

CHAPTER I

MAHA SATIPATTHANA SUTTA

(DISCOURSE ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS)

Satipatthāna Sutta (Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness) appears as Sutta No. 10 of Majjhima Nikaya and Sutta No. 22 of Digha Nikaya. The latter is called *Maha Satipatthana Sutta* and includes a detailed treatment of the Four Noble Truths in the section on the contemplation on Mental Objects (*Dhammānupassana*).

The title of the Sutta is a compound word '*Satipatthana*' Though '*Sati*' literally means 'memory' as a psychological term it means 'attention' or 'awareness'. *Patthāna* means establishing. In the Buddhist doctrine 'Attention' (*Sati*) is a wholesome (*Kusala*) exercise. Hence the Sutta is called the ' Discourse on Foundations of Mindfulness'. (Variant titles are in use).

The Sutta provides in the words of scholars "the most simple and direct, the most thorough and effective, method for training and developing the mind for its daily tasks and problems as well as for its highest aim, mind's own unshakeable deliverance from Greed (*Lobha*), Hatred (*Dosa*) and Delusion (*Moha*)".

In the sphere of mental training the sutta presents two stages, an initial stage of ' Bare Attention' (*Sati*) and a more advanced stage of clear comprehension (*Sampajañña*). Bare Attention is the clear and single minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us at the successive moments of perception. It is detached observation free from exertion. It is concerned only with the "Present". It teaches one to live with full awareness "Here" and "Now"

Clear Comprehension is concerned with active life. It is the regulative force of all activities, bodily, verbal and mental. *Satipatthāna* is culture of the mind in its highest sense. This training is not simply intellectual. Buddha has emphasized on many occasions that higher mental development should necessarily be on a high moral foundation.

The overwhelming spiritual significance of *Satipatthāna* is self-evident. In this background an aspect that has remained unobserved is its applicability to modern life as a way of solace and relief from mundane problems.

When the modern world with its strength of science and technology is sliding down a hedonistic slope abandoning higher values of life, which is a dangerous drift from true progress, the need for a counter-drift towards a nobler ideal is very great. This is where the practice of Mindfulness is important and relevant. By giving the modern man the wisdom to discriminate good from evil *Satipatthāna* provides a drive in the correct direction. Modern life is subject to immense stress resulting unrelenting endeavour for material progress. Material progress alone does not ensure true satisfaction. Mental training from meditation alone can provide the tranquillity that promotes real peace and happiness.

Satipatthāna Sutta

Satipatthāna Sutta (Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness) was delivered by the Buddha while He was living among the Kurus at Kammasadhamma, a market town of Kuru people. It was addressed to the Congregation of Bhikkhus.

Buddha opens the Sutta with a striking declaration of its unique significance thus :

“This is the sole way O Monks, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destroying of pain and grief, for reaching the right path, for the realization of Nibbana namely the Four Foundations of Mindfulness”.

Buddha identifies the Four Foundations of Mindfulness Thus :

1. The Contemplation of the Body (*Kāyānupassanā*)
2. The Contemplation of Feelings (*Vedanānupassanā*)
3. The Contemplation of Mind (*Citānupassanā*)
4. The Contemplation of Mind Objects (*Dhammānupassanā*)

Contemplation (*anussati*) is the exercise in concentration that is undertaken with meditative insight, not the form of concentration which leads to tranquillity or Absorptions (*Jhana*) but the realization of the true nature of things the intuitive knowledge of the three characteristics of phenomena, impermanence (*anicca*) unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and insubstantiality (*anattā*).

Contemplation of the Body (*Kāyānupassanā*)

Contemplation of the body is meditating focussing attention on organs, constituents, productions and functions of the Body. The Sutta treats Contemplation of the Body under six groups comprising fourteen topics as follows:

1. Mindfulness of Breathing (*Ānāpāna Sati*)
2. Postures of the Body (*Iriyapatha*)
3. Mindfulness with Four kinds of clear comprehension (*Catu Sampajañña*)
4. Reflection on the Repulsiveness of the Body (*Patikkūla manasikara*)
5. Reflection on the Material Elements (*Dhātu manasikara*)
- 6 – 14. Nine Cemetery Contemplations (*Nava sivatika*)

Mindfulness of Breathing (*Ānāpāna sati*)

Advice on the Contemplation of the Body begins with a prescription for Mindfulness of Breathing which is recommended as a convenient starting point. The Sutta suggests a number of environmental factors, such as a serene environment (forest, foot of a tree), apt bodily posture (cross-legged) as conducive factors. Mindfulness of Breathing is a meditation and not a Breathing exercise (as in Yoga). The breath should be the normal and natural flow without interference, strain or rigidity. The meditator should observe the nature of the breath, whether long or short, inward or outward, and the effect on the body and achieve calmness, tranquility and deepening of the entire life rhythm.

Mindfulness of the Bodily Postures (*Iriyāpatha*)

In this exercise the meditator should contemplate on the bodily postures in which he abides, whether, walking, standing, sitting or reclining, the purpose being to increase the awareness of momentary bodily behavior. It will bring about an awareness of the impersonal nature of the body.

Four kinds of Clear Comprehension (*Catu sampajaḍḍa*)

Clear Comprehension is "knowledge according to every way intensively". The meditator should practise clear comprehension through every physical activity, walking, bending, stretching, wearing the cloth, eating, drinking not excluding even defecating and urinating. Commentaries mention four kinds of Clear Comprehension which are

1. *Sātthaka sampajaḍḍa* - prior investigation of contemplated activities (purpose)
2. *Sappāya sampajaḍḍa* - Investigation into the suitability of the objects (suitability)
3. *Gocara sampajaḍḍa* - Vigilance as to whether meditation would be disturbed by other activities (Resort)
4. *Asammoha sampajaḍḍa* - Directing undeluded attention (Non - delusion)

Clear Comprehension, unlike previous exercises which enjoined general attention, exercises a directing influence upon various bodily activities.

Contemplation on the repulsiveness of the Body (*patikkula manasikāra*)

The meditator is instructed to contemplate on the various parts of the body in their true perspective which is repulsiveness, an aspect of impermanence and decay. The enumeration of the parts (hair, nails,

teeth, skin, flesh, fibrous thread, etc.) is meant to dissolve the notion of one-ness of the body and remove the delusion of body's beauty, revealing its impurity so as to induce alienation from attachment without a violent revulsion.

Contemplation on the Material Elements (*Dhatu manasikara*)

The meditator is enjoined to contemplate on the four basic elements that constitute the body namely, the earth element - solidity (*pathavi*), the water element - cohesion (*āpo*), the fire element - heat (*tejo*) and air element - motion (*vāyo*).

The purpose is to dissect the body into elements (which are common to inanimate matter as well) in order to accentuate the impersonal and non substantial nature of the body and to intensify the awareness of its egolessness.

Nine Cemetery Contemplations (*Nava sivatika*)

Cemetery Contemplation is taking the decomposing human carcass as the object of reflection. The Sutta prescribes contemplation taking as the object nine stages of decomposition of a dead body dumped at a Cemetery and not disposed, either in actual form or by visualization, from three days after death through progressive deterioration till reduction of the skeleton to powder.

The objective is to arouse a disgust of the body which is ordinarily passionately treasured, and to impart a lesson on impermanence by the observation of the dissolution of the composite body and thereby to reflect thus: "Truly my body too is similar and is destined to the same inescapable fate of decay"

CONTEMPLATION OF FEELING (*Vedanānupassana*)

Feeling in Buddhist psychology is pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent sensation free from any sense of emotion or empathy. The meditation method stipulates reflecting on such sensations whether physical or mental as they arise or are experienced. The Sutta enumerates nine modes of contemplation of Feeling, clearly

comprehending, initially, whether any feeling is pleasant, painful or neutral and at each stage whether such identified feeling is worldly or spiritual adding up to nine modes of feelings.

Since according to the *paticca samuppāda* chain, Feeling is conditioned by sense Impression (*phassa*), and conditions Craving (*Tanhā*) which conditions Clinging (*upādāna*, (all of which are passionate desires), by proper mastery over Feeling one is able to break the chain of Causation. The meditator reflects on the origination and dissolution of feelings. His mindfulness is established with the thought there is feeling (but no individual who feels), his mindfulness is present to the extent necessary for realization and self - reflection, he lives independent and clings to nothing in the world.

COMTEMPLATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS (*Cittānupassanā*)

Citta (consciousness) in Buddhist psychology is the active element in mind and mentation, that which cognizes an object (*arammanam cinteti ti cittam*). The meditator is advised to reflect on states of consciousness as and when they arise with clear comprehension. The Sutta lists sixteen such states of consciousness, eight pairs of contradictories (barring one)

The meditator knows whether the mind

1. is in a state of lust or free from lust
2. is in a state of hatred or free from hatred
3. is in a state of ignorance or free from ignorance
4. is in a state of torpor or distraction
5. is in a state developed consciousness with *jhāna* or is without *jhāna*
6. is in a state of consciousness at sensuous level or above sensuous level
7. is concentrated or not concentrated
8. is released or not released

Contemplation of the mind is prescribed as an effective way of self examination leading to greater self-knowledge. Bare attention to a state of mind while it lasts is said to be more efficacious than subsequent introspection which can lead to complications.

Contemplation of Mental Objects (*Dhammānupassanā*)

The Mental Objects meant for contemplation are subjects of thought or doctrines embodying Buddha's teaching of reality and liberation. Five doctrinal topics are recommended under this section.

1. Hindrances (*Nivarana*)

Hindrances (*Nivarana*) are passions (*kilesa*) that hinder the attainment of mental calmness, tranquillity and wisdom. They obstruct the origination of wholesome thoughts (*kusala*). According to texts there are five hindrances.

1. *Kāmacchanda* - desire for sense pleasures
2. *Vyāpāda* - ill-will or hatred towards objects which are unpleasant and disagreeable
3. *Thīna - middha* - sloth and Torpor, sickness of mind and mental states
4. *Uddhacca - kukkucca* - agitation or confused state of mind and worry and indecision over one's actions
5. *Vicikicchā* - Doubt about the Buddha, Dhamma, and moral training. Contemplating on Hindrances, the meditator, taking each Hindrance should know whether it is present in him, absent in him, how it arises, how it vanishes and how future arising may be averted.

2. Five Aggregates of Clinging (*Panca Upādānakkhandhā*)

Upādānakkhandhā (Aggregates of Clinging) are the constituent elements of a Being comprising all the physical and psychological phenomena which, when they come together form the conventionally so-called Being.

There are five such Aggregates according to texts :

1. *Rûpakkhandha* - Aggregate of matter, totality of matter including material element and qualities of matter
2. *Vedanakkhandha* - Aggregate of Feeling, all affective sensations, bodily or mental, agreeable, painful or neutral

3. *Saḍḍakkhandha* - Aggregate of perceptions, comprehension through sense organs including the mind.
4. *Sankharakkhandha* - Aggregate of Mental formations, the driving force of the mind, volitions
5. *Vidānakkhandha* - Aggregate of the Consciousness, sense and sense reactions arising in the sense bases in relation to corresponding objects

The meditator, in respect of each Aggregate of Clinging, becomes aware of its arising, its disappearance, and avoids clinging to any of them.

3. Factors of Enlightenment (*Bojjhanga or Sambojjhanga*)

*Bojjhanga*s are factors or Constituents of Enlightenment or supreme wisdom. Texts mention seven such Factors of Enlightenment which are as follows :

- I. *Sati sambojjhanga* - Factor of Mindfulness
- II. *Dhamma vicaya sambojjhanga* - Factor of Investigation of law
- III. *Viriya sambojjhanga* - Factor of Energy
- IV. *Piti sambojjhanga* - Factor of Rapture
- V. *Passaddhi sambojjhanga* - Factor of Tranquillity
- VI. *Samadhi sambojjhanga* - Factor of Concentration
- VII. *Upekkha sambojjhanga* - Factor of Equanimity

(For a detailed explanation of the Factors of Enlightenment please refer to Chapter One of Book 4)

Contemplating on Factors of Enlightenment, the meditator, in respect of each of the seven Factors, should know, with clear comprehension, whether he has the Enlightenment Factor, when the Factor is absent, the arising of the Factor that has arisen comes to be.

5. Four Truths (*Catusacca*)

The Four Truths meant for contemplation are the Four Noble truths proclaimed by the Buddha in the *Dhamma cakkappavattana Sutta*

and amplified and elaborated in many subsequent Suttas. The Four Truths are :

- I. *Dukkha sacca* - The Truth of Suffering
- II. *Dukkha samudaya sacca* - The Truth of the cause of suffering
- III. *Dukkha Nirodha sacca* - The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering
- IV. *Dukkha Nirodha gamini patipadā sacca* - The Truth of path leading to the cessation of suffering

(For a detailed explanation of the Four Noble Truths please refer to the Nineteenth Chapter of Book 2)

Contemplating on the Truths, the meditator should understand according to reality, what is Suffering, the Origin of Suffering, the Cessation of Suffering, and the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering.

The Sutta concludes with the declaration that anyone who continues the practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness for seven years would attain Arahantship or otherwise at least the state of the Non-Returner (*Anāgāmi*). While seven years of continued practice would suffice for the attainment of the full result, depending on the skill of the individual disciple even seven days would suffice. The system of meditation prescribed in the Sutta is "the one way" (*ekāyano maggo*) sufficient in itself for the attainment of Enlightenment. The Sutta is equally pre-eminent both in *Mahayāna* and *Theravada* doctrines as the Supreme Spiritual Highway to Enlightenment.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain "Mindfulness" as presented in *Satipatthana Sutta*
2. Discuss the importance of *Satipatthāna Sutta* in the Buddhist system of meditation.
3. "The Way to Nibbana is through the development of the mind" . Explain this statement by reference to the *Satipatthana Sutta*
4. Discuss the importance of "Breathing Meditation" (*Ānāpāna Sati*) in the Buddhist system of meditation.
5. Explain any given Contemplation.