

Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness | *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 10*

(abbreviated version from Bhante Gunaratana's *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness in Plain English*)

Bhikkhus[monks], this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of nibbana—namely, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

1. *Mindfulness of the Body*

- Mindfulness of the breath.
- Mindfulness of the four postures: walking, standing, sitting, and lying down.
- Mindfulness with clear comprehension: of what is beneficial, of suitability, of the meditator's domain, of non-delusion.
- Reflection on the thirty-two parts of the body. Analysis of the four elements. Nine cemetery contemplations.

2. *Mindfulness of Feelings*

- Pleasant, painful, and neither-painful-nor-pleasant feelings, worldly and spiritual.
- Awareness of their manifestation, arising, and disappearance.

3. *Mindfulness of Mind*

- Understanding the mind as: greedy or not greedy, hateful or not hateful, deluded or not deluded, contracted or distracted, not developed or developed, not supreme or supreme, not concentrated or concentrated, not liberated or liberated.
- Awareness of its manifestation, arising, and disappearance.

4. *Mindfulness of Dhamma*

FIVE MENTAL HINDRANCES

- Sense desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, skeptical doubt.
- Awareness of their manifestation, origin, and disappearance.

FIVE AGGREGATES OF CLINGING

- Material form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness.
- Awareness of their manifestation, arising, and dissolution.

SIX INTERNAL AND SIX EXTERNAL SENSE BASES

- Eye and visible objects, ear and sounds, nose and smells, tongue and tastes, body and tangible objects, mind and mental objects.
- Knowledge of them, and of the arising, abandoning, and future non-arising of the fetters that originate dependent on both.

SEVEN FACTORS OF ENLIGHTENMENT

- Mindfulness, investigation of Dhamma, energy, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity.
- Knowledge of their presence, their arising, and their development.

FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

- Suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

- Skillful understanding, thinking, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration.

Bhikkhus, if anyone should properly develop these Four Foundations of Mindfulness for seven years ...or even for seven days, one of two fruits could be expected for that person: either final knowledge here and now, or, if there is a trace of clinging left, the state of non-returning.

The Four Foundations of Buddhist Mindfulness

Mindfulness (*sati* in the Pali language) is often taught as the “nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment.” But Buddhist Mindfulness is broader. It’s mindfulness-with-clear-comprehension (*sati-sampajanna* in Pali), *vigilance*. We’re *looking out* for our experiences in the present moment and evaluating them according to the Buddha’s teachings, especially with the mind and dhammas. Are my actions and reactions skillful or not, i.e., do they lead away from suffering or towards suffering? Do they help me eliminate craving and aversion or reinforce them? Do they help me cultivate generosity and benevolence? *Satipaṭṭhāna* might eventually give us insight into the Buddha’s teaching of no-independent-self, impermanence, non-attachment, and the interdependent arising and passing away of all experiences. Or it might just create inner tranquility.

Mindfulness meditation is good for:

- Taking control of how your mind processes stimuli.
- Assuming more responsibility for the course of your life.
- Learning you can intervene in the stream of causes and conditions that shape us.
- Cultivate positive emotional responses to the world and reduce negative ones.

When your mind changes, your world changes. *Satipaṭṭhāna* starts with *Ānāpānasati* (mindfulness of breathing), but extends it to all our physical, mental, and emotional experiences.

Basic (very, very basic!) instructions:

1. Choose a quiet place (at least when starting out).
2. In a chair on a cushion, sit comfortably but straight, feet on floor or support.
3. Pick an amount of time and stick to it. (10-15 minutes is a good start.)
4. First, focus on your breathing, either at your nostrils or your diaphragm. What does it feel like?
5. After you catch your mind wandering—and it will—just return your attention to your breath.
6. Later, or in a different session, cultivate awareness of another part of your body, perhaps your posture. Expand this through your body until you’re generally aware of most of it.
7. Later, or in a different session, cultivate awareness of your overall feeling—positive, negative, or neutral.
8. Later, or in a different session, cultivate awareness of your mind; are you feeling calm? Distracted? What emotions and thoughts arise? Do you feel calm? Indulge that calm. Do you feel distracted? Return to an easier object of concentration. Do you feel greed or anger? Then cultivate opposite emotions such as generosity and benevolence; ardently wish yourself and others to be free from suffering. Mind racing? Return to object of focus. Do you feel sluggish? Stand up, do some walking meditation.
9. Later, or in a different session, cultivate awareness of the “dhammas.” This is complicated, as you can see from the *Satipatthana Sutta*. Start small, perhaps looking out for boredom or restlessness. Where is the boredom? In the task or in your mind? How does the aversion create suffering? Or with pleasure: what thoughts arise that you want to follow, what activities do you crave to do? Is the craving in the task or your mind? How does the craving create suffering? Think about a time you did something for someone and they thanked you sincerely; how did that feel? Mindfulness is also mindfulness of opportunities to cultivate skillful emotions such as generosity and benevolence.

It’s easiest to build up to the dhammas. For a few meditation sessions, focus on breathing. Then perhaps posture or the sensations in parts of your body. Then overall feeling tones, then mind. Dhammas should come last. With enough practice, one learns to cultivate mindfulness of many of these simultaneously. Meditation is mind training, and all training takes time. The goal is to extend this mindfulness into all of your activities.

- Also recommended: Joseph Goldstein, *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening*