Satipaṭṭhāna and Samādhi

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Short Abstract:

Ajahn Brahmali investigates the relationship between mindfulness and stillness.

One of the most common unquestioned assumptions among Buddhist meditators is that satipaṭṭhāna is synonymous with vipassanā. This assumption, it seems, often is a result of reading the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas in isolation without carefully considering the context in which satipaṭṭhāna is used throughout the suttas. When the broader view of the entire Sutta Piṭaka is taken into account, it becomes clear that such an assumption is, at best, only partially correct. In this short study I will investigate the various contexts in which satipaṭṭhāna appear and in particular consider its relationship with samādhi.

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Introduction

One of the most common unquestioned assumptions among Buddhist meditators is that satipaṭṭhāna is synonymous with vipassanā. This assumption, it seems, often is a result of reading the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas[[1]](#footnote-2) in isolation without carefully considering the context in which satipaṭṭhāna is used throughout the suttas. When the broader view of the entire Sutta Piṭaka is taken into account, it becomes clear that such an assumption is, at best, only partially correct.[[2]](#footnote-3) In this short study I will investigate the various contexts in which satipaṭṭhāna appear and in particular consider its relationship with samādhi.[[3]](#footnote-4)

Samādhi and the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas

The Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas are often understood as being only concerned with vipassanā meditation. But there is nothing intrinsic to the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas that allows one to conclude thus. Indeed, there are several aspects of these suttas that point to satipaṭṭhāna also being concerned with samatha and samādhi, calm and stillness.

The first of these aspects is the inclusion of the first tetrad of the Ānāpānasati Sutta in the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas.

Ānāpānasati is usually regarded as a samādhi practice, and there seems to be no reason why it should be regarded otherwise here.[[4]](#footnote-5) Moreover, the Ānāpānasati Sutta states that each of its four tetrads fulfils each of the four satipaṭṭhānas.[[5]](#footnote-6) It then concludes:

“Bhikkhus, that is how mindfulness of breathing, when developed and cultivated, fulfils the four satipaṭṭhānas.”[[6]](#footnote-7)

And it is not only the ānāpānasati part of the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas which relates to samādhi. The cemetery contemplations, for example, are elsewhere specifically said to be samādhi practices:

“And, monks, what is the effort of guarding? Here, monks, a monk guards a favourable object of samādhi which is present in him: the perception of a skeleton, the perception of a worm-infested corpse, the perception of a livid corpse, the perception of a festering corpse, the perception of a fissured corpse, the perception of a bloated corpse.”[[7]](#footnote-8)

Indeed, it seems that all the satipaṭṭhāna practices have a samādhi aspect. Take the standard passage which concludes each exercise of the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas:

“In this way he contemplates an aspect of the body internally, or he contemplates an aspect of the body externally, or he contemplates an aspect of the body … feelings … mind … phenomena internally and externally.”[[8]](#footnote-9)

Then consider the following passage which relates the internal contemplation directly to samādhi:

“Here a monk contemplates an aspect of the body internally, energetic, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed desire and aversion for the world. Contemplating an aspect of the body … feelings … mind … phenomena internally, he is rightly stilled (sammā samādhiyati), rightly purified.”[[9]](#footnote-10)

Satipaṭṭhāna and Samādhi Outside of the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas

The above should be sufficient to at least suggest that samādhi is an integral part of satipaṭṭhāna. However, to be able to make a strong case for this relationship, and to consider in more detail what it involves, it is necessary to look beyond the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas to the broader use of satipaṭṭhāna in the Sutta Piṭaka.

In the threefold division of the Buddhist Path, into sīla (virtue), samādhi, and paññā (wisdom), satipaṭṭhāna is classified under samādhi, not under paññā:

“Right effort, right mindfulness (satipaṭṭhāna),[[10]](#footnote-11) and right samādhi (the jhānas)[[11]](#footnote-12)—these states are included in the category of samādhi. Right view and right intention—these qualities are included in the category of wisdom.”[[12]](#footnote-13)

If satipaṭṭhāna were equivalent or closely related to vipassanā rather than samādhi, would it not be included in the category of wisdom rather than the category of samādhi?[[13]](#footnote-14)

The most important relationship between satipaṭṭhāna and samādhi that emerges from a broad reading of the suttas is that the practice of satipaṭṭhāna leads to samādhi:[[14]](#footnote-15)

“The four satipaṭṭhānas are the bases of samādhi.”[[15]](#footnote-16)

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“The repetition, development, and cultivation of these same qualities (satipaṭṭhāna and right effort) is the development of samādhi.”[[16]](#footnote-17)

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“ ‘I will contemplate an aspect of the body … feelings … mind … phenomena,[[17]](#footnote-18) energetic, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed desire and aversion for the world.’ It is in this way, monk, that you should train.

“When, monk, this samādhi has been developed and made much of in this way, you should develop this samādhi with initial and sustained application, you should develop it without initial application but with a remainder of sustained application, you should develop it without initial and sustained application, you should develop it with rapture, you should develop it with comfort, you should develop it with equanimity.”[[18]](#footnote-19)

The last part, “initial and sustained application ... with equanimity,” is a reference to the jhānas.[[19]](#footnote-20) Note how satipaṭṭhāna practice is first called “this samādhi” and then said to lead on to the jhānas.

“So too, monks, here some foolish, incompetent, unskilful monk contemplates an aspect of the body, energetic, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed desire and aversion for the world. While he contemplates an aspect of the body, his mind does not become stilled (samādhiyati) ...

“So too, monks, here some wise, competent, skilful monk contemplates an aspect of the body, energetic, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed desire and aversion for the world. While he contemplates an aspect of the body … feelings … mind … phenomena, his mind becomes stilled (samādhiyati)…

“That wise, competent, skilful monk gains pleasant dwellings in this very life, and he gains mindfulness and clear comprehension.”[[20]](#footnote-21)

The phrase “pleasant dwellings in this very life” is a common synonym in the suttas for the four jhānas.[[21]](#footnote-22)

Thus a pattern emerges whereby the four satipaṭṭhānas constitute the practice and development of samādhi, eventually leading to the four jhānas, sammāsamādhi. This relationship between the satipaṭṭhānas and samādhi is in fact made very explicit in the suttas:

“It is indeed to be expected, venerable sir, that a noble disciple who has faith, energy, and mindfulness, will gain samādhi, will gain one-pointedness of mind, when he has created a foundation through relinquishment. That samādhi of his, venerable sir, is his faculty of samādhi.”[[22]](#footnote-23)

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“For one of right mindfulness (satipaṭṭhāna), sammāsamādhi (the jhānas) springs up.”[[23]](#footnote-24)

Satipaṭṭhāna and Vipassanā

The above survey presents the most important evidence on the context in which satipaṭṭhāna occurs throughout the suttas. Having thus shown that the usual purpose of satipaṭṭhāna is the attainment of samādhi, it is necessary to consider the relationship between satipaṭṭhāna and vipassanā.

Firstly, it should be noted that the prevalence of a direct link between satipaṭṭhāna and samādhi does not necessarily mean that satipaṭṭhāna is all about samatha meditation. Rather, it means that, whether one practices samatha or vipassanā, in both cases the purpose of satipaṭṭhāna is the attainment of samādhi.

Secondly, the question arises as to what happens after samādhi: is there such a thing as post-samādhi satipaṭṭhāna, and if so, what does it involve? In this context it is important to note that a number of suttas make it clear that satipaṭṭhāna practice can take one all the way to the end of the Buddhist Path, for example:

“Bhikkhus, these four satipaṭṭhānas, when developed and cultivated, are noble and liberating; they lead one who acts upon them to the complete destruction of suffering.”[[24]](#footnote-25)

For satipaṭṭhāna to be able to take one to full awakening, it seems required that it must include post-samādhi vipassanā, i.e. deep insight.[[25]](#footnote-26) But a direct relationship between satipaṭṭhāna and vipassanā is never explicitly mentioned in the suttas.[[26]](#footnote-27) To establish such a link it is necessary to broaden the inquiry to include other terms that also signify insight, such as ñāṇa, dassana, and yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana. This broadened inquiry brings to light the following interesting passage:

“Come, friends, contemplate an aspect of the body … feelings … mind … phenomena, energetic, clearly comprehending, unified, serene, stilled, with one-pointed mind, in order to know the body according to reality (yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa).”[[27]](#footnote-28)

Note how this passage differs significantly from the standard satipaṭṭhāna formula found almost everywhere else. It is two differences in particular that are important in the context of this study: Firstly, the insight aspect relates to the deep insights of seeing reality as it actually is (yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa); secondly, using a string of related terms—unified, serene, stilled, with one-pointed mind—the passage puts a strong emphasis on samādhi. The implication is that satipaṭṭhāna should be practiced for the purpose of deep insight only after samādhi has been achieved.[[28]](#footnote-29) It thus seems clear that there is such a thing as post-samādhi satipaṭṭhāna and that its purpose is deep insight.[[29]](#footnote-30)

Two Stages of Satipaṭṭhāna

From the above it emerges that satipaṭṭhāna normally should be considered as a practice leading to samādhi and under special circumstances as a practice leading to deep insight. Furthermore, it appears that these two aspects of satipaṭṭhāna can be divided into two quite distinct stages. In accordance with the natural progression of meditation practice,[[30]](#footnote-31) the first stage of satipaṭṭhāna is about attaining samādhi. Once samādhi has been achieved (i.e. the necessary condition for deep insight is in place), the mind is equipped to uncover the true nature of the five aspects of personality[[31]](#footnote-32) and realise the successive stages of awakening. This is the second stage of satipaṭṭhāna. Such a two-stage division of satipaṭṭhāna is in fact explicitly described in the suttas:

“... so these four focuses of mindfulness (satipaṭṭhāna) are the bindings for the mind of the noble disciple in order to subdue his habits from lay life, to subdue his distress, fatigue, and fever from lay life, and in order that he may attain the true way and realise extinguishment (nibbāna).

“Then the Tathāgata trains him further: ‘Come, bhikkhu, contemplate an aspect of the body … feelings … mind … phenomena, but do not think thoughts of sense desire.’ ”[[32]](#footnote-33)

Here the first stage of satipaṭṭhāna serves the purpose of abandoning refined hindrances.[[33]](#footnote-34) This is part of the path leading to samādhi. The second stage of satipaṭṭhāna is here characterised by sense desire having been abandoned, something suggesting that samādhi has been attained.[[34]](#footnote-35)

Conclusion

Almost all sutta passages that deal with the place of satipaṭṭhāna in the broader scheme of the Buddhist path, show that satipaṭṭhāna is a condition for samādhi. It must therefore be concluded that the main purpose of satipaṭṭhāna is to bring the mind to samādhi. This result is important because it contradicts the common misunderstanding that satipaṭṭhāna is only concerned with vipassanā.

The second important conclusion that can be drawn from the above discussion is that satipaṭṭhāna as a deep insight practice, leading to insight into the true nature of the aspects of personality (khandhas), only begins after samādhi has been attained. This conclusion is in line with a common theme in the suttas:

“When there is right stillness (sammāsamādhi), for one who has right stillness, the cause is in place for knowledge and vision of things according to reality (yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana).”[[35]](#footnote-36)

References

Abbreviations

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| AN | Aṅguttara Nikāya. References are to chapter (nipāta) number and *sutta* number as in Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation. |
| DN | Dīgha Nikāya. References are to *sutta* number, section number (only for some *suttas*), and paragraph number as in Maurice Walshe’s translation. |
| MN | Majjhima Nikāya. References are to *sutta* number and paragraph number as in Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation. |
| SN | Saṁyutta Nikāya. References are to chapter (saṁyutta) number and sutta number as Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation. |

1. “The Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas” is a reference to [DN 22](https://suttacentral.net/) and [MN 10](https://suttacentral.net/) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. I follow the advice given in the four great standards, [DN 16:4.8.1–4.11.15](https://suttacentral.net/), which is to use only the word of the Buddha as the final authority in settling controversial points of Dhamma. For the purposes of this paper, I take the following parts of the Pali Canon as the word of the Buddha: The Dīgha Nikāya (DN), the Majjhima Nikāya (MN), the Saṁyutta Nikāya (SN), and the Aṅguttara Nikāya (AN). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Whenever samādhi is used on its own in the suttas, it almost always includes the four jhānas. Moreover, although other types of samādhi are mentioned in the Pali Canon, by far the most common type of samādhi is the four jhānas. Thus, in this paper, whenever I use the term samādhi, I mainly refer to the four jhānas. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. The first three tetrads of the Ānāpānasati Sutta are generally understood (also by the Commentary) to be samādhi practices. Moreover, the suttas contain phrases such as ānāpānasati-samādhi, “concentration through mindfulness of breathing,” e.g. at [SN 54.7](https://suttacentral.net/). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. See [MN 118:23.1–28.1](https://suttacentral.net/). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Evaṁ bhāvitā kho, bhikkhave, ānāpānassati evaṁ bahulīkatā cattāro satipaṭṭhāne paripūreti. [MN 118:28.1](https://suttacentral.net/).

   Depending on availability and suitability, I use either Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translations or supply my own. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Katamañca, bhikkhave, anurakkhaṇāppadhānaṁ? Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu uppannaṁ bhaddakaṁ samādhinimittaṁ anurakkhati aṭṭhikasaññaṁ puḷavakasaññaṁ vinīlakasaññaṁ vicchiddakasaññaṁ uddhumātakasaññaṁ. [AN 4.14:4.1–4.2](https://suttacentral.net/) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Iti ajjhattaṁ vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati, bahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati, ajjhattabahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati. Iti ajjhattaṁ vā vedanāsu vedanānupassī … citte cittānupassī … dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati, bahiddhā vā dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati, ajjhatta-bahiddhā vā dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati. [MN 10:5.1–5.2, 7.1–7.2, 9.1–9.2, 11.1–11.2, 13.1–13.2, 15.1–15.2, 17.1–17.2, 25.1–25.2, 31.1–31.2, 33.1–33.2, 35.1–35.2, 37.1–37.2, 39.1–39.2, 41.1–41.2, 43.1–43.2, 45.1–45.2](https://suttacentral.net/)

   The inclusion of the arising and passing away section immediately after the above might be taken to mean that this is all about insight. However, it seems that the initial part on contemplating internally and externally can be done independently of the contemplation of arising and passing away, see e.g. [DN 18:26.4–26.16](https://suttacentral.net/). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Idha bho bhikkhu ajjhattaṁ kāye kāyānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhā domanassaṁ. Ajjhattaṁ kāye kāyānupassī … vedanāsu vedanānupassī … citte cittānupassī … dhammesu dhammānupassī viharanto tattha sammā samādhiyati sammā vippasīdati. [DN 18:26.7, 26.9, 26.11, 26.14](https://suttacentral.net/)

   Rightly concentrated, sammā-samādhiyati, refers to the jhānas. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Right mindfulness, sammāsati, is always defined as the four satipaṭṭhānas; see e.g. [SN 45.8:9.1–9.6](https://suttacentral.net/). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Sammāsamādhi, right stillness, is always defined as the four jhānas, see e.g. [SN 45.8:10.1–10.6](https://suttacentral.net/). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Yo ca sammā-vāyāmo yā ca sammā-sati yo ca sammā- samādhi, ime dhammā samādhikkhandhe saṅgahitā; yā ca sammā-diṭṭhi yo ca sammā-saṅkappo, ime dhammā paññākkhandhe saṅgahitā ti. [MN 44:11.4–11.5](https://suttacentral.net/) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. That vipassanā and wisdom are closely related is shown by a passage which states that when vipassanā is developed, wisdom is developed: Vipassanā, bhikkhave, bhāvitā kamatthamanubhoti? [AN 2.31](https://suttacentral.net/) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. I use “satipaṭṭhāna leads to samādhi” and “satipaṭṭhāna is a samādhi practice” synonymously. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Cattāro satipaṭṭhāne samādhi-nimittā. [MN 44:12.3](https://suttacentral.net/) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Yā tesaṁyeva dhammānaṁ āsevanā bhāvanā bahulīkammaṁ, ayaṁ ettha samādhibhāvanā. [MN 44:12.5](https://suttacentral.net/) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. i.e. the four satipaṭṭhānas. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Kāye kāyānupassī … vedanāsu vedanānupassī … citte cittānupassī … dhammesu dhammānupassī viharissāmi ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhā-domanassanti. Evañhi te, bhikkhu, sikkhitabbaṁ.

    Yato kho te, bhikkhu, ayaṁ samādhi evaṁ bhāvito hoti bahulīkato, tato tvaṁ, bhikkhu, imaṁ samādhiṁ savitakkasavicārampi bhāveyyāsi, avitakkavicāramattampi bhāveyyāsi, avitakkaavicārampi bhāveyyāsi, sappītikampi bhāveyyāsi, nippītikampi bhāveyyāsi, sātasahagatampi bhāveyyāsi, upekkhāsahagatampi bhāveyyāsi. [AN 8.63:3.1](https://suttacentral.net/) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. The various qualities listed are the defining characteristics of the jhānas, see g. [MN 51:20.1–23.1](https://suttacentral.net/). The samādhi with initial and sustained application is the first jhāna. The samādhi without initial but with a remainder of sustained application is mentioned in the suttas only rarely and it falls between the first and the second jhāna. The samādhi without initial and sustained application is the second jhāna or above. The samādhi without rapture refers to third jhāna and above, and so does the samādhi with comfort; comfort (sāta) here being a synonym for happiness (sukha). The samādhi with equanimity refer to the fourth jhāna and beyond. That the four jhānas are meant here is also supported by the Commentary; see Aṅguttara Nikāya Commentary vol. IV, p.142, l. 9-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Evameva kho, bhikkhave, idhekacco bālo abyatto akusalo bhikkhu kāye kāyānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṁ. Tassa kāye kāyānupassino viharato cittaṁ na samādhiyati … vedanāsu … citte … dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṁ. Tassa dhammesu dhammānupassino viharato cittaṁ na samādhiyati…

    Evameva kho, bhikkhave, idhekacco paṇḍito byatto kusalo bhikkhu kāye kāyānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṁ. Tassa kāye kāyānupassino viharato cittaṁ samādhiyati … vedanāsu … citte … dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṁ. Tassa dhammesu dhammānupassino viharato cittaṁ samādhiyati…

    Sa kho so, bhikkhave, paṇḍito byatto kusalo bhikkhu lābhī ceva hoti diṭṭheva dhamme sukhavihārānaṁ, lābhī hoti satisampajaññassa. [SN 47.8:3.4–4.3, 7.1–8.3](https://suttacentral.net/) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Katamā ca, bhikkhave, samādhibhāvanā bhāvitā bahulīkatā diṭṭhadhammasukhavihārāya saṁvattati? Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu vivicceva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṁ savicāraṁ vivekajaṁ pītisukhaṁ paṭhamaṁ jhānaṁ upasampajja viharati. Vitakkavicārānaṁ vūpasamā ajjhattaṁ sampasādanaṁ cetaso ekodibhāvaṁ avitakkaṁ avicāraṁ samādhijaṁ pītisukhaṁ dutiyaṁ jhānaṁ upasampajja viharati. Pītiyā ca virāgā upekkhako ca vihāsiṁ, sato ca sampajāno sukhañca kāyena patisamvedeti; yaṁ taṁ ariyā ācikkhanti— ‘upekkhako satimā sukhavihārī’ti tatiyaṁ jhānaṁ upasampajja viharati. Sukhassa ca pahānā dukkhassa ca pahānā pubbeva somanassadomanassānaṁ atthaṅgamā adukkhamasukhaṁ upekkhāsatipārisuddhiṁ catutthaṁ jhānaṁ upasampajja viharati. e.g. [AN 4.41:2.1–2.3](https://suttacentral.net/). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Saddhassa hi, bhante, ariya-sāvakassa āraddha-vīriyassa upaṭṭhitassatino etaṁ pāṭikaṅkhaṁ yaṁ vossagg’ārammaṇaṁ karitvā labhissati samādhiṁ, labhissati cittassa ekaggataṁ. Yo hi’ssa, bhante, samādhi tad-assa samādh’indriyaṁ. [SN 48.50:4.1–4.2](https://suttacentral.net/)

    The sati faculty is normally understood to be the four satipaṭṭhānas and the samādhi faculty the four jhānas, see [SN 48.8:1.10–1.15](https://suttacentral.net/). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Sammā-satissa sammā-samādhi pahotī ti. [SN 45.1](https://suttacentral.net/); and also [AN 10.103](https://suttacentral.net/), [AN 10.105](https://suttacentral.net/), [AN 10.121](https://suttacentral.net/). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Cattāro me bhikkhave satipatthānā bhāvitā bahulīkatā ariyā niyyānikā niyyanti takkarassa sammā-dukkhakkhayāya. [SN 47.17](https://suttacentral.net/); and also [SN 47.11](https://suttacentral.net/), [SN 47.27](https://suttacentral.net/), [SN 47.32](https://suttacentral.net/), [SN 47.34](https://suttacentral.net/), [SN 47.37](https://suttacentral.net/), [SN 47.38](https://suttacentral.net/), [SN 47.50](https://suttacentral.net/). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. By deep insight I mean insight into the five khandhas as being affected by the three characteristics; i.e. insight that is capable of giving rise to the four stages of awakening. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. In fact vipassanā is not a very common word in the suttas, at least not compared to satipaṭṭhāna and particularly not compared to samādhi. It is mainly used in the following contexts.

    I. Its most frequent use by far is as a pair with samatha. In this usage the meaning seems to have a rather broad range and is never specifically related to satipaṭṭhāna. See [DN 33:1.9.26](https://suttacentral.net/), [DN 34:1.3.6](https://suttacentral.net/), [MN 73:18.1–18.2](https://suttacentral.net/), [MN 149:10.10](https://suttacentral.net/), [MN 151:19.2](https://suttacentral.net/), [SN 35.245:9.6](https://suttacentral.net/), [SN 41.6:10.6](https://suttacentral.net/), [SN 43.2:1.7](https://suttacentral.net/), [SN 45.159:2.13](https://suttacentral.net/), [AN 2.31:1.3](https://suttacentral.net/), [AN 2.172](https://suttacentral.net/), [AN 2.310:1.3](https://suttacentral.net/), and [AN 4.254:4.2](https://suttacentral.net/). On a few occasions samatha and vipassanā form a pair within a longer list of qualities, e.g. at [MN 43:14.3](https://suttacentral.net/) and [AN 4.147:1.3](https://suttacentral.net/).

    II.Vipassanā is occasionally used in the phrase vipassanāya samannāgato, “possessed of insight.” Again, it is not explicitly related to satipaṭṭhāna. See [MN 6:3.1–6.1, 18.2–19.2](https://suttacentral.net/), [MN 32:5.6, 12.7, 12.11](https://suttacentral.net/), and [AN 10.71](https://suttacentral.net/).

    III. On a couple of occasions vipassanā occurs outside of these contexts. At [AN 2.31:1.8–1.9](https://suttacentral.net/) wisdom is said to be developed through developing vipassanā; at [SN 43.12:2.6–2.8](https://suttacentral.net/), among a large number of other qualities, vipassanā is said to lead to freedom from conditioned phenomena; at [AN 4.170](https://suttacentral.net/) vipassanā is said to be developed before, after, or together with samatha.

    IV. Vipassanā is also found in a few compounds. At [AN 4.92](https://suttacentral.net/), [AN 4.93](https://suttacentral.net/), [AN 4.94](https://suttacentral.net/), [AN 9.4:6.1–7.1, 8.9–8.18](https://suttacentral.net/), and [AN 10.54:2.1–6.2](https://suttacentral.net/) we find the compound adhipaññā-dhamma-vipassanāya, “insight into things relating to the higher wisdom,” and at [MN 111:2.8](https://suttacentral.net/) anupada-dhamma-vipassanā, “step by step insight into things.”

    V. Finally, occasionally one finds the verbal form vipassati, e.g. [DN 32:3.19](https://suttacentral.net/) and [MN 131:3.6, 10.6](https://suttacentral.net/), [MN 132:3.7, 10.6](https://suttacentral.net/), [MN 133:5.6, 7.8, 20.14](https://suttacentral.net/), [MN 134:3.6, 7.6, 14.6](https://suttacentral.net/).

    In all the above there is no obvious linkage between vipassanā and satipaṭṭhāna. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Etha tumhe, āvuso, kāye kāyānupassino viharatha ātāpino sampajānā ekodibhūtā vippasannacittā samāhitā ekaggacittā, kāyassa yathābhūtaṁ ñāṇāya; vedanāsu … citte … dhammesu dhammānupassino viharatha ātāpino sampajānā ekodibhūtā vippasannacittā samāhitā ekaggacittā, dhammānaṁ yathābhūtaṁ ñāṇāya. [SN 47.4:2.3–2.6](https://suttacentral.net/) [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. I. The various terms signifying samādhi are adjectives to kāyānupassino. The meaning is therefore that one should dwell contemplating the body (etc.) after these qualities, i.e. samādhi, have been established.

    II. That satipaṭṭhāna as a deep insight practice only begins after samādhi has been attained is not surprising. In the suttas it is always samādhi which is the condition for yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana, e.g.: sammāsamādhimhi asati sammāsamādhi-vipannassa hat’ūpanisaṁ hoti yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassanaṁ, “when right samādhi is not existing, for one failing in right samādhi, the cause is destroyed for knowledge and vision of things as they really are;” [AN 10.3:1.7, 2.7](https://suttacentral.net/). See also [AN 10.103](https://suttacentral.net/), [AN 10.105](https://suttacentral.net/), and [AN 10.121](https://suttacentral.net/).

    This relationship between samādhi and yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa- dassana may also explain why a direct link between satipaṭṭhāna and insight is so rarely expressed in the suttas. It seems likely that after samādhi yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana is used in place of satipaṭṭhāna so as to indicate more precisely what is happening at this stage. Elsewhere, e.g. [MN 117:34.3](https://suttacentral.net/), sammā-ñāṇa is used in a similar way. Yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana may thus be regarded as a subset and a specialised aspect of satipaṭṭhāna.

    [MN 64:9.1–16.2](https://suttacentral.net/) gives a clear example of the sort of insight practice that comes after samādhi: after emerging from the jhānas one is to reflect on them as being affected by the three characteristics. Although satipaṭṭhāna is never mentioned, this practice would seem to fall squarely within cittānupassanā, “contemplation of the mind.” [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. It should also be noted that although the emphasis of satipaṭṭhāna is on vipassanā at this stage, this does not preclude satipaṭṭhāna from being helpful for the further development of samādhi And the deeper the samādhi the more powerful the subsequent vipassanā practice will be. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. i.e., that samādhi is a precondition for deep insight. See Conclusion below. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. i.e., the five khandhas, the standard analysis in the suttas of a living being. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Evameva kho, aggivessana, ariyasāvakassa ime cattāro satipaṭṭhānā cetaso upanibandhanā honti gehasitānañceva sīlānaṁ abhinimmadanāya gehasitānañceva sarasaṅkappānaṁ abhinimmadanāya gehasitānañceva darathakilamathapariḷāhānaṁ abhinimmadanāya ñāyassa adhigamāya nibbānassa sacchikiriyāya.

    Tamenaṁ tathāgato uttariṁ vineti—“ehi tvaṁ, bhikkhu, kāye kāyānupassī viharāhi, mā ca kāmūpasaṁhitaṁ vitakkaṁ vitakkesi. Vedanāsu … citte … dhammesu dhammānupassī viharāhi, mā ca kāmūpasaṁhitaṁ vitakkaṁ vitakkesi.” [MN 125:23.5–24.5](https://suttacentral.net/)

    On the reading kāmūpasaṁhitaṁ rather than kāyūpasaṁhitaṁ see Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, note 1177. [SN 47.10](https://suttacentral.net/) too appears to be showing a similar split between satipaṭṭhāna before and after samādhi. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. It would seem that “distress, fatigue, and fever based on lay life” refers to the five hindrances, in particular sense desire. The text in question, however, specifies that the five hindrances have already been removed. To make sense of this apparent contradiction, we need to turn to the parallel to [MN 125](https://suttacentral.net/) found in the Madhyama Āgama in Chinese translation, [MĀ 198](https://suttacentral.net/ma198/). This parallel does in fact not include the five hindrances at this stage. Ven. Anālayo argues persuasively that certain elements of the Pali version, including the five hindrances, are corruptions that were not originally present. (See Anālayo’s, A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya, Taipei, 2011, p.719.)

    There are also other passages where satipaṭṭhāna practice is shown to remove (refined aspects of) the hindrances:

    I. “So too, monks, here some wise, competent, skilful monk contemplates an aspect of the body … feelings … mind … phenomena, energetic, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed desire and aversion for the world. While he contemplates an aspect of phenomena, his mind becomes concentrated, his corruptions are abandoned.”

    Evameva kho, bhikkhave, idhekacco paṇḍito byatto kusalo bhikkhu kāye kāyānupassī viharati … vedanāsu vedanānupassī viharati … citte cittānupassī viharati … dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṁ. Tassa dhammesu dhammānupassino viharato cittaṁ samādhiyati, upakkilesā pahīyanti. [SN 47.8:7.4–7.11](https://suttacentral.net/)

    Upakkilesa is used in other places to refer to subtle aspects of the hindrances, e.g. the Upakkilesa Sutta, [MN 128](https://suttacentral.net/).

    II. “So too, Ānanda, when a bhikkhu contemplates an aspect of the body … feelings … mind … phenomena he flattens bad unwholesome qualities.”

    Evameva kho, ānanda, bhikkhu kāye … vedanāsu … citte … dhammesu dhammānupassī viharantopi upahanateva pāpake akusale dhamme. [SN 54.10:9.6–9.9](https://suttacentral.net/)

    III. “Monks, the four satipaṭṭhānas should be developed for the abandoning of these five hindrances.”

    Imesaṁ kho, bhikkhave, pañcannaṁ nīvaraṇānaṁ pahānāya ime cattāro satipaṭṭhānā bhāvetabbā. [AN 9.64:2.1](https://suttacentral.net/) [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Note that the description of satipaṭṭhāna here (at the second stage) bears a close resemblance to the passage quotes in [note 27](#note-27) above (and the corresponding section in the main text). In the present passage, instead of the terms ātāpī, sampajāno, satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhā-domanassaṁ found in the ordinary satipaṭṭhāna formula, we find mā ca kāmūpasaṁhitaṁ vitakkaṁ vitakkesi. This indicates that sense desire has been abandoned through samādhi. Similarly, in the passage in [note 27](#note-27), satimā vineyya loke abhijjhā-domanassaṁ has been replaced with a string of terms signifying samādhi. It therefore seems likely that the two passages refer to the same type of post-samādhi satipaṭṭhāna. Also in the present passage, in the subsequent text the first jhāna is missing, the training going straight to the second jhāna. This suggests that the first jhāna is here included in the satipaṭṭhāna practice. Again, this points to post-samādhi satipaṭṭhāna. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Sammāsamādhimhi sati sammāsamādhi-sampannassa upanisa-sampannaṁ hoti yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassanaṁ. See e.g. [AN 10.3:2.7](https://suttacentral.net/). This relationship between samādhi and yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana is found on numerous occasions throughout the suttas. See also [note 28](#note-28). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)