Chapter 5

The Duties of the Lay-follower

The Buddha taught the Dhamma to monks, to nuns and to lay-followers, men and women. He preached to people with different ways of life and different accumulated inclinations. He knew that people who listened to him had not the same capability to grasp the Dhamma. We read in the “Kindred Sayings” (IV, Saîåyatanavagga, Part VIII, Kindred Sayings about Headmen, § 7, Teaching) :

Once the Exalted One was staying at Nålandå, in Påvårika Mango Grove.

Then Asibandhaka’s son, the headman, came to see the Exalted One, and on coming to him saluted him and sat down at one side. So seated... he said:-

“Does not the Exalted One, lord, dwell in compassion for every living thing?”

“Yes, headman, the Tathågata does so dwell.”

“But, lord, does the Exalted One teach the Dhamma in full to certain ones, but to certain others he does not teach the Dhamma in full?”

“Now, headman, as to this I shall question you. Do you reply as you think fit.

Now what do you think, headman? Suppose a yeoman farmer here has three fields, one excellent, one moderate, and one poor, hard, saltish, of bad soil. Now what do you think, headman? When that yeoman farmer wants to sow his seed, which field would he sow first, the excellent field, the moderate field, or the one that is poor, hard, saltish, of bad soil?”

“That yeoman farmer, lord, wishing to sow his seed, would first sow the excellent field, and having done so he would sow the moderate one. Having so done he might and might not sow that field that is poor, hard, saltish, of bad soil. Why so? Because in any case it might do for cattle-food.”

“Well, headman, just like that excellent field are my ordained disciples, both men and women. I teach them the Dhamma that is lovely in its beginning, lovely in its middle and lovely in its ending, both in spirit and in letter. I make known to them the righteous life that is wholly perfect and utterly pure. Why is that? Because, headman, these people abide with me for their island, with me for their cave of shelter, me for their stronghold, me for their refuge.

Then, headman, just like that moderate field are my lay-disciples, both men and women. I teach them the Dhamma that is lovely in its beginning, lovely in its middle and lovely in its ending, both in spirit and in letter. I make known to them the righteous life that is wholly perfect and utterly pure. Why is that? Because, headman, these people abide with me for their island, with me for their cave and shelter, me for their stronghold, me for their refuge.

Then, headman, just like that field that is poor, hard, saltish, of bad soil, are my wandering recluses and brahmins that hold other views than mine. To them also I teach the Dhamma that is lovely in its beginning, lovely in its middle, lovely in its ending, both in spirit and in letter. I make known to them the righteous life that is wholly perfect and utterly pure. Why so? Because if they understand but a single sentence of it, that would be to their profit and happiness for many a long day....”

Even if someone has understood just one sentence, it might help him later on to have more understanding of the Dhamma. He might listen again to the Dhamma in a future life and then his understanding could develop. Out of compassion the Buddha continued to teach Dhamma for fortyfive years. We read in the “Dialogues of the Buddha”(II, no. XVI, The Book of the Great Decease, 113) that the Buddha related to Ånanda what he had answered to Måra when he had said to the Buddha that he should now pass away:

And when he had thus spoken, Ånanda, I addressed Måra, the Evil One, and said:- “I shall not pass away, O Evil One! until not only the monks and nuns of the Order, but also the lay-disciples of either sex shall have become true hearers, wise and well trained, ready and learned, carrying the doctrinal books in their memory, masters of the lesser corollaries that follow from the larger doctrine, correct in life, walking according to the precepts- until they, having thus themselves learned the doctrine, shall be able to tell others of it, preach it, make it known, establish it, open it, minutely explain it and make it clear- until they, when others start vain doctrine easy to be refuted by the truth, shall be able in refuting it to spread the wonder-working truth abroad! I shall not die until this pure religion of mine shall have become successful, prosperous, wide-spread, and popular in all its full extent- until, in a word, it shall have been well proclaimed among men!”

The monks, nuns and layfollowers who listened to the Buddha and considered what he taught could develop right understanding in their daily lives. They developed understanding of paramattha dhammas, of citta, cetasika and rúpa, which are impermanent, dukkha and non-self. People may believe in a soul or mind which experiences different objects. The Buddha taught about cittas which experience different objects. Each citta which arises falls away within splitseconds, at each moment there is a different experience. We read in the “Book of Analysis” (Vibhaòga, Ch 16, Analysis of Knowledge, Singlefold Exposition, 319, 320) about the sense-cognitions of seeing, hearing, etc., which each are dependant on a rúpa which is their physical base, the corresponding sense-base, and a rúpa which is the corresponding sense object. Thus, seeing has eyesense as its base and visible object as its object. Seeing, its base and its object fall away, they are impermanent, non-self. We read:

“Have different bases, have different objects” means: The base and object of eye consciousness is (one thing); the base and object of ear consciousness is another; the base and object of nose consciousness is another; the base and object of tongue consciousness is another; the base and object of body consciousness is another.

“Do not experience each other’s object” means: Ear consciousness does not experience the object of eye consciousness; eye consciousness does not experience the object of ear consciousness either. Nose consciousness does not experience the object of eye consciousness; eye consciousness does not experience the object of nose consciousness either. Tongue consciousness does not experience the object of eye consciousness; eye consciousness does not experience the object of tongue consciousness either. Body consciousness does not experience the object of eye consciousness; eye consciousness does not experience the object of body consciousness either....

Of the other sense-cognitions it is explained in the same way that they do not experience each other’s object. It is said that they do not arise in succession and that they do not arise simultaneously. It is helpful to learn more details about cittas which experience objects through the different doorways. We may find it obvious that seeing is different from hearing, but only when there is mindfulness of seeing when it appears or of hearing when it appears, understanding of what paramattha dhammas are will be clearer. In this way the idea of self who sees or hears can be eliminated. Among the people who listened to the Buddha there were kings, householders and slaves. The hearing of a king or of a slave, hearing at that time or hearing today is always the same: hearing has its own characteristic which cannot be altered. Hearing experiences only sound, not the voice of a person, or the noise of something. People who listened to the Buddha could be mindful of the paramattha dhamma appearing at the present moment and in that way right understanding of its characteristic could develop.

Sati or mindfulness is not concentration on a particular reality. One never can tell when a particular reality will arise and when there will be mindfulness. Trying to do something special in order to have sati is motivated by lobha, attachment, and this is not the right condition for sati. Understanding of paramattha dhammas and consideration of the truth are the right conditions for the arising of sati, there is no other way. Someone may think that his daily life is too busy, that he has no time to consider paramattha dhammas. He may believe that he, because of his work, has to think continuously of persons, of conventional realities. However, even thinking is a conditioned reality. We think with lobha, attachment, and dosa, aversion, there is like or dislike of objects time and again. We cannot get rid of akusala, but it can be the object of understanding. If we understand the characteristic of sati and if we understand what the object of sati is: a nåma or a rúpa, it can arise naturally in daily life. It will arise sometimes, but it is natural that there are countless moments without sati. The Buddha, when he explained about the nature of non-self [[1]](#footnote-1), said to the monks that one cannot say, “let body be thus for me, let body not be thus for me”, and that it is the same with regard to the other four khandhas. We should remember that we cannot tell citta to be in this way, not in that way. Citta is beyond control, but it can be understood as it is.

We read in the scriptures about kings who were followers of the Buddha. These kings were very busy and they had many people around them, but they developed satipaììhåna and even attained enlightenment. King Bimbisara, for example, became a sotåpanna. We read in the “Kindred Sayings”(IV, Saîåyatanavagga, Kindred Sayings on Sense, Third Fifty, Ch 3, the Housefathers, § 127, Bhåradvåja) that King Udena [[2]](#footnote-2) asked the venerable Piùèola of Bhåradvåja how young monks could overcome their passions and practise the righteous life. Piùèola answered that the Buddha had told them to see all women as if they were their mother, sister or daughter. When the King remarked that the heart is wanton, Piùèola said that the Buddha had told the monks to regard the body as full of impurities. The King said that this was hard for those who were untrained. He asked whether there was another condition for the monks to practise the righteous life. Thereupon Piùèola said that the Buddha had explained how the six doors are guarded by mindfulness:

... Seeing an object with the eye, be not misled by its outer view, nor by its lesser details. But since coveting and dejection, evil, unprofitable states, might overwhelm one who dwells with the faculty of the eye uncontrolled, do you apply yourselves to such control, set a guard over the faculty of the eye and attain control of it...

The same is said with regard to the other doorways. When one is infatuated with thoughts about people and things and there is no mindfulness, the doorways are not guarded. When there is mindfulness of visible object and when there is right understanding of it as only a rúpa which is seen, one attaches less importance to it. We learn from the Abhidhamma that visible object is one rúpa out of the twentyeight kinds of rúpa, and that it is the only rúpa which can be seen. The Abhidhamma helps us to have more understanding of the objects of mindfulness. The King understood what Piùèola had said about the guarding of the six doors and he praised him. He spoke about his own experiences:

I myself, master Bhåradvåja, whenever I enter my palace with body, speech and mind unguarded, with thought unsettled, with my faculties uncontrolled,- at such times lustful states overwhelm me. But whenever, master Bhåradvåja, I do so with body, speech and mind guarded, with thought settled, with my faculties controlled, at such times lustful states do not overwhelm me.

Excellent, master Bhåradvåja! Excellent it is, master Bhåradvåja! Even as one raises what is overthrown, or shows forth what is hidden, or points out the way to him that wanders astray, or holds up a light in the darkness, so that they who have eyes may see objects,- even so in divers ways has the Dhamma been set forth by the worthy Bhåradvåja. I myself, master Bhåradvåja, do go for refuge to that Exalted One, to the Dhamma and to the Order of monks. May the worthy Bhåradvåja accept me as a follower from this day forth, so long as life lasts, as one who has so taken refuge.

The King had great confidence in the Dhamma, he could verify for himself that when there was forgetfulness akusala cittas arose and when there was mindfulness kusala cittas arose. When there are conditions for the arising of sati it arises, without the need to prepare for it. Even a short moment of sati is most beneficial, because then there can be a beginning of right understanding of realities. If there is mindfulness now we can know that this moment is different from the previous moment when there was none. Gradually we can come to understand the characteristic of sati.

Mahånåma was another king who developed satipaììhåna in daily life. We read in the “Gradual Sayings” (IV, Book of the Eights, Ch III, § 5, Mahånåma, the Sakyan) that Mahånåma asked the Buddha, while he was dwelling in Banyan Tree Park, at Kapilavatthu, how a man becomes a lay-disciple. The Buddha said:

“When, Mahånåma, he has found refuge in the Buddha, found refuge in the Dhamma, found refuge in the Order, then he is a lay-disciple.”

“Lord, how is a lay-disciple virtuous?”

“When, Mahånåma, a lay-disciple abstains from taking life; abstains from taking what is not given him; abstains from lustful and evil indulgences; abstains from lying; and abstains from spirituous intoxicants, the cause of indolence- then a lay-disciple is virtuous.”

“Lord, how does a lay-disciple help on his own welfare, but not that of another?”

“When, Mahånåma, he has achieved faith [[3]](#footnote-3) for self, but strives not to compass faith in another; has achieved virtue for self, but strives not to compass virtue in another; has achieved himself renunciation, but strives not to compass renunciation in another; longs himself to see monks, but strives not for this sight for another; longs himself to hear Saddhamma [[4]](#footnote-4), but strives not for this hearing for another; is mindful himself of Dhamma he has heard, but strives not that another should be mindful of it; reflects himself upon the meaning of Dhamma he is mindful of, but strives not for another to reflect thereon; when he knows himself both the letter and the spirit of Dhamma and walks in comformity therewith, but strives not for another so to walk- then a lay-disciple helps on his own welfare, but not that of another.”

“And how, lord, does a lay-disciple help on both his own welfare and the welfare of another?”

“When indeed, Mhånåma, he has achieved faith himself and strives to compass faith in another; has achieved virtue himself... renunciation... longs to see monks... to hear Saddhamma... is mindful... reflects... when he knows both the letter and the spirit of Dhamma and walks in conformity therewith and strives to make another so to walk- then, Mahånåma, a lay-disciple helps on his own welfare and the welfare of another.”

It is the task of the monks to study and explain the Dhamma, but also lay-disciples should, each in their own way, help to explain the teachings and their application. This sutta can encourage all of us to study the Dhamma more, to consider the Dhamma more, and, even though we are beginners on the Path, to explain to others the development of satipaììhåna in daily life.

The householder Anåthapiùèika [[5]](#footnote-5) is an example of someone who was intent not only on the welfare of himself, but also on the welfare of others. He was a very rich merchant of Såvatthí who had presented the Jeta Grove to the Buddha. He developed satipaììhåna in his daily life and became a sotåpanna. We read in the “Gradual Sayings” (V, Book of the Tens, Ch X, § 3, View) that he preached Dhamma to Wandering ascetics who held other views. They spoke to him about their own views, about the world being eternal, not eternal, limited, not limited, views about the soul and the body, and other speculative views. We read that Anåthapiùèika answered:

“Sirs, when this or that worthy says: ‘I hold this view, housefather: Eternal is the world’- such view arises either from his own lack of close thinking, or it depends on the words of someone else. A view like this has become, is put together, thought out, has arisen dependent on something. Now whatever has become, is put together, thought out, has arisen dependent on something- that is impermanent. What is impermanent, that is dukkha. To what is dukkha that worthy clings; to what is dukkha that worthy resorts....”

Anåthapiùèika said the same about the other views. Thereupon the wanderers asked him to tell them about his own view. He answered:

“Sirs, whatsoever has become, is put together, is thought out, is dependent on something else, that is impermanent. What is impermanent, that is dukkha. What is dukkha, that is not of me, I am not that, not for me is that the self. Such is my own view, sirs.”

“Well, housefather, since you hold that whatsoever has become, put together... is impermanent, and since you hold that the impermanent is dukkha, then, housefather, you cling to dukkha, you make dukkha your resort.”

“Sirs, since whatsoever has become, whatsoever is put together, thought out, dependent on something else, is impermanent; since what is impermanent is dukkha; since what is dukkha is not of me, I am not that, not for me is that the self- thus is this matter well seen by me as it really is by right insight; and from that dukkha I have come to know the uttermost escape, as it really is.”

At these words the Wanderers kept silent, were confounded, hung the head, looked downward, were disappointed, sat unable to make reply.

Anåthapiùèika related his conversation with the wanderers to the Buddha and then the Buddha praised him. Afterwards the Buddha told the monks:

“Monks, any monk who had been fully ordained in this dhamma-discipline even for a hundred rain-seasons might reasonably from time to time confute and rebuke the Wanderers holding other views just as they have been confuted by the housefather Anåthapiùèika.”

When someone clings to speculative views it is only thinking, a nåma which is conditioned, impermanent, dukkha and non-self. When the wanderers tried to confuse Anåthapiùèika, telling him that he was clinging to what was dukkha, Anåthapiùèika explained that he did not take anything for self. Since he was a sotåpanna he understood the four noble Truths: dukkha, the origin of dukkha, the ceasing of dukkha and the way leading to the ceasing of dukkha. Thus he could say that he had come to know “the uttermost escape, as it really is”.

It is most beneficial to listen to anyone who can explain the Dhamma in the right way, be he monk or lay-follower. Dhamma is Dhamma, it is the truth of realities as explained by the Buddha. We should not cling to a particular person who explains the Dhamma, it is the Dhamma itself which is important.

People of all ranks and classes, even slaves who had to do a great deal of menial work, could develop satipaììhåna in daily life. We read in the “Stories of the Mansions” (Vimånavatthu, Khuddaka Nikåya, Minor Anthologies IV, Ch II, 1, Slave-woman’s Mansion, Dåsívimåna) about a slave-woman who developed insight and became a sotåpanna. We read in the “Commentary on the Vimåna Stories” (Paramattha-dípaní nåma Vimånavatthu-aììhakatha, commentary on Ch II, 1, Exposition of the Servant-girl Vimåna) that, when the Buddha was dwelling at the Jeta Grove, a householder who lived at Såvatthi listened to the Buddha and decided to give four constant supplies of food to the Order. He told his servant to be constantly diligent in this matter. We read:

She was by nature endowed with faith, desirous of merit and virtuous; therefore day in, day out, she would rise very early, prepare the choicest food and drink, thoroughly sweep the monks’ sitting-places, daub the floor-covering (of cow-dung), prepare the seats and, when the monks had arrived, would have them be seated there, salute them, worship them with scents, flowers, incense and lamps and then wait upon them with due care. Then one day when the monks had finished their meal she approached them, saluted them and then spoke thus, “Indeed how, sirs, is there complete release from the miseries of birth and so on?” Some monks gave her the Refuges and the Five Precepts and, making visible to her the true nature of the body, incited her as to recognition of its loathsomeness; others talked Dhamma-talk connected with impermanence. Keeping the precepts for sixteen years and properly striving time and again she one day gained the benefit of hearing Dhamma, developed vipassanå through the ripening of knowledge and realised the sotåpatti-fruit (fruition-consciousness of the sotåpanna).

She died not long afterwards and came into being as a favourite attendant of Sakka, Lord of Devas....

We read in the Story of the Slave-woman’s Mansion that Moggallåna saw the slave-woman as a deva, enjoying great bliss, and asked her the cause of her great beauty and the bliss she enjoyed. She answered:

When I was born a human being among men, a woman slave I was, a menial in a household, a lay-follower of the One with Vision, of Gotama widely famed.

With effort gained was I in the Dispensation of that steadfast one. Let this body break up as it may, herein is no relaxing (of effort).

The Way of the five rules of training, secure, auspicious, is said by the wise to be without a thorn, without a tangle, straight.

Behold the fruit of effort as achieved by a little woman. Companion of the king am I, of Sakka who is of the highhest power....

This slave-girl who had to do menial work gave us an example that for vipassanå we do not have to do anything special, that it is developed by being mindful of nåma and rúpa, no matter where and when. During the time someone is doing household chores there is the experience of tactile object through touch many times. At such moments there may be ignorance and forgetfulness, but sometimes there may be sati and paññå when there are conditions for their arising. The right conditions are listening to the Dhamma and right consideration of the Dhamma. When we touch something we may believe that it was there already for a long time, but from the Dhamma we learn that what is experienced through the bodysense is a rúpa which has arisen because of conditions and then falls away immediately. Hardness appears through the bodysense, but it falls away immediately. When it appears there can be mindfulness of it without thinking about it, and it can be understood as only a rúpa. When we think of this or that particular thing, such as a table, which is hard, it is a nåma which thinks, and it is due to the cetasika saññå, remembrance, that we recognize things and know how to use them. Hardness is an absolute reality, it has its own characteristic. Thinking and remembrance are absolute realities, they have their own characteristics. We do not have to name them when they appear; if there is direct awareness of them right understanding of their characteristics can gradually develop. The slave-girl we read about in the above-quoted sutta was not indolent but developed vipassanå with great patience and perseverance for many years. She was aware of realities over and over again so that the subsequent stages of vipassanå could arise and enlightenment be attained. We may have theoretical understanding of the fact that seeing is nåma and visible object is rúpa, that hearing is nåma and sound is rúpa, but it is necessary to develop right understanding of them when they appear at the present moment. When we stand, walk, take hold of a glass or saucepan, realities appear already, we do not have to go to a quiet place in order to be aware of nåma and rúpa.

We read in the “Middle Length Sayings” (III, no. 131, Discourse on the Auspicious) that the Buddha, while he was dwelling near Såvatthí in the Jeta Grove, said to the monks:

The past [[6]](#footnote-6) should not be followed after, the future not desired.

What is past is got rid of and the future has not come.

But whoever has vision [[7]](#footnote-7) now here, now there, of a present

dhamma,

Knowing that it is immovable, unshakable, let him cultivate it [[8]](#footnote-8).

Swelter at the task this very day. Who knows whether he will die

tomorrow?

There is no bargaining with the great hosts of Death.

Thus abiding ardently, unwearied day and night,

He indeed is “Auspicious” called, described as a sage at peace.

And how, monks, does one not follow after the past? He thinks: “Such was my rúpa ... my feeling... my perception (saññå)... my habitual tendencies (saòkhårakkhandha)... my consciousness in the distant past” and finds delight therein. Even so, monks, does one follow after the past.

The Buddha said that, if one does not find delight in the khandhas of the past, one does not follow after the past. Further on we read:

And how, monks, does one desire the future? He thinks: “May my rúpa... feeling... perception... habitual tendencies... consciousness be thus in the distant future” and finds delight therein. Even so, monks, does one desire the future.

We then read that he who does not cling to khandhas of the future does not desire the future. Further on we read:

And how, monks, is one drawn into present dhammas [[9]](#footnote-9)? As to this, monks, an uninstructed ordinary person, taking no count of the pure ones, unskilled in the dhamma of the pure ones... regards rúpa... feeling... perception... the habitual tendencies... consciousness as self or self as having consciousness or consciousness as in self or self as in consciousness. Even so, monks, is one drawn into present dhammas.

And how, monks, is one not drawn into present dhammas? As to this, monks, an instructed disciple of the pure ones, taking count of the pure ones, skilled in the dhamma of the pure ones, trained in the dhamma of the pure ones, taking count of the true men, skilled in the dhamma of the true men, trained in the dhamma of the true men, does not regard rúpa... feeling... perception... the habitual tendencies... consciousness as self or self as having consciousness or consciousness as in self or self as in consciousness. Even so, monks, is one not drawn into present dhammas....

Taking the five khandhas for self is “personality belief” (sakkåya diììhi) [[10]](#footnote-10). The sotåpanna has eradicated personality belief, and the only way leading to its eradication is mindfulness and right understanding of the dhamma appearing at the present moment. What is the dhamma appearing at the present moment? We read in “Mahåkaccåna’s Discourse on the Auspicious“ (Middle Length Sayings III, no. 133) that, after the Buddha spoke the verse, “The past should not be followed after, the future not desired...” to the monk Samiddhi, Kaccåna the Great explained the meaning in detail, by way of the twelve sense-fields, åyatanas [[11]](#footnote-11), namely: the five senses and the mind, and the objects experienced through the six doors. One may cling to the sense-fields of the past, of the future and of the present. He explained how one is not drawn into present dhammas:

...If, your reverences, there are at this present time both eyesense and visibile object... ear and sounds... nose and smells... tongue and flavours... body and tactile objects... mind and mental objects to which his consciousness is not bound fast by desire and attachment at this same present time, (then) because his consciousness is not bound fast by desire and attachment, he does not delight in them; not delighting in them, he is not drawn away among present dhammas. It is thus, your reverences, that one is not drawn into present dhammas.

Because of our accumulated ignorance we confuse visible object and seeing, sound and hearing, we cannot clearly distinguish their different characteristics when they appear. So long as we do not distinguish nåma and rúpa from each other we will not be able to realize their arising and falling away. Then we will continue to cling to the idea of beings or things which last. When there can be awareness of one reality at a time appearing through one doorway we will begin to understand the present moment.

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Chapter 6

The Four Applications of Mindfulness

We read in the “Kindred Sayings” (V, Mahå-vagga, Book III, Kindred Sayings on the Applications of Mindfulness, Ch I, § 1 Ambapålí) that the Buddha, while he was staying at Vesålí, in Ambapålí’s Grove, said to the monks:

This, monks, is the sole way that leads to the purification of beings, to the utter passing beyond sorrow and grief, to the destruction of woe and lamentation, to the winning of the Method [[12]](#footnote-12) , to realizing Nibbåna, to wit: the four applications of mindfulness. What four?

Herein, a monk dwells, as regards body (as transient), having overcome, in the world, covetousness and grief. He dwells, as regards feelings... as regards cittas... as regards dhammas, contemplating dhammas (as transient), ardent, composed and mindful, having overcome, in the world, covetousness and grief.

This, monks, is the sole way that leads to the purification of beings, to the utter passing beyond sorrow and grief, to the destruction of woe and lamentation, to the winning of the Method, to realizing Nibbåna, to wit: the four applications of mindfulness.

The four Applications of Mindfulness are: Mindfulness of Body, including all rúpas, Mindfulness of Feeing, Mindfulness of Citta and Mindfulness of Dhammas. “Dhammas” include here all realities which are not classified under the first three Applications of Mindfulness; they are realities classified under different aspects, such as the akusala cetasikas which are the five “hindrances”, the sobhana cetasikas which are the factors of enlightenment, the realities which are classified as the five khandhas or as the åyatanas, “sense-fields”, or the four noble Truths [[13]](#footnote-13). Thus, the four Applications of Mindfulness contain all realities which appear through the six doors of the senses and the mind and which can be objects of mindfulness. Whatever reality appears at the present moment can be object of mindfulness and right understanding.

The development of right understanding of realities, satipaììhåna, is the essence of the Buddha’s teaching. The four Applications of Mindfulness have been explained in detail in the “Satipaììhåna sutta”(Middle Length Sayings I, no 10) and the “Mahå-satipaììhåna sutta”(Dialogues of the Buddha II, no. 22), but also many other parts of the scriptures contain expositions of the teaching of satipaììhåna. Moreover, even when satipaììhåna is not explicitly mentioned, it is implied, because it is the only way leading to the eradication of defilements, which is the goal of the Buddha’s teachings.

When one reads about the monk who “dwells contemplating” body, feelings, cittas and dhammas, one may think that one has to sit and meditate about the objects of satipaììhåna. We read in the “Book of Analysis” (Ch 7, Analysis of the Foundation of Mindfulness, 195) a word exposition of “contemplating” and “dwells”:

“Contemplating”[[14]](#footnote-14) means: Therein what is contemplation? That which is wisdom, understanding, absence of dullness, truth investigation, right view. This is called contemplation. Of this contemplation he is possessed, well possessed, attained, well attained, endowed, well endowed, furnished. Therefore this is called “contemplating”.

“Dwells”[[15]](#footnote-15) means: Assumes the four postures, exists, protects, keeps going, maintains, turns about, dwells. Therefore this is called “dwells”.

As we see, “dwells” does not refer only to sitting, but to the four postures, namely, walking, sitting, standing and lying down. In daily life these four postures are assumed time and again. Thus, he “dwells contemplating” means: it is his habit to be aware in his daily life of the realities included in the “Four Applications of Mindfulness”.

We read in the above quoted sutta: ”having overcome in the world covetousness and grief”. The “Book of Analysis”, in the same section, explains the meaning of the “world”:

This same body is the world, also the five khandhas (as objects) of the attachments are the world.

The “world” includes all conditioned realities, nåmas and rúpas, which appear through the six doors. At the moment of mindfulness one is not attached to objects, there is no covetousness, nor is there grief or aversion. When there is mindfulness of whatever object presents itself, be it pleasant or unpleasant, there is no wish to flee from it or to go to a quiet place. However, some people feel that they are overwhelmed by defilements, especially when they are occupied with their daily tasks. They believe that they should calm the mind first before they develop vipassanå [[16]](#footnote-16). They wonder whether they should not apply the Buddha’s advice to dwell at the roots of a tree. It is true that we read for example in the “Middle Length Sayings” (I, no. 8, Discourse on Expunging) that the Buddha, while he was staying near Såvatthí, in the Jeta Grove, taught Dhamma to Cunda and after that said:

...These, Cunda, are the roots of trees, these are empty places. Meditate, Cunda; do not be slothful; be not remorseful later. This is our instruction to you.

The Buddha spoke such words to monks. The monk should not be attached to the company of people, he should live like an arahat. The Buddha did not tell all monks to live in the forest because forest life is not suitable for everyone; one has to endure hardship and discomfort. Those who had accumulations for living in the forest and for developing samatha, tranquil meditation, could do so, but the Buddha did not lay down any rule as to mental development. Some people had accumulated the skill and inclination to develop both samatha and vipassanå, whereas others developed only vipassanå. In the same sutta the Buddha explained to Cunda about the attainment of jhåna, the result of the development of samatha:

The situation occurs, Cunda, when a monk here, aloof from pleasures of the senses, aloof from unskilled states of mind, may enter on and abide in the first jhåna which is accompanied by initial thought and discursive thought [[17]](#footnote-17), is born of aloofness, and is rapturous and joyful. It may occur to him: “I fare along by expunging.” But these, Cunda, are not called expungings in the discipline for an ariyan; these are called “abidings in ease here-now” in the discipline for an ariyan.

The attainment of jhåna brings only temporary freedom from defilements, not the eradication of them. The Buddha spoke in a similar way about the higher stages of jhåna. After that the Buddha explained about restraint from all kinds of vices and defilements, about the development of wholesome qualities and the development of the eightfold Path. He taught the “disquisition on expunging...the disquisition on utter quenching”. Through samatha defilements can be temporarily subdued, wheras through insight they can eventually be completely eradicated.

There are many misunderstandings about the development of samatha. People want to have a peaceful mind, but they do not realize that this is attachment. They do not want to have aversion and worry, but they are ignorant of the disadvantages of attachment. It is attachment which conditions aversion. Even jhåna can be an object of clinging. We read in the “Middle Length Sayings” (III, 113, Discourse on the Good Man) that the Buddha, while he was staying near Såvatthí, in the Jeta Grove, spoke to the monks about dhamma of good men and dhamma of bad men. The “bad man” is proud of the fact that he is of a high family, of his fame, of the monk’s requisites he obtains. He exalts himself and disparages others because of these things, whereas the good man thinks of the goal of dhamma, does not exalt himself and does not disparage others. The bad man is proud of having heard much (of the teachings), of being an expert in Vinaya, a speaker on dhamma, a forest dweller, and he is proud of having attained jhåna. We read:

And again, monks, a bad man, aloof from pleasures of the senses, aloof from unskilled states of mind, enters on and abides in the first jhåna which is accompanied by initial thought and discursive thought, is born of aloofness, and is rapturous and joyful. He reflects thus: “I am an acquirer of the attainment of the first jhåna, but these other monks are not acquirers of the attainment of the first jhåna.” He exalts himself for that attainment of the first jhåna, disparages the others. This too, monks, is dhamma of a bad man. But a good man, monks, reflects thus: “Lack of desire even for the attainment of the first jhåna has been spoken of by the Lord; for whatever they imagine it to be, it is otherwise.” He, having made lack of desire itself the main thing, neither exalts himself on account of that attainment of the first jhåna nor disparages others. This, too, monks, is dhamma of a good man...

The same is stated about the higher stages of jhåna. The bad man who attains the highest stage of immaterial jhåna [[18]](#footnote-18), the plane of neither-perception-nor-non-perception[[19]](#footnote-19) exalts himself and disparages others. He cannot attain arahatship. The good man who attains the highest stage of immaterial jhåna is intent on detachment, he is not proud of his attainment. We read further on that the Buddha said:

And again, monks, a good man, by passing quite beyond the plane of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, enters on and abides in the stopping of perception and feeling [[20]](#footnote-20); and when he has seen by means of wisdom his cankers are caused to be destroyed. And, monks, this monk does not imagine he is aught or anywhere or in anything.... [[21]](#footnote-21)

This monk, who is a good man, will not be reborn, he has reached the end of the cycle of birth and death. When someone has accumulated the skill and the inclination to develop samatha to the degree of jhåna, he should not take jhånacitta for self and he should have no desire for jhåna. When jhånacitta arises it does so dependant on the appropriate conditions. He can be mindful of it in order to see it as it is, as non-self.

For the development of jhåna many conditions have to be fulfilled and one should know which are impediments to jhåna. We read in the “Gradual Sayings” (V, Book of the Tens, Ch VIII, § 2, The thorn) that the Buddha was staying near Vesalí in Great Grove, at the House with the Peaked Roof, together with a number of senior monks. A crowd of Licchavis who were riding in their cars made a great noise, dashing into Great Wood to visit the Lord. The monks who were staying with the Buddha remembered that the Buddha had said that noise is an obstacle to jhåna, and therefore they retreated to Gosinga Wood where they would be free from noise and crowds. The Buddha asked the other monks where those senior monks were gone and then they gave him the reason for their departure. The Buddha said to them:

Well said! Well said, monks! Those who should assert what those great disciples have asserted would rightly do so. Indeed, monks, I have said that noise is a thorn to jhåna [[22]](#footnote-22). There are these ten thorns. What ten?

To one who delights in seclusion delight in society is a thorn. To one devoted to concentration on the mark of the foul [[23]](#footnote-23), concentration on the fair is a thorn. To one guarding the doors of the sense-faculties the sight of shows is a thorn. To the Brahma-life consorting with women is a thorn. To the first jhåna sound is a thorn; to the second jhåna applied thought and sustained thought [[24]](#footnote-24); to the third zest [[25]](#footnote-25); to the fourth jhåna in-breathing and out-breathing is a thorn [[26]](#footnote-26). To the attainment of the stopping of perception and feeling, perception and feeling are a thorn. Lust, malice and delusion are thorns.

So, monks, do you abide thornless, do you abide thorn-removers, do you abide thornless thorn-removers. Monks, the thornless are arahats, the thornless thorn-removers are arahats.

In this sutta the Buddha speaks about conditions for different stages of jhåna, and after that he reminds the monks that attachment, aversion and ignorance are hindrances. He reminds them to become people without defilements, namely arahats. The way leading to the eradication of defilements is satipaììhåna.

We read in the sutta that sound is a “thorn” to jhåna. Sound is not an obstacle to the development of insight. Someone may find a loud noise distracting from awareness of nåma and rúpa, but he forgets that sound can be object of awareness. He did not choose to hear such a sound, it just arose because of the appropriate conditions and it was the right time for kamma to produce the vipåkacitta which heard that sound. We never know what object will present itself at a particular moment, realities do not belong to a self, they are beyond control. When we hear a loud noise aversion may arise, and that is another reality which arises because of conditions; there can be awareness of its characteristic so that it can be realized as non-self. We would like to ignore akusala, but we should face it with mindfulness and right understanding. If we are not mindful of akusala we will continue to take it for self and it will never be eradicated.

We read in the “Mahå-satipaììhåna sutta” (Dialogues of the Buddha, XXII) in the section on the fourth Application of Mindfulness, Mindfulness of Dhammas, that the monk has to see dhammas in dhammas. We read that he has to see “dhammas in dhammas from the point of view of the five hindrances”. These are the defilements of sensuous desire, ill-will or anger, sloth and torpor, agitation and worry, and doubt. He has to realize it when there is sensuous desire in him and when he has no sensuous desire, and it is the same with the other hindrances. We read:

...So does he, as to dhammas, continue to consider them, both internally or externally, or internally and externally together. He ever considers how a dhamma is something that comes to be, again he ever considers how a dhamma is something that passes away, or he ever considers their coming to be with their passing away....

Whenever defilements arise they should be seen as dhammas, conditioned realities. We read in the above-quoted sutta that a monk should consider the origination and passing away of dhammas, he should see the impermanence of conditioned dhammas. What falls away immediately cannot be owned by a self. We can understand this truth on a theoretical level, but when there is direct awareness of the dhamma which appears the truth can be understood more deeply. When defilements are realized as dhammas which are impermanent and non-self, one will not be disturbed by them; one can face them with right understanding.

Further on in the above-quoted sutta we read that a monk considers dhammas from the point of view of the five khandhas, of the “Six Internal and External Spheres of Sense” (åyatanas [[27]](#footnote-27)), of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment [[28]](#footnote-28) and of the four noble Truths. Under the section of the second noble Truth, the Truth of the origin of dukkha, which is craving, we read about all the objects of craving. The text states:

And what, monks, is the ariyan Truth concerning the coming to be of dukkha?

Even this craving, potent for rebirth, that is accompanied by lust and self-indulgence, seeking satisfaction now here, now there, namely, the craving for the life of sense, the craving for becoming (renewed life), and the craving for not becoming (for no rebirth).

Now this craving, monks, where does it arise, where does it have its dwelling? In those material things of this world which are dear to us, which are pleasant. There does craving arise, there does it dwell.

What things in this world are dear, what things are pleasant? The eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind- these are the things in this world that are dear, that are pleasant. There does craving arise, there does it dwell.

Visible object, sound, odour, flavour, tangible object and mind-object- these are the things in this world that are dear, that are pleasant. There does craving arise, there does it dwell.

Seeing-consciousness [[29]](#footnote-29), hearing-consciousness, smelling-consciousness, tasting-consciousness, body-consciousness and mind- consciousness- these are the things in this world that are dear, that are pleasant. There does craving arise, there does it dwell.

Eye-contact [[30]](#footnote-30), ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact and mind-contact- these are the things in this world that are dear, that are pleasant. There does craving arise, there does it dwell.

Feeling originating from eye-contact, feeling originating from ear-contact, feeling originating from nose-contact, feeling originating from tongue-contact, feeling originating from body-contact, and feeling originating from mind-contact- these are the things in this world that are dear, that are pleasant. There does craving arise, there does it dwell.

The remembrance [[31]](#footnote-31) of visible object, of sound, of odour, of flavour, of tangible object and of mental object- these are the things in this world that are dear, that are pleasant. There does craving arise, there does it dwell.

The same is said about intention (cetanå) concerned with the objects experienced through the six doors, craving for them, thinking [[32]](#footnote-32) about them, deliberating [[33]](#footnote-33) about them.

We cling to the world appearing through the six doors. Every kind of craving can be considered as dhamma, it is included in the fourth Application of Mindfulness. We cannot force ourselves to be detached from pleasant objects, clinging is a conditioned reality. Clinging arises and falls away, but if there is no sati we do not know that it is a conditioned reality which is impermanent and non-self. We may understand in theory that it makes no sense to cling since pleasant objects only last for a very short while, but we still cling to all objects. Even when insight has been developed to the degree that paññå realizes the arising and falling away of realities, clinging is not eradicated yet. The sotåpanna sees realities as impermanent and non-self, he has eradicated the wrong view of self; but he still has craving for pleasant objects, and therefore he has to continue to develop insight until arahatship is attained. Only then all forms of clinging are eradicated.

All the different sections of the “Mahå-satipaììhåna sutta” remind us that whatever reality presents itself can be object of awareness and right understanding. Right understanding can be developed in any situation, no matter whether someone is developing calm or whether he is enjoying pleasant things such as music or delicious food.

We read in the “Mahå-satipaììhåna sutta” in the section on the Application of Mindfulness of the Body about the Reflection on the Repulsiveness of the Body:

And moreover, monks, a monk reflects upon this very body, from the soles of his feet below upward to the crown of his head, as something enclosed in skin and full of various impurities:- “Here is in this body hair and down, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidney, heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs, stomach, bowels, intestines; excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, serum, saliva, mucus, synovic fluid, urine.”...

The repulsiveness of the parts of the body is a meditation subject of samatha which has as its aim to be less attached to the body. However, when we notice “parts of the body”, such as hair or nails, we can be reminded to develop insight in order to realize that what we take for “my body” are only elements which are impermanent and devoid of self. We read in the “Book of Analysis” (Ch 3, Analysis of the Elements, 82) about the element of solidity or hardness, here translated as “extension”:

Therein, what is the element of extension? The element of extension is twofold: It is internal; it is external. Therein what is internal element of extension? That which is personal, self-referable, hard, harsh, hardness, being hard, internal, grasped (by craving and false view). For example: head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin; flesh, sinews, bone, bone-marrow, kidneys; heart, liver, membraneous tissue, spleen, lungs; intestines, mesentery, undigested food, excrement; or whatever else there is, personal, self-referable, hard, harsh, hardness, being hard, internal, grasped. This is called internal element of extension....

It is then explained that the external element of extension is for example metal, stone or rock. The four Great Elements of solidity, cohesion, heat and motion are present in the body and also in material phenomena outside. Hardness of the body is the same as hardness of a rock, hardness is a paramattha dhamma, a rúpa with its own unchangeable characteristic. When hardness appears there can be awareness and right understanding of it as an element which is not “mine” or “self”.

In the “Mahå-satipaììhåna sutta”, after the section on the “Parts of the Body”, it is said that the monk should dwell contemplating the arising and falling away of dhammas, and this is repeated after each section of the Applications of Mindfulness. Hair, nails and teeth are concepts we can think of, but they consists of rúpas which each have their own characteristic. Rúpa, the reality which does not know anything, is different from nåma, the reality which experiences something. The characteristics of nåma and rúpa have to be clearly distinguished from each other, not by theoretical understanding, but by insight, direct understanding, which has to be developed through awareness time and again. If nåma and rúpa are not clearly distinguished from each other, their arising and falling away, their impermanence, cannot be realized and we will continue to cling to the wrong view of self.

Some people believe that the teaching of the four Applications of Mindfulness implies a particular order of objects of mindfulness; they believe that when someone is mindful of the objects included in Mindfulness of the Body, he is only aware of rúpa, not of nåma. However, there is no particular order of objects of mindfulness, it all depends on conditions which object presents itself at a particular moment. If there would be awareness of rúpa, but not of nåma, one would not really understand the characteristic of rúpa as completely different from the characteristic of nåma. Time and again, we notice parts of the body and also at such moments there are nåmas and rúpas which can be objects of mindfulness. The Buddha taught the four Applications of Mindfulness in order to remind us to be aware of rúpa, of feelings, of cittas, of dhammas, which include all realities other than those mentioned under the first three sections. At one moment there may be mindfulness of hardness, and at another moment mindfulness of feeling, which may be pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent, or mindfulness of the citta which experiences hardness, or mindfulness of aversion or attachment. There is time and again a reality impinging on one of the six doors. If there is right understanding of the objects of mindfulness, we can learn to be aware of one reality at a time, either a nåma or a rúpa. In that way their different characteristics can gradually be understood.

1. See Ch 3, where I quoted from Book of Discipline IV, Mahå-vagga, 9-14). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Dictionary of Påli Proper Names, by Malalasekera, P.T.S. This dictionary in two volumes gives us the details of the lives of the persons we read about in the suttas, with all the references to the corresponding parts of the scriptures. It also gives us the contents in brief of the suttas under their Påli titles. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In Påli: saddhå, which has the meaning of confidence in wholesomeness. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. True Dhamma. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See for his story the Vinaya, V, Cullavagga, 6, on Lodgings, from 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The commentary, the Papañcasúdaní, explains: the khandhas of the past. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. vipassati, that is, discerns with insight. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In the translation of this sutta, in the “Wheel” no. 188, B.P.S. Sri Lanka, with the title “Ideal Solitude”, “immovable” has been explained as the stable nature of the emancipated mind. The translation has here: The Immovable- the non-irritable. In that state should the wise one grow. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The P.T.S. translation has: “drawn away among present things”, but I prefer the Wheel translation: “drawn into present things”. However, instead of “things” I retained the Påli: dhammas. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Ch 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Ch 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In Påli: ñåya, translated as “the right path” in “The Way of Mindfulness”, the satipaììhåna sutta and commentary, by Soma Thera, B.P.S. Sri Lanka. The Commentary to the satipììhåna sutta, the Papañcasúdaní, states: “The real eightfold Path is called the right path.“ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The realities included in the fourth Application of Mindfulness will be dealt with further on in this chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In Påli: anupassí. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. In Påli: viharati. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Vol. I, Ch 7, where I dealt with this question. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. These are the jhånafactors of vitakka and vicåra which “think” of the meditation subject and which are still present in the first stage of jhåna. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Arúpa-jhåna. Fine-material jhåna or rúpa-jhåna has meditation subjects which are still connected with materiality, whereas immaterial jhåna, arúpa-jhåna, has meditation subjects which are no longer connected with materiality. Arúpa-jhåna is more refined, more subtle than rúpa-jhåna. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Visuddhimagga Ch X. Citta and cetasikas are present , but they are very subtle and peaceful. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Only the ariyans who have developed both insight and samatha up to the highest stage of arúpa-jhåna and who have reached the stage of enlightenment of the anagåmí, non-returner, or the stage of the arahat can attain the stopping of perception and feeling, the temporary suspension of perception and feeling. See Visuddhimagga XXIII, 16-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. He has eradicated all forms of conceit. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Here jhåna is translated as “musing”. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Those who have as meditation subject the foulness of the body should be aware of its foulness or loathsomeness, they should not see any beauty in it. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. In order to attain the second stage of jhåna, the jhåna-factors vitakka, applied thought, and vicåra, sustained thought, which are still needed in the first stage of jhåna, have to be abandoned. In comparison to the first jhåna where vitakka and vicåra are still necessary in order to concentrate on the meditation subject, the second stage of jhåna is more refined. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. In order to attain the third stage of jhåna, the jhåna-factor zest,píti, has to be abandoned. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. In the fourth stage of jhåna breathing has stopped. See “Middle Length Sayings” I, no. 44, where Dhammadinnå explains to Visåkha about the stopping of vitakka and vicåra, the stopping of activity of body, explained as breathing, and the stopping of activity of mind, namely perception and feeling, according as higher stages of jhåna have been attained. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The five senses and the mind, and the objects experienced through the senses and the mind. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Mindfulness, investigation of Dhamma, energy, joy, calm, concentration and equanimity. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The P.T.S. translates: the thoughts that arise through sight, but the Påli text has: cakkhu-viññåùa. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The cetasika which is contact, phassa. It contacts the object which presents itself through one of the six doors; it is a condition for citta to experience that object. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Saññå, which is translated as remembrance or perception. It is a cetasika accompanying each citta, and its function is remembering or recognizing an object, or “marking” it, so that it can be recognized. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. vitakka, applied thought. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. vicåra, sustained thought. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)