn Naeb writes: “When we acknowledge an object through the ears, we must be aware that it is the mental state which hears. It is not necessary to be mindful of the sound, but rather to be mindful of hearing” (Kornfield 2011, 309). The centering tendency of the ‘self’ is neither good nor bad, but merely an adaptation of our body-mind system to the

increasingly complex environment. However, the salient point stressed is that a certain delusion comes about through *inappropriate attention*. When we attend exclusively to the red apple in front of us and not to the myriad processes within us, a sense of separateness and solidity is fabricated. When we associate the various sensations we perceive with a notion of locality – and impute this locality with a sense of concreteness, we then see the world through the illusory lens of duality. We conceive of a concrete ‘self’ that observes a stable ‘external environment’ – and as has been shown, belief in such a dichotomy is untenable.

Thanissaro Bhikkhu writes that once we conceive of a ‘self’, we are forever assailed by subsequent perceptions of individuality, through conceptual thought patterns relating to ‘me’ and ‘mine’ (MN 18).¹² We become enamoured by concepts, and completely lose touch with our initial conscious confrontation with objects. In the next chapter, I will substantiate the view that belief in this ‘self’ gives rise to suffering, and that the task is to shift ones attention away from the allures of phenomena, and return to the moment of sensory contact. It is through the subtle process of decoupling awareness from external objects, and reorienting it to the initial moment of contact, that we come to notice the three universal features of experience. These are referred to as the three marks of existence, and are: inconstancy (*anicca*), not-self (*anatta*) and suffering (*dukkha*). They will play a central role in the discussion to come, and it could even be said that the practice of shifting our awareness to contemplate these marks *is* satipaṭṭhāna. It is a technique which Thanissaro Bhikkhu describes as “peeling away ever more subtle layers of participation in the present moment until nothing is left standing in the way of total release” (DN22). Cognitive scientists, psychologists, and Buddhists have identified a set of processes referred to as ‘self’,

¹² Thanissaro Bhikkhu’s remarks come in the introductory paragraphs before his translation of the *Madhupindika Sutta*.

however it is in Buddhism that the misapprehension of these processes is emphasized as being the chief cause of our suffering. It will be argued that through the practice of satipaṭṭhāna, our suffering comes to an end, and the illusory burden of the ‘self’ is put down.

Chapter 3: Setting the Wheel in Motion

"Rahula, any form whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every form is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'" (MN 62)

3.1 Void like Foam

In the previous chapter, the 'self' was described as a complex set of adaptive processes, helping us to navigate the environment. The various scientists cited have not posited that anything substantial underlies the 'self' – they have simply schematized its functioning. In a similar vein, Y. Karunadasa succinctly summarizes the early Buddhist account of the 'self', introducing its middle position. He writes that the Buddha denies a metaphysical self, as well as a temporary physical self within our "psychosomatic complex" (Karunadasa 2017, 35). The cognitive processes described in Chapter Two are not at odds with the Buddhist view, there is simply an emphasize placed that all such processes are momentary phenomena with no underlying substrate. There is nothing that is changing, only change itself. One way of categorizing this pattern of changing phenomena is through what is known as the five aggregates (*pañca khandha*). In the *Culavedalla Sutta*, we see the five aggregates described as: form (*rūpa*), feelings (*vedanā*), perceptions (*saññā*), mental formations (*saṃkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) (MN 44). The totality of experience is explained with reference to these categories, and this schema is particularly used when exploring the notion of 'self'.

Rather than presenting an account of fundamental ontology, the *khandha*'s are experiential categories. In every moment, one can use the schema of the five aggregates to encompass and understand what is happening. However the crux is this: the five are not truly separable – and to speak of them as distinct entities is merely a convention. We fall into the

delusion of ‘self’ when we take one, or all of the five aggregates as being permanent, independent and stable. When we impute the aggregates with these qualities, and reify them as if they were actually existing things, we fall into delusion and the five aggregates (*pañca khandha*) become the five clinging-aggregates (*pañca-upādānakhandha*). It is this subtle difference of clinging that is the origination of *dukkha*. Of particular trouble to us is the the *saṃkhāra* aggregate - as this is where our internal monologue and complex thought processes are found. On this matter, Lily de Silva writes that:

The distinctive physical and mental characteristic features of each individual are determined by these volitional activities. To this category belong all our hopes, aspirations, ambitions and determinations, and we identify ourselves with themes *my* hopes, *my* ambitions (De Silva 1990, 7).

As such, it is in this category that much of our active clinging occurs, and that the unconscious processes spoken of in Chapter Two are placed. Before moving onto what exactly it means to ‘cling’ to the aggregates, I will turn to the Four Noble Truths, and relate them to the notion of ‘self’.

3.2 Arya Satya

Often regarded as the first sermon given by Gautama the Buddha after his enlightenment, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* lays out the structure of his entire teaching, centered around the Four Noble Truths. These truths paint a subtle and often nihilistically misinterpreted picture of lived experience. The First Noble Truth is that all the ordinary happenings in one’s life are *dukkha*. *Dukkha* is not just relegated to acute moments of discomfort, but everything from “Birth, aging, death, pain, despair, unfulfilled desire...is stressful” (SN 56.11). If the stress of life is not salient, Thai insight meditation practitioner Ajahn Naeb draws attention to ones posture. Consider that when asked to hold a certain position, within moments, there is the desire

to change or shift. Importantly, this change occurs because you are suffering, and believe that your new position will cure the suffering (Kornfield 2011, 302). This process occurs continuously in every position, and it is only when we *attend* to it that we realize how much of our time is spent momentarily relieving our discomfort.

The Second Noble Truth speaks to the origination of *dukkha*. It is due to craving – specifically “craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, and craving for non-becoming” (SN 56.11). We are never content with our present experience. In a reductive sense, our mind always searches for novel ways our six senses can be stimulated, by either dreaming up new scenarios, or wishing for the continuation or cessation of a current situation. Consider experiencing something immensely pleasurable. Instead of simply remaining with the sensations as they occur, the mind often thinks: “I want more of this, I hope this never ends, How can I get this next time”. Lakoff and Johnson, as highlighted in the previous section, proposed that due to our exclusive fascination with the objects of our perception, we overlook not only the act of perceiving, but begin to fabricate the delusion that these events are occurring outside and independently of us. It is after we create this duality, that we begin craving and clinging towards these so-called external events. Yet, as we saw in the previous chapter, this idea of ‘independent externality’ is wholly fabricated in our minds, and is not reflective of how the world is.

The Third Noble Truth states that in order for our suffering to cease, we must put an end to craving (*taṇhā*). The cessation of *dukkha* is concurrent with the letting go and relinquishment of this craving. It is written in the *Tanhavagga* that:

“Just as a tree, though cut down, sprouts up again if its roots remain uncut and firm, even so, until the craving that lies dormant is rooted out, suffering springs up again and again.” Dhp

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We must stop craving that which is stressful, and the Buddha says: “In short, the five-clinging aggregates are stressful” (SN 56.11). In the *Bhara Sutta*, these five aggregates are referred to as *the* burden which one must cast off to become liberated. So the task turns to understanding the ‘self’ and understanding why and how we started clinging to the aggregates. The journey towards this realization is explained in the Fourth Arya Satya, the Noble Eightfold Path. After walking this path, the Arahant Isidatta wrote the following verse:

The five aggregates,
having been comprehended,
stand with their root
cut through.
The mass of suffering has been understood (Thag 1.120)

3.3 Self-Clinging

There is an inherent circularity within the aggregates, as we are tasked with going beyond them, yet they encompass the ‘All’. In the *Udana Sutta*, it is said that one assumes the aggregates to be ‘self’ because “he does not discern as it actually is: inconstant, stressful, and not-self” (SN 22.55). These three qualities, inconstancy (*anicca*), stress (*dukkha*) and not-self (*anatta*) are universal features of our experience, and we fundamentally misapprehend and overlook them. Due to this misapprehension, we assume one or more of the aggregates to be *what we truly are*. In the words of the suttas, we appropriate them in a threefold manner: “This is my self, this is what I am, this is mine” (MN 62). Emphasized again in the *Pañcavaggi Sutta*, it is said:

Any consciousness whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every consciousness is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am' (SN 22.59).

We notice the word *consciousness*, as opposed to form used in the above passage. This is because the Buddha continually applies this analysis to all of the five *khandas*, repeatedly

emphasizing their ephemeral nature and the futility of craving something that is ‘void like foam’¹³.

We have seen that many suttas highlight a shift of attention onto the fact that things are inconstant. This is in order to impress upon a practitioner that even upon a thorough search of the six sense spheres, nothing stable and self-like is truly found (AN 10.60). The mechanics of this false appropriation of self are outlined in skeletal form in the *Madhupindika Sutta*. The map is of the form:

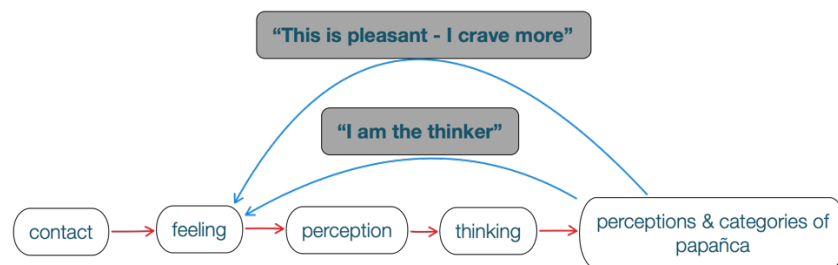


Fig.1. Schematization and contents of this conceptual map taken from MN18.

It is roughly in the manner outlined in Figure 1 that upon sensory contact, feeling arises, and immediately perception and thinking follow. Our *papañca* (conceptual proliferations) are the myriad ensuing thought forms consisting of further elaborations on this initial distinction of appropriation and ownership. There is then a looping back of *papañca* onto the initial contact and we continue perceiving the world in this deluded manner –with a notion of ‘I Am’. All subsequent moments of cognition are then with respect to an illusory ‘self’, and it is from this, that craving and aversion ensue. In the *Upadana Sutta*, it is said that the more we focus on the allures of phenomena (the aspects which can be appropriated by the ‘self’), the more our craving develops (SN 12.52). The *Cetana Sutta* states that the more we establish our consciousness

¹³ We find this turn of phrase in the *Phena Sutta* (SN 22.95).

somewhere, the more our consciousness grows accustomed to it (SN 12.38). These two suttas simply echo the platitude that *practice makes perfect*. The more we do something, the more likely we are to continue doing it – even if it causes us suffering. The looping back of *papañca* onto feeling continues to occur and endless levels of abstraction ensue. There are no limits to the fantasies our minds can create, and the more we dwell on them, the more substantial we make them. The Buddha likens the transition from craving to clinging as adding fuel to a fire, causing it to rage on more powerfully and for a longer time (SN 12.52). As such, through our delusion, as described in *Maha-dukkhakkhandha Sutta*, we continually dream up desired contacts that are infused with this self-notion (MN 13). Acting on this basis, we imagine pleasurable and unpleasurable feelings arising from the experience of our six senses contacting certain externalities, and we seek and avoid these contacts. We treat our internal feelings (*vedanā*) as *clingable* phenomena, as if they were permanent and could be held onto. To stop this misperception from evolving into a great mass of stress, one must become aware of what truly constitutes reality. It will be argued in the next chapter that at the nexus of *vedanā*, this change in perspective is made most accessible, and a shift in salience with regard to the three marks of existence is most easily achieved.

3.4 The View

To embark on this process of reorientation, one needs to be aware of not only the path to get there, but assess accurately where one stands, and how one ought to begin the journey; in short, one needs a correct *view*. The importance of Right View (*sammā diṭṭhi*) is clear in the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta*, as when questioned about the path factors, the Buddha repeatedly says that, “Right View is the forerunner” (MN 117). In his doctoral dissertation which surveyed the

different notions of *ditṭhi* in Theravada Buddhism, Paul Fuller concludes that the Right View is not merely *another* viewpoint, nor is it a rejection of views. Simply put, it is the stance that *attachment* to views is what should be abandoned (Fuller 2005, 157). When a right view is attained, phenomena are seen as “This is not mine, not my self, not who I am” (MN 62). One must view the world differently, or in the language of Chapter Two, make certain elements phenomenologically salient. Further emphasizing this point, the *Indriyabhavana Sutta* says that one should discern the arising of phenomena and note its compounded and dependently arisen nature, and it is through such contemplation that liberation from clinging is achieved (MN 152). In a similar vein, after interviewing ten Theravadin meditation masters, Jack Kornfield offers a pithy summary of what he thinks a practitioner aims to realize: “Nothing is worth holding on to” (Kornfield 2011, 101). In order to convince ourselves of this, we must utilize *appropriate attention* with respect to the field of mind and matter, and undertake a practice that helps us embody the formula laid out in the *Yadannica Sutta*:

What is impermanent is suffering, what is suffering is not-self, what is not-self should be seen with right understanding as: not mine, not I am, not my self – seeing this, no return to any state of existence (SN 22.15).

The Fourth Noble Truth is the path towards this reorientation - the Noble Eightfold Path, commonly divided into three trainings: ethics (*sila*), concentration (*samadhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Virtue encompasses right action, right speech, right livelihood. In *samadhi* we have right concentration, right mindfulness and right effort. Finally, in *paññā* there are right view and right resolve (MN 44). Virtue and concentration were embedded within the ideological milieu from which Buddhism arose, whereas *paññā* was the liberative wisdom that the Buddha discovered and shared. His last words were, "Behold now, bhikkhus, I exhort you: All compounded things are subject to vanish. Strive with earnestness!" (DN 16). His final words are

a rallying cry to strive towards seeing the compounded nature of phenomena. By viewing the 'self' in this light, and deconstructing its solidity, all other delusions vanish. Yet, if removal of the 'self' illusion was merely an act of will, no path would be required. However, some processes, no matter how well we comprehend their nature intellectually, cannot be made to simply disappear. As such, the path of satipaṭṭhāna will now be introduced.

Chapter 4: The Great Establishing Of Awareness

*Even with all the whistles & whistling,
the calls of the birds,
this, my mind, doesn't waver,
for my delight is in
oneness (Thag 1.49)*

4.1 The Goal

We can now turn to the central questions of how one attains liberation from suffering. As stated earlier, the working definition of satipaṭṭhāna to be used will not be relegated to a single source. Instead, it will be an amalgam of views from modern scholars and lineage holders. Let us begin by turning to the Satipaṭṭhāna *Sutta* itself, as translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu:

This is the only way, monks, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destruction of suffering and grief, for reaching the right path, for the attainment of Nibbana, namely, the four foundations of mindfulness (MN 10).¹⁴

Through the systematic practice of satipaṭṭhāna, we are progressively shown that the notion of selfhood is an illusion. The experiential task of satipaṭṭhāna contains stages of progression like any of technique; however, as written in the *Rathavinīta Sutta*, it is all done for “the sake of total Unbinding through lack of clinging” (MN 24). Through the fourfold practice of satipaṭṭhāna, one cultivates the seven factors of enlightenment (seven *bojjhaṅgas*) and subsequently passes through thirteen stages of insight (MN 2). We also find writings in the *Patisambhidāmagga* detailing Eighteen Principal Insights (Ñāṇamoli 2009, 22). Regardless of path divisions, practitioners are almost universally classed according to their realization in one of four stages: stream enterer, once returner, non-returner, and Arahant. A detailed description of these stages,

¹⁴ It should be noted that some authors disagree with the translation and connotations of “one and only one” path – in reference to satipaṭṭhāna. See L.S. Cousins article “The Origin of Insight Meditation” 1994, page 56.

along with what constitutes their attainment is found in Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli's 2009 translation of the *Patisambhidāmagga* (279-281). In any case, the salient point with regard to stages along the path is that they are all with regard to how much a practitioner has *abandoned* that which fettered them to the world. It is not a path of accumulation, but of letting go. We will now turn to the notion that the practice of satipaṭṭhāna is not an intellectual technique, nor is it a style of internal verbalization or self-hypnosis - no amount of rhetoric can suffice to convince us to let go of self-clinging. As plainly stated by Mahasi Sayādaw: "you cannot get insight through thinking alone" (Mahasi 2016, 127). S.N. Goenka echoes this sentiment and writes, "liberation can only be gained by practice, never by mere discussion" (Goenka 1999, vii). This is because even if we acknowledge the inconstancy of phenomena at the intellectual level – we continue to act *as if* we had a stable, independent self. Steven Collins in his 1982 text *Selfless Persons* gives the example of a Roman Catholic having denounced their faith, but in moments of crisis still crossing themselves (18). Despite their faith having been rationalized away, they were still unconsciously operating as though it were true. The situation is indicative of how deeply rooted the problem is. As such, its upheaval requires a thorough investigation of subjective experience, and a turning of awareness towards *all* objects of perception in order to fully disintegrate the notion of compactness relating to the 'I' (Anālayo 2003, 24).

This chapter aims to provide a structural overview of the multi-faceted nature of satipaṭṭhāna. I will be consulting various *Nikāya* sources, and approaching several surviving Vipassana lineages in an attempt to determine what qualities are essential in this practice. I aim to show, through the convergence of multiple sources, what some of the important elements of this practice are. Thanissaro Bhikkhu writes that the term satipaṭṭhāna is often translated as either 'foundation of mindfulness' or 'establishing of mindfulness' (DN 22). There are four

foundations of mindfulness, four experiential loci that one must establish their mindfulness in through the practice of satipaṭṭhāna. These are: body, feeling, mind, and mental objects/dhammas (DN 22). These four categories appear exhaustive, as whether you conceive of experience as five aggregates, six sense doors, or the broad category of *nama-rupa* (mentality-materiality) – the four satipaṭṭhānas cover them all. Nothing is left out, and if one can be convinced to stop clinging after investigating the four satipaṭṭhānas, then one has gone through the entire field of mind and matter. The sutta presents the satipaṭṭhānas in ascending order of subtlety, and this layout is summarized by Bhikkhu Anālayo: one begins by contemplating rudimentary bodily experiences that are immediately accessible, such as: sitting, walking, extending limbs, chewing and so on (19). Then, one moves to contemplating the arising of feelings, and subsequently moves to contemplating the mind. This is done by noticing its affective quality: anger, sadness, boredom, etc. The final station of mindfulness is the contemplation of mental objects and dhammas. These are the most subtle objects, and specifically, one contemplates the Buddhist ways of understanding experience, such as the five aggregates, four noble truths, six sense bases. The satipaṭṭhānas sutta is an invitation to contemplate ever more subtle aspects of our lived experience, and with the help of various mental factors, one can learn to attend to phenomena in a way that makes it clear that there is no stable or independently existing ‘self’ anywhere in experience. The specific nature of this contemplation will be assessed in a coming section, but the goal of dissolving our self-clinging through investigation of the field of mind and matter should be clear.¹⁵ Vipassana master Sunlun Ashin Vinaya writes that this notion of “I” is not eradicated in an instance, and must be chipped away at again and again (Sunlun 2000, 26). As

¹⁵ A clarificatory point is that similar to the five aggregates, the four satipaṭṭhānas are not truly separable, and their contemplation cannot be done in true isolation.

spoken of before, operating through the ‘self’ is a way of centralizing experience such that ownership, stability and independence appear to exist. Earlier we noted that this ‘self’ schema is centered around a framework of goal orientation, and it is because of this that craving and aversion arrive. Importantly, the Buddhist insight into *anatta* (not-self) does not aim to impede this natural functioning; nor does it condemn it as being perverse. The ‘self’ processes of the cognitive unconscious continue normally, as our lived experience is predicated upon their functioning. However, through practice, it is learned that there is simply an alternative way to attend to phenomena that leads to the end of suffering.

The practice of satipaṭṭhāna is not one of overcoming or transcending our habitual unconscious processes – but of observing and becoming aware of their existence and influence on our perception. Thanissaro Bhikkhu writes that after liberation, “The five faculties, monks, continue as they were” (Thanissaro 1993, 81).¹⁶ While the faculties continue unimpeded, there is a fundamental link that is severed between feeling and craving. Practitioners learn to remain fixed at the moment of feeling, and refrain from indulging in thoughts of craving. The idea is introduced that one ought to notice reality more directly, and engage less neurotically with it. On this sentiment, Mahasi Sayādaw writes that: “Insight meditation is an uninterrupted observation of all phenomena as they arise at the six sense doors, such that one can realize the unique characteristics and so on of mental and physical phenomena as they really are” (Mahasi 2016, 123). The tacit assumption is that the way we are currently experiencing phenomena is deluded, and that there is a way to attend more *directly* to experience. When we attend in this way, our self-clinging will lessen as we see it as being experientially unfounded. There is a movement from attending to the unique particularities of experience, to the universal quality of

¹⁶ Additionally, he writes that, “the senses and their objects are there just as before, but the fundamental affective link that ties the mind to sensations has been cut.” (Thanissaro 1993, 113).

experience in general. So the question now turns to what do we attend to, and how does satipaṭṭhāna facilitate this pursuit? As written by Sunlun Vinaya, it is “penetrative understanding by direct meditative experience of the three basic characteristics of all phenomena” (Sunlun 2000, 91). It is this turn of awareness that shall be examined in the forthcoming section.

4.2 Appropriate Attention

This section will demonstrate through a variety of sources that the practice of satipaṭṭhāna is a method of contemplating experience through knowing *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*. Beginning with Venerable Mingun Jetavana Sayādawji, in an interview translated by Tin Mg Mying in 2019 plainly stated that observing *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta* is how we practice Dhamma. Moreover, when asked about what is necessary to become a stream-enter (*sotapaññā*), he responded: “It is said, “*eka nanena yuttam*” meaning single knowledge is sufficient. There is no other way; all you need to know is *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anatta*”.¹⁷ In the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta itself, at the end of every section describing the satipaṭṭhānas (body, feeling, mind, and mental contents), the following sentences are repeated: “One dwells observing the phenomenon of arising, passing away, and arising and passing away” (Goenka 1985, xiii). Each section ends with “a restatement of the importance of contemplating the arising and passing away of phenomena” (Anālayo 2003, 18). When contemplating each of the four satipaṭṭhānas, one “is to direct awareness to it and in particular to a specific feature, namely its impermanent nature” (Anālayo 2003, 33). Recorded in Jack Kornfields collection of Theravadin encounters, Sayagi U Ba Khin, the teacher of S.N. Goenka, writes that it is through awareness of the truth of *anicca*, *anatta* and *dukkha* that a

¹⁷ My friend Tony Scott, from the University of Toronto, has graciously provided me with this translated material. The above material was edited and corrected by him, and was originally translated by Tin Mg Mying in 2019. It was obtained through a research trip he undertook to Myanmar, and was found in one of the Mingun Jetavana’s meditation centres. The material will be included in his forthcoming PhD dissertation.

student develops nibbana dhatu – which itself is a precursor to final nirvana (Kornfield 2011, 475). Finally, Teacher Pa-Auk Sayādaw writes that when observing *nama-rupa*, one must comprehend impermanence, in that as soon as something arises, it passes away. Comprehending in this way is real Vipassana (Pa-Auk 2000, 73).

The rhetorical style of these teachers as well as the suttas is clear. Viewing phenomena by attending to the three marks is a more direct way of contacting reality. Living within the loop of *papanca*, the loop of craving and aversion, is to live disconnected from what is actually occurring. Importantly, disconnecting from this deluded way of perceiving phenomena is not achieved through acquiring the correct concepts, or understanding nuanced philosophies – but through an experiential shift in salience. As highlighted in the *Patisambhidāmagga*, one progressively abandons ways in which they were subtly engaging in self-clinging. In addition to contemplating the three marks of existence, the *Patisambhidāmagga* highlights that each station of mindfulness is to be contemplated with seven aspects, culminating in the abandonment of grasping/clinging.

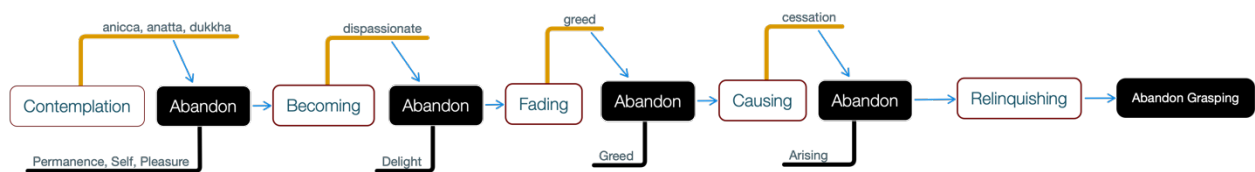


Fig. 2. This schematic of the seven aspects and the progressive abandonments they facilitate is from Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli’s 2019 translation of the *Patisambhidāmagga* (398).

Figure 2 outlines the stages leading from contemplation, to the abandonment of grasping. As one moves from left to right, increasingly nuanced affective attitudes towards phenomena are abandoned. The logic of these stages stems from considering the initial contemplation. If one attends only to the marks, naturally one becomes dispassionate with respect to the world, as

phenomena are only attended to as ephemeral and insubstantial. Naturally, the objects of greed are no longer alluring, and as you remain unperturbed by the cessation of phenomena, you remain similarly unconcerned at their arising. Embodying the attitude of not minding whether things arise or pass away, one relinquishes their hold on phenomena, and grasping towards the world is abandoned. As the subtle and gradual stages involved in releasing our ‘self-clinging’ has been made clear, we will now turn to how this is achieved through practice.

4.3 How to Train

I will now turn to the specific method of training, and the psychophysical elements required for one to properly practice satipaṭṭhāna. I will begin by looking at early suttas, but ultimately derive the main characteristics of the technique from the surviving modern lineages of the teachers quoted in the earlier chapters of this paper. I will explore how the elements listed in Figure 3, with varying degrees of emphasis, appear across various surviving Vipassana lineages. I will begin by explaining the schematized elements, and then describe how they operate in consort during practice.

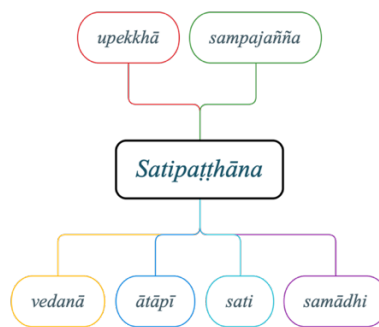


Fig.3. The following elements are emphasized as being important to the practice of satipaṭṭhāna.

4.31 Atapi, Sampajañña, Sati

Let us begin our assessment by turning to a phrase that is found throughout the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta: “*atapi-sampajano-satima*” (Goenka 1999, 5). These three mental factors often appear in proximity to each other, and I will examine their inclusion in the technique. Beginning with *sati*, it is often translated as mindfulness or bare awareness, although in modern scholarship it is made clear that it is *not* merely a passive or non-judgemental state of receptivity.¹⁸ In support of this point, Thanissaro Bhikkhu writes that, “the practice of right mindfulness focuses, not on the haphazard occurrence of mental qualities, but on the elimination of undesirable qualities” (Thanissaro 1993, 100). The work of S.N. Goenka is in agreement with this claim, as he states that *sati* as mere awareness is not enough, and that one needs “piercing and penetrating *paññā*” (Goenka 1999, 7). As explored, the piercing wisdom one attends to is that of the three marks, and the quality of this attention is what Bhikkhu Bodhi calls “watchful and lucid awareness” (Bodhi 2011, 21). Additionally, this form of awareness acts as a guard and has a quality of overseeing that which you are attending to (Sunlun 2000, 12). As a result of the higher vantage point of *sati* – one can have insight into not only the specific content one is thinking, but insight into the nature of thinking. This leads to the development of *sampajanna*, defined as Clear Comprehension of experience as it is (Bodhi 2011, 22). S.N. Goenka describes *sampajanna* as “having constant and thorough understanding of impermanence” (Goenka 1985, xiii). The relationship between *sati* and *sampajanna* is best explained by Bhikkhu Bodhi. “Sati lays open the contents of the experiential field; the role of *sampajañña*, clear comprehension, is to determine and define the contents for what they are” (Bodhi 2011, 33). This task of de-habituating ourselves from constantly perceiving objects as alluring, and focusing on an

¹⁸ Some scholars argue that instead of translating *sati* as mindfulness or bare awareness, it is more aptly translated as being related to the memory faculty.

alternative quality requires hard work, and it is here that *atapi* is essential. Often translated as diligence (Anālayo 2003, 17), or ardentness (Goenka 1985, xiv), it refers to the varying degree of intensity applied during one's practice. For example, the Sunlun method of Vipassana places a great emphasis on intensity, and it is said that mindfulness is neither established leisurely (Sunlun 2000, 8), nor is escape from samsara achieved through relaxed effort (62). This lineage is a proponent of long sessions of meditation as one bears all unpleasant bodily sensations as they arise without changing posture. Bhikkhu Bodhi provides another general definition of *atapi* in his 2011 article, saying that it represents the energy and strength required to engage in the practice (21). Whether experienced or novice meditators, it is a common experience that upon sitting down to practice, one is assaulted by unknown itches, and vague notions of urgent tasks that require your immediate attention. It takes diligence to stay present and focused on your meditation, and not get swept away by myriad things. However as will be seen, *atapi* is not merely a practical means of sitting still during practice, it is an essential component in causing latent mental tendencies to arise. Thus far, the practice consists in diligently guarding one's awareness such that one attends to the impermanent nature of phenomena. I will now move to the elements of *vedanā*, *samadhi* and *upekkhā*. Their inclusion and integration with the other three elements clarifies not only the mental attitude one should adopt, but *what* phenomena one ought to attend to.

4.32 Samadhi, Upekkhā, Vedanā

According to Nyanaponika Thera, *upekkhā* is equanimity, which is “a perfect, unshakable balance of mind rooted in insight” (Thera 2013). With respect to practice, Sunlun Vinaya writes that true equanimity is “bearing pain without thought of anger or frustration – remain calm and

detached” (Sunlun 2000, 71). In the *Vibhanga Sutta* the equanimity faculty is that which operates when the field of mind and matter is experienced as neither comfort nor discomfort (SN 48.38). All of these definitions can be related back to the notion of appropriate attention; as when one does not attend to the sensual aspects of phenomena, the mind can remain balanced. *Upekkhā* is the capacity to, for example, be able to witness the arising of a pleasant sensation, and not immediately develop thoughts of craving towards it. Furthermore, even if craving develops, equanimity is the capacity to not reprimand or develop aversion towards oneself. The ability to step outside of the craving/aversion dichotomy is the essence of equanimity. Once one learns to attend to the fact that a sensation, no matter how rich and pleasurable, simply arises and passes away, the capacity to watch it calmly begins to develop.

The amount of concentration (*samadhi*) used in the practice of satipaṭṭhāna varies widely. It is foundational in the Sunlun method, and Vipassana is described as using “the two legs of concentration (*samadhi*) and sensation (*vedanā*)” (Sunlun 2000, 7). The relationship between concentration and insight is a well explored topic and the *Yuganaddha Sutta* delves into their relationship, and that they both appear on the path to enlightenment (AN 4.170). Further examples of their union are present in the Buddha’s exploration of the *jhanas* in the *Dvedhavitakka Sutta* (MN 19), and Sariputra’s adventures in the *Anupada Sutta* (MN 111). Both beings gained insight from retrospectively analyzing their experiences within the *jnanas*, and not from merely enjoying the absorption. In an interesting study by Hagerty and colleagues in 2013, a Theravadin practitioner had his brain observed while entering various states of absorption. The empirical results clearly noted moments of access concentration (*khaṇikasamādhi*) as distinct from *jhanic* absorption. The study concluded that through the practice of *jhana*, the meditator was “self-stimulating a brain reward system using only internal mental processes” (1).

Interestingly, a similar argument is put forward by meditators that these *jhanic* absorptions are distinct from satipaṭṭhāna *precisely* because they involve the active generation (self-stimulation) of mental states. However, they are deemed useful when used in tandem to insight practices, as the Venerable Pa-Auk writes that *samatha* practice gives the practitioner a place to rest in between sessions of Vipassana – as “there is much to discern in Vipassana and tiredness may occur” (Pa-Auk 2000, 96).

Finally, we turn to the element of *vedanā*. While it is one of the four satipaṭṭhānas, many lineages claim that it is the axis around which the other foundations revolve. *Vedanā* is the nexus of the entire field of mind and matter. In the 1985 *Mahasatipaṭṭhāna* commentary by S.N. Goenka, it is written that:

The realities of the body may be imagined by contemplation, but to experience it directly one must work with *vedanā* (body sensation). Mind and matter are so closely interrelated that the contexts of the mind always manifest themselves as sensation in the body (vii).

This point is echoed by Sunlun Vinaya, who writes that *vedanā* is at the intersection of mind and matter, and as such, is the non-mnemonic element in perception (Sunlun 2000, 8). Consequently, by attending to sensation, one can make direct and minimally meditated contact with reality. Repeatedly throughout the original sutta, one is told to contemplate each of the satipaṭṭhānas “in and of themselves”. Thanissaro Bhikkhu interprets this as meaning that one should watch the functioning of the station without conceptual imposition (DN 22). If we recall the purpose of our meditation in the first place, we note that the cessation of craving is what we are seeking. *Vedanā* occupies an important position within both the *Mahanidana* and the twelve linked presentation of *pratītyasamutpāda*. (SN.12.20), (DN 15). In both of these schemas, after contact (*phassa*) comes feeling (*vedanā*), and after feeling comes craving (*taṇhā*). Thus, craving will not arise if

vedanā is attended to appropriately. In the *Upadana Sutta* it is written that “one who keeps focusing on the drawbacks of clingable phenomena, craving ceases” (SN 12.52). As such, it appears that focusing on the drawbacks of *vedanā*, (which arises from stimulations at the six sense doors), is an extension of what this sutta is saying.

However, in certain lineages, such as that of Mahasi Sayādaw, the emphasis on pure attention centered on *vedanā* is not as great. For example, he says that when one begins to practice, it is very difficult to avoid the conceptual sense of solidity (Mahasi 2016, 263). As such, meditators are instructed to mentally “note” the occurrence of events such as heat, sweating, daydreaming and so on. (266). In traditions such as those of S.N. Goenka and Sunlun Vinaya, mental noting is seen as antithetical to the goal. Sunlun writes that the cognitive act of ‘noting’ an event takes place dramatically slower than the actual processes which you are noting (Sunlun 2000, 12). As such, you miss the event you noted and can’t keep up with reality as it is occurring. The moment you note, you slip into the past and engage in discursive thought.

Bringing the practice together, let us turn once again to the Mingun Jetavana Sayādaw. His motto is a clear unification of observing the three marks and avoiding the *kleshas*.

One should not think about the new; one should not return to the old
One should not force the object to arise; one should not force the object to dissolve
Whenever there is arising and passing away—try and observe it till it registers
Forcing the object to arise is *lobha* (greed)- forcing the object to dissolve is *dosa* (anger)
Ignorance of arising and passing away is *moha* (delusion)¹⁹

Applying this to *vedanā*, we come to a holistic view of the practice of satipaṭṭhāna.

Without craving, aversion, or ignorance, one sits still and observes sensation. With a balanced

¹⁹ This translated verse was also graciously provided through personal correspondence with my friend Tony Scott, a Buddhist scholar at the University of Toronto. This passage was first translated in 2018 by Tin Mg Myint, and Tony conducted a second translation and extensively edited the text.

mind, one stops reacting towards impermanence as if it were substantial. We cannot change what type of feelings arise, we can only attend to that feeling in a way that leads either to more clinging, or to Unbinding. Ultimately, as Ajahn Chah says, we come “to see all sensations as equal in value because they all have the same nature. When we understand sensations, we understand the world” (Chah 2002, 248). In the concluding chapter of his book, Bhikkhu Anālayo writes that the practice of satipaṭṭhāna can be understood by the pithy phrase: “Keep Calmly Knowing Change” (Anālayo 2003, 267). This phrase highlights once again the key element of the practice: clear comprehension of the three marks of existence (*sampajanna*). The application of this element, in conjunction with the other five, leads to a comprehensive mental training schema that works towards chipping away at the notion of the ‘self’. We will now analyze the underlying mechanisms behind this practice, and demonstrate how modern theories of the cognitive unconscious can augment our understanding of the path.

Chapter 5: Establishing Contact

“The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject itself projects” -Merleu-Ponty²⁰

5.1 Opening the Dialogue

The case has been presented that six interrelated components are central to satipaṭṭhāna practice: *upekkhā* (equanimity), *sati* (mindfulness), *atapi* (diligence), *sampajanna* (clear knowing), *samadhi* (concentration) and *vedanā* (feeling). These six elements applied together, and focused on a station, aid practitioners in uncovering phenomena that they were previously unaware of, in order to loosen the grip of clinging. Some teachers highlight the importance of *vedanā* as sensation – and that through stationing our mind at this satipaṭṭhāna, the others are made evident. As progression ensues on the path, there is a natural increasing of the scope and stability of our conscious attention, and we subsequently become aware of previously unconscious phenomena. The purpose of this is to see that the three marks of existence are valid no matter our level of granularity. As explored, letting go of clinging or grasping is a gradual process that has as many as seven aspects in the *Patisambhidāmagga*. In one’s effort to contemplate the three marks of existence, one must increase what they are aware of, and in the S.N. Goenka tradition one must attain the stage of *bhanga* (Goenka 1999, 6). At this stage, sensations are perceived at every point on the body, and one attends to their quality of arising and passing away. Attainment of this stage makes *anicca* a super salient phenomenon. The value of this process is implicit in the Buddhist project, however the *mechanism* that brings what was previously unconscious into our awareness was studied at length by physiologist Benjamin Libet.

²⁰ (Varela et al. 1993, 4)

It is his work to which we will now turn – as his research sheds light on some of the introspectively inaccessible phenomena that mediate our experience.

5.2 Time On

One of the more astounding results put forward by Benjamin Libet was the discovery that we unconsciously decide to perform an action well before we consciously decide to act. In other words, when you decide to do something, that same decision was actually made in your unconscious mind several moments prior to your becoming privy to the fact (Libet 2004, ix). In order to come to this conclusion, Libet administered a motor control test to a group of participants. Subjects noted when they consciously intended to take action. However, Libet recorded that consistent brain activation occurred 350 milliseconds *before* participants noted they were aware of the decision (Libet 2004, x). Their unconscious minds decided, and fed their conscious minds the answer. In a noteworthy convergence, Mahasi Sayādaw writes in his meditation manual that when one is being mindful of moving, the following scenario may arise.

When you note an intention to bend or stretch the arm, you may find that the movement of bending or stretching seems to be delayed for some time. This means that your awareness has become sharp and powerful (Mahasi 2016, 285).

This is further corroborated by a 2016 study published by Peter Lush and colleagues. They found that when administering the Libet experiment to a group of meditators, the meditators registered motor intention at an earlier time than the control group (1).²¹ Meditators become more aware of their unconscious tendencies, which as explored in Chapter Two, are responsible for around 95% of cognition. This immense asymmetry is due to an apparent threshold between the conscious

²¹ This study was not in relation to satipaṭṭhāna practice, but on an unspecified mindfulness (*sati*) technique. As such, it speaks only to the efficacy of sati component of satipaṭṭhāna, and not to the other five faculties.

and unconscious mind. A further discovery of Libet was his determining that it takes 0.5s of neuronal activation for a stimulation (sensory contact) to become conscious. Any stimulation occurring for less than this amount of time is processed only by the unconscious mind (Libet 2004, 51). As such, Libet reflects that: “there appears to be a threshold between unconscious and conscious experience that is mediated by frequency and duration of a stimulus” (Libet 2004, 57). His “Time-On” hypothesis states that one can in fact add awareness to an unconscious function by increasing the duration of focused attention (102). This is where *samadhi* enters the picture. It is from sustained attention that unconscious stimuli become conscious. It is clear that on every pore of the body, there is some physiological event occurring – whether this event is an internal biochemical reaction, the wind on our skin, or our clothing brushing against an area. As such, the stronger our concentration, the longer we will be able to place our sustained attention on our bodies, and the more *vedanā* will be made apparent to consciousness. The Sunlun method states that even a slight wavering or shift during the peak of meditation “brings down the structure...and the edifice will need to be set up again” (Sunlun 2000, 22). Shifting one’s posture leads to a break of focus (as awareness shifts to the act of moving), which then impedes subtle phenomena from coming to the surface, as the ‘time-on’ has been cut short.

Another important aspect of centering practice around *vedanā* is that as a result, emotions will arise. The benefit of this is clear if we consider the definition of psychologist George Mandler, that an emotion is simply: “arousal plus emotional thoughts” (Attwood 2018, 34). Utilizing Jaak Panksepp’s earlier arguments that emotions arise with respect to a goal²², and that implicit in this goal is a notion of the duality of self/other, mine/not-mine – we are thus made more aware of the functioning of the ‘self’. Through sustained awareness of physical arousal, an

²² Which can be as mundane as: “I’m uncomfortable, I want to change positions”

entire realm of phenomena to which we were previously unaware of will begin to manifest. The inner workings of the ‘self’ are seen more intensely, and its unconscious operations are now entering the light of awareness. An important caveat is that one should *not* allow one’s attention to be drawn by the novel influx of emotional thoughts and *papañca*. As Bhikkhu Anālayo writes: “Vedanā has a strong conditioning impact on emotions, [but] vedanā does not include emotions in its range of meanings” (Anālayo 2003, 132). As such, one keeps their attention fixed on the satipaṭṭhāna of vedanā, and *sati* enters to not only guard attention from wandering into conceptual proliferations, but it enables one to keep the newly uncovered sensations in conscious awareness simultaneously. This dual functioning of *sati* is reinforced in the *Patisambhidāmagga*, as it is written that the satipaṭṭhāna itself is not the mindfulness: “Mindfulness is both the establishment (foundation) and the mindfulness” (Ñāṇamoli 2009, 399). As such, practitioners are mindful of the station itself, while simultaneously utilizing mindfulness to guard their attention and remain receptively aware.

Through practice, a stage is reached in which one is aware of subtle sensations and mental intentions, of which there was no previous knowledge. The world becomes more chaotic. The faculty of *sampajanna* can be assessed now. One ought neither attend to their *papañca*, nor to phenomena as if it were clingable – as such we must clearly discern their inconstancy. This is done by remaining steadfast at the moment of arising of a sensation, and as Sunlun Vinaya writes, remaining “vigorously mindful of the awareness of touch” (Sunlun 2000, 105). Vigor is required as you are now inundated by novel emotions and sensations, and it is paramount to develop clear knowledge of the impermanent nature of what you are experiencing. To make this awareness of *anicca* more clear, let us consider the practice of *Ānāpānasati*. The practice is to attend to the initial and immediate contact of the breath, which means that whenever you drift

away into a thought you bring your attention back to the breath. Eventually, one is able to remain with the sensation of the contact of breathing. The longer one remains focused, the more *anicca* and *anatta* reveal themselves. Initially the breath appears like a solid stream of water going in then turning out. However, one soon begins to discern a pause in between the inbreath and outbreath. Subsequently, the breath discerned becomes increasingly subtle, and is more like many fine droplets of water instead of a stream. Mahasi Sayādaw lays out a compatible *Abhidhammic* schematization of cognition, in which every ‘mind moment’ comprises of thirty eight individual units (Mahasi 2016, 112). Importantly, out of the thirty eight, only the first seven are concerned solely with the perceived object. The remaining thirty one mind moments encompass karmic impulsions, which are, in other words, perceptions of craving and aversion. As such, a practitioner’s aim is to *not* allow sensory phenomena to reach the stage of karmic impulsion (163). We notice a disintegration of the commonly held notion of a “stream of consciousness”, and instead obtain a picture of discrete instances of awareness – which is a conclusion shared by Benjamin Libet. His “Time-On” theory concludes that “conscious thought processes must consist of discontinuous separate events” (Libet 2004, 112). It is seen that by making the actual discontinuous nature of experience salient, one is progressively shown its inconstancy. This gives credence to the view that the three marks of existence are not conceptual impositions onto phenomena, but rather, point to the natural quality of experience that is revealed when one directs attention solely to feelings. The remaining mental factors of satipaṭṭhāna, *upekkhā* and *atapi*, play an integral role in ensuring that this newly revealed subtle reality is attended to correctly. The more phenomena that appear, the more potential there is to cling. To even arrive at the stage where discontinuity is perceived, one must have already pacified more gross karmic impulsions.

5.3 The Threshold

The more subtle awareness becomes, the more previously unconscious phenomena is revealed. It is now apt to turn to Carl Jung, one of the pioneers of depth psychology, and his theory of the *Transcendent Function*. Similar to Benjamin Libet, he holds in his 1975 work that “consciousness possesses a threshold intensity which its contents must have attained, so that all elements that are too weak remain in the unconscious” (71). We have highlighted previously how to bring about the deconstruction of this threshold through conscious attention, but Jung provides insight into the mechanics behind this exchange between the conscious and unconscious. First, he states that this transition and blurring of lines is a moment of great tension. He states that encountering this moment of immense energy takes effort and perseverance, and that many lack self-confidence, motivation, or courage to make the attempt (Miller 2004, 29). A similar rhetoric is found in Sunlun Vinaya’s teaching, as the “method is simple, but calls for courage” (Sunlun 2000, 67). The courageous task is of getting rid of the separation between the two realms of conscious and unconscious. Importantly, Jung writes that this is certainly *not* achieved by condemning the contents of the unconscious (Jung 1975, 76). Before assessing the Buddhist flavour of this quote, I will briefly survey Jung’s view of the unconscious mind.

In the Jungian worldview, our unconscious contains all the inherited behaviors, and myriad fantasy combinations that our mind produces when attempting to make sense of the world. It functions as a compensatory element in our psychological regulation. For every attitude or image in our consciousness, an opposite exists in our unconscious (Miller 2004, xi). Jung also saw the unconscious not only as the realm of contents that have been repressed or deemed too inappropriate for expression, but as a “mysterious landscape that compensates for, supplements

and opposes consciousness (Miller 2004, 2). As such, its functioning, despite how chaotic it may appear, is perfectly normal and essential for the proper balance of our minds. The directedness of our consciousness is balanced out by the chaos of the unconscious. It is to our great fortune that most of the processes do not possess the necessary intensity to cross the threshold of our awareness. However, these fantasies regularly have free reign over our attention, and we are enamoured by their technicolour display at night as we dream.

Yet, when this process is incited during our full waking consciousness, precautions must be taken. Jung's warnings are twofold: first, you run the risk of becoming "trapped in your own complexes or too fascinated by the all-enveloping phantasmagoria" (Miller 2004, 70). This idea of over fascination with novel sensations is reminiscent of becoming attached to the *nimita* and geometrical patterns that occur during the first stages of absorption. Similarly, getting attached to these atypical phenomena is counterproductive and "actually opposite to Vipassana" (Sunlun 2000, 75). The pleasure of the *jhana* states is oft written about, however it is by emerging from these states, and observing their distinct mental formations, and seeing those as *anicca*, *anatta* and *dukkha* that one is truly practicing Vipassana (Pa-Auk 2000, 212). This sentiment is also echoed in Mahasi's 2016 meditation manual as he says that if one 'delights' in their pleasure, they are on the wrong path (283).

Thus, the first warning is to avoid craving, and Jung's second warning is to avoid aversion. When there is an active suppression, the unconscious loses its regulating influence and then begins to have an "accelerating and intensifying effect on the conscious process (Miller 2004, 21). Jung cites that the modern ego is inflated and overdeveloped, and this leads to a dangerous tendency to attempt to control the natural operations of the unconscious (Miller 2004, 22). What then occurs is that one consciously pays *more* attention to unconscious regulation,

which actually impedes its natural compensatory processing. One can easily imagine a scenario when meditating where an intense and distressing emotion arises, and one then resents or becomes angry at its occurrence – wishing it had remained in the depths of the psyche. It is the very act of *wishing it hadn't occurred*, that gives it the psychic fuel to linger in our awareness. We are still craving the object by trying to negate its existence (*vibhava-taṇhā*). Jung sees this scenario as the “over-directed” conscious mind attempting to direct and impose ownership over the processes of the unconscious. The false sense of control that we think will stop our suffering, is in fact the cause of it. If we recall Figure 1, which shows the ‘looping’ of *papaṅka* onto *vedanā* – we can understand Jung’s words through this lens. When new *vedanā* comes to light, instead of remaining with it, we engage in proliferations about the feelings. The subtlety is that we engage in proliferations about wishing we weren’t proliferating – and such loops of thought can occur *ad infinitum*. Despite the challenges of unifying our psyche, Jung highlights that in order for the “original, potential wholeness” of humans to shine through, one must grow towards a union of conscious and unconscious (Miller 2004, 62). Having spoken on craving and aversion, Jung inadvertently writes on the last *klesha* as well, ignorance. The necessity of this path is simply because those who are the least aware of their unconscious, are the most heavily influenced by it (Jung 1975, 81).

To solidify the relationship between Jung and satipaṭṭhāna, I now return to the *Madhupinkda Sutta*’s schema of dependent arising. It is from contact that feeling is born, and, subsequently, cognition, thought, and conceptual proliferations. Our awareness of unconscious phenomena, no matter how exotic, is simply another sensual contact. The trouble is, as the basic satipaṭṭhāna instructions say, we *proliferate* about this content. We imbue it with notions of “this is mine, this is I, this is what I am” – and it is precisely this false imputation of agency that cause

the psychological system to lose its balance. This is where *upekkhā* and *atapi* play an important role. They posit the way in which one should observe those newly arisen phenomena, to ease the tension between the known and the unknown. Plainly, one should not interfere in the processes that one is bearing witness to. At the mental level, *upekkhā* is remaining undisturbed by anything that arises, engaging in neither the craving of continuation (*bhava-taṇhā*), the craving of discontinuation (*vibhava-taṇhā*) nor sensual craving (*kāma-taṇhā*). When an old emotion, or novel fantasy crosses the threshold into the conscious mind – one should neither reject nor rejoice at the appearance. Further, one should not use its appearance as a springboard for further elaborations. In a sense, one simply relaxes in its arising. The *Kalaka Sutta* summarizes how one ought to approach the arising of distressing cognitions: “When cognizing what is to be cognized, he doesn't construe an [object as] cognized. He doesn't construe as uncognized. He doesn't construe an [object] to-be-cognized. He doesn't construe a cognizer” (AN 4.24). One simply remains steadfast at the moment of initial awareness. As in the *Ānāpānasati* example, the greater your capacity to rest in the instance of arising, the more clearly you will be able to see how you construe duality (as it is seen that the continuity of something as basic as breath is not representative of actuality), and thus begin to unbind yourself. This manifests also on the physical level, as *atapi* can be seen as not only the diligence of remaining focused on the task at hand, but of not changing posture, which is ultimately a subtle affective attitude towards a bodily position. It is very challenging to watch an unpleasant sensation, without letting it turn into anger, or begin thirsting for a different posture. If one cannot bear cramps, itching, or drowsiness, then the more subtle sensations will remain out of reach. Both physically and mentally, one must remain balanced with regard to whatever arises – as such *upekkhā* and *atapi* remain of utmost importance. It is through sustained practice that the practitioner notices that

through their active engagement with what arises, misery ensues. Thorough application of satipaṭṭhāna practice leads to a progressive release from one's tendencies to engage in the three types of craving. Subsequently, when one's attention is no longer on the sensuality of an object, the three marks of existence come to the fore.

Chapter 6: Arriving at Concurrence

“Be strong, and enter into your own body: for there your foothold is firm. Consider it well, O my heart! Go not elsewhere” - Kabir²³

6.1 Wholeness

This chapter will unify the cognitive frameworks identified in the opening chapters with the schema of satipaṭṭhāna practice outlined in the latter half of this paper. Central to the discussion will be a presentation of how the culmination of satipaṭṭhāna manifests in embodied life. To summarize the technique thus far, it has been made explicit that through the application of *sati* and *samadhi* on the nexus of *vedanā*, increasingly subtle aspects of experience are revealed to our consciousness. Using sustained attention, one is able to reveal physical and mental sensations that were previously unconscious. Keeping attention diligently and equanimously stationed at the nexus of *vedanā*, one is not drawn away into mental fantasy, nor are the *kleshas*²⁴ indulged. One is not craving sensations, nor generating aversion towards them, and one is increasingly less ignorant of the sensations occurring within the mind-body system. With this attitude, one neither accelerates processes of our unconscious mind by imposing illusory control, nor ignores the contents which would allow them to secretly influence one’s actions; practitioners remain squarely in the middle. As such, by only regarding the immediate moment of contact, practitioners develop an acquaintance with the three marks of existence. This increases one’s capacity to bear witness to the arising and passing away of phenomena – leading to the development *sampajañña*.

²³ (Tagore 1915, xx)

²⁴ The three poisons (*kleshas*) are often translated as: Greed, Hatred, Ignorance

The goal of practice is to become established in reality. This establishing leads to a progressively clearer picture of how one interferes with the flow of experience. Sustained practice reveals that all *contrived* attempts at relaxing and letting go are as ineffective as hitting a rippling pond in an attempt to calm it down. However, it is this very tendency of our minds, the neurotic habit of getting involved, that Carl Jung denoted as having a quality of “definiteness and directedness” (Miller 2003, 15). As explored in Chapter Two, once reality is bifurcated into external and internal, an internal ‘self’ serves a valuable adaptive purpose. Returning to Jaak Panksepp, he writes that our primordial self-schema “guides higher perceptual processes, by promoting attentional focus and perceptual sensitivity” (Panksepp 1998, 309). As such, when this ‘self’ broaches the unconscious, and views other phenomena, it is only natural that it attempts to schematize, solidify, and organize. In short, when confronted with unconscious phenomena, our conscious ego naturally tries to impose control. Through practice, the relationship between these internal components of the psyche develops into that of: “two human beings with equal rights” (Miller 2004, 3). On an experiential level, we turn to Mahasi Sayādaw for insight into how this is understood:

These phenomena are not me or mine, and they are also not anyone else or anyone else’s. They are only conditioned mental and physical phenomena. Conditioned phenomena are noting conditioned phenomena (Mahasi 2016, 164).

One is simply aware that as a consequence of practicing satipaṭṭhāna, the directed (conscious), and disordered (unconscious) areas of mind will begin to interact. The form of this interaction may be foreign and strange, yet it is a natural union of opposites. The disordered unconscious should neither overwhelm the awareness, nor should the directed awareness overly impose order – they interdependently coexist, and the meditator is tasked with merely observing the dynamic. As Bhikkhu Anālayo writes, “one should let the body speak for itself, disclosing its true nature to

the scrutiny of the meditator” (Anālayo 2003, 34). This quote points to the notion that through clearly observing the body, the three marks of existence are made evident. The challenge is that clearly observing phenomena is a foreign experience, and, as such, the six elements of satipaṭṭhāna are required to undo the conditioned tendency of interfering with the present.

6.2 It is as it is

The final matter we will turn to is the lived experience of satipaṭṭhāna, which Sunlun Vinaya describes as “grasping bare reality as it is, in the precise moment” (Sunlun 2000, 38). As explored earlier, there is a notion of everything remaining just as it was before – yet you remain unstained by the world (DN 22). On the topic of Arahants, fully realized beings, Y. Karunadasa writes that they still experience feelings, yet they fully know they are impermanent and are not bound by them (Karunadasa 2017, 134). You don’t become some kind of inert rock from meditating, and in the *Arahant Sutta* it is even explained that despite having seen through the illusory ‘self’, words like ‘I’ and ‘mine’ are still conventionally used (SN 1.25). The crux appears in the Dhammapada, verse 254: “Mankind delights in worldliness, but the Buddhas are free from worldliness” (Dhp XVIII). This highlights that the enlightened being does not delight in conceptual proliferations (*papañca*), but certain thoughts still occur to them. In the *Potthapade Sutta*, the Buddha thinks to himself: “While it’s still too early to go into *Savatthi* for alms, why don’t I go to the debating hall near the Tinduka tree” (DN 9). This is a clear example of the Buddha entertaining a thought whose sentence structure is likely very similar to thoughts one has on a daily basis. Continuing on this point, Lily de Silva writes that it is difficult to articulate the quality of an Arahant’s experience, but one might say the Arahant has a *realistic* understanding of the *conditioned nature* of objects, consciousness, and sensory contact (de Silva 1987). The

Arahant clearly notes the mind's performance of categorization tasks, as it is through these that the vastness of experience is made limited and understandable (Varela et al. 1991, 176). Instead of becoming stressed about these categories, the Arahant views them as a natural.

As we return to the original goal – the cessation of suffering, we see that the process of satipaṭṭhāna reveals experience to us and provides guidelines to minimize our engagement with it. We have seen various philosophical worldviews that describe precisely why the self-schema acts as it does, and why exactly it seems to cause suffering. As such, our rational minds have explained themselves to themselves. Processes once seemingly foreign all have their place in the landscape of experience. To solidify the world, to search in the realm of externality for causes, is all a natural predisposition of our evolved minds. In a skillful analogy, Varela and colleagues write that: “this abstract attitude is the spacesuit, the padding of habits and preconceptions, the armour with which one habitually distances oneself from one's experience” (Varela et al. 1991, 25). The Arahant is no longer enchanted by this spacesuit, they have undergone an epistemic shift that enables them to perceive *papañca* as simply another impermeant and conditioned feature of experience. As Ludwig Wittgenstein writes: “One realizes the solution to the problem of life when the problem disappears” (Wittgenstein 1921 , 88). The culmination of the path of satipaṭṭhāna is for the problem to disappear, and for the ‘self’, the asker of the question, to be seen as insubstantial.

Conclusion

The psychological and philosophical journey into the practice of satipaṭṭhāna began with the six sense organs, and their six objects of perception. From there, it was stated that there are myriad unconscious processes that mediate experience – with most of them operating under the paradigm of practical goal orientation. Implicit in this paradigm is the notion of a duality between agent and environment, self and other, mine and yours. Exploring this notion of ‘self’, it was observed that it plausibly originates from a primordial internal mapping of our positioning in space. In short, the ‘self’ was presented as a natural set of dynamical processes. We then turned to the Buddhist worldview, and introduced the goal of putting down the burden of self-clinging. We explored how self-clinging occurs through inappropriately attending to phenomena, and that a tool for reorienting ourselves to attend to *anicca*, *anatta* and *dukkha* is the path of satipaṭṭhāna. In Chapter Four, we began to analyze this practice with respect to the suttas, modern scholarship, and a variety of surviving lineages. While different traditions emphasized different parts of the practice, they all agree that in some regard, the following six interrelated elements appear: equanimity, concentration, mindfulness, diligence, clear comprehension, and feeling. The doctrinal reasons for their inclusion in the technique was then augmented by research done by Carl Jung and Benjamin Libet among others. The noteworthy convergence was that these thinkers also deem it valuable to bring awareness to what was previously unconscious, and highlight how there is a direct relationship between ignorance and deluded action. Through diligent physical and mental effort, sensitivity to the world increases, and one begins to uncover progressively subtle phenomena. Importantly, those phenomena are already present within the psychosomatic system, but are only brought to conscious awareness through concentration, and are stopped from habitually influencing actions via mindfulness. In consort with mindfulness, viewing whatever phenomenon arises with equanimity stops it from perturbing the mind. Finally,

by appropriately attending to the ephemeral and compounded nature of experience – one is able to remain present with reality as it happens, and not indulge in conceptual proliferations. The path of satipaṭṭhāna is the path of letting go of what one never needed to hold on to. In summary, and greatly inspired by all the scholars I've referenced, these four lines offer my interpretation of the main points of practice.

*Increasingly aware,
Ardently still,
Attend to change,
Feel the immediate.*

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