

A MENTAL THERAPY

**The Development of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness
or**

Sati

Satipaṭṭhāna

**in
Theravāda Buddhist Meditation (Vipassanā)**

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Dedicated to my daughter, Aruni

Sri Nandāramaya,
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Balangoda, Ceylon.
10.12.84

It gives me great pleasure to express my views concerning the thesis on 'Sati', written by Mrs. Kusuma Devendra. When I went through this book I found that the author had adhered to the Theravada explanation of the term, Sati. The general tendency nowadays of most writers of Buddhism is to present their own theories rather than the exposition given both in the text and the commentaries, whereas Mrs. Kusuma Devendra has presented in very clear language the real explanation welcomed by the Theravadi scholars. This thesis is an excellent exposition of the term 'Sati' and ably written. It is with great pleasure that I do commend this thesis to the earnest seekers of knowledge, especially those seeking self knowledge. At the same time I would like to say that here is an author who is not a mere writer but one who lives up to what she writes.

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B. Anandamaitreya
Mahanayaka Thero

Forest Hermitage
Kandy, SRI LANKA
12th November 1984

Thank you for kindly sending me, for my perusal, your manuscript on SATI ("Mindfulness")

I have found it to be a very informative piece of writing, comprising all the important material about the subject, which otherwise a student would have had to gather from many different sources. Besides, the treatise is well written and ought to inspire the reader to take up the practice of this essential tenet of the Dhamma which is important not only for meditation, but also in its application to the problems of everyday life

Yours in the Dhamma;



Nyanaponika Mahathera

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ABBREVIATIONS

A.N.	Anguttara - Nikāya
D.N.	Dīgha - Nikāya
Dh.	Dhammapada
Dh.s	Dhamma Saṅgaṇī
M.N.	Majjhima - Nikāya
S.N.	Samyutta - Nikāya
Sn.	Suttanipāta
V.	Vinaya Piṭṭaka
V.M.	Visuddhimagga

INTRODUCTION

The dawn of the 20th century ushered in a resurgence of human thought and values directed towards the pursuit of happiness as never before. The present age euphemistically referred to as the scientific age is moving towards harnessing all human ingenuity to devise more and more means to provide for the physical comfort of human beings. But alas! all these sensual pleasures have not enhanced the quanta of human happiness in the world. In fact the world is reeling in pain, sorrow, dissatisfaction, intrigue, suspicion and so on at all levels.

Thus, it will be apparent that the remedy for human suffering does not lie in pampering to the senses. Happiness and contentment is a condition of the mind. This is succinctly expressed in Buddhism as '**mano pubbangamā**' ie., 'mind is foremost.' Hence the search for happiness must essentially begin by looking inwards at one's own mind. A mind cultivated and trained can live calm, collected, and content even in the midst of the wildest confusion.

It is a significant fact that mind training can be under taken only by a human being. Sub-humans and superhumans cannot undertake training because their minds are obsessed by either too much misery or too much sensual pleasure or may be indifferent. Thus the wonderful inheritance of Buddhist literature is completely lost to them.

It is extremely fortunate that Buddha's original teaching is preserved redundant in the Pali language. In fact, Pali is a language reserved entirely for one subject, namely the Buddha's teaching. The style of the discourses has an economic simplicity, coupled with richness of idiom, that makes it a very polished vehicle hard to do justice to in any translation. About the Pali canon Professor Rhys Davids wrote that, 'Gotama Buddha did not leave behind him a number of deeply simple sayings from which his followers subsequently built up a system or systems of their own, but had, himself, thoroughly elaborated his doctrine, partly as to details after, but in its,

fundamental points even before, his mission began, and during his long career as a teacher, he had ample time to repeat the principles and details of the system over and over again to his disciples and to test their knowledge of it”¹; and finally, his leading disciples were like himself accustomed to the subtlest metaphysical distinctions and trained in the wonderful command of memory which Indian ascetics then possessed. When those facts are recalled to mind it will be seen that much more reliance may be placed upon the doctrinal parts of Buddhist scriptures than upon corresponding later records of other religions.

Thus the stress - ridden world today need not despair. The ancient Path which was revered, praised and followed by the noble and wise sages of bygone centuries is still preserved and offers an excellent solution to today’s problems. What is necessary is to excavate the gems and use them with intelligence to bring out their lost lustre and shine.

The essence of the Buddha Dhamma is the purification of the mind **citta visuddhi**, it is the mind that propels the body along. Understanding this body and mind process is the task of the human being. By developing sati and the four foundations of mindfulness, an intelligent and energetic person can understand this body-mind complex within this life time and attain to the highest goal enunciated by the Buddha.

The first of the four foundations of mindfulness is directed entirely to the body and all aspects of it are minutely analysed. Every action, every movement comes within the purview of mindfulness. It is of abiding interest to note that one of the refrains running through the **Satipaṭṭhāna sutta**, ‘**atthi kāyoti vā panassa**’ indicates, that ‘In him an awareness has been established that there exists a body, merely for the sake of building up mindfulness and knowledge.’ This is a most profound utterance of the Buddha and could be comprehended only by one who is expert in the practice of the **Satipaṭṭhāna** method. The three other foundations of mindfulness aim at tracking down and discovering the working of the inner recesses of the mind.

1. *Introduction to ‘The life of Buddha - Bhikkhu Ñānamoli.’*

The entire canonical literature is richly overflowing with Buddha's precise instructions and exhortations as to how one could gain this wisdom and achieve deliverance from the stress, strain and fever of existence. The practical guidance is enumerated in the **Satipaṭṭhāna sutta**. It is this practice that is most important, this practice alone results in personal conviction and realisation of the truth. No amount of the study of the theory can achieve this end.

In the pre-Buddhist era, the practice of developing **sati** was undertaken by the Indian sages, but they lacked the wisdom of the Buddha and only developed concentration to a very high degree and attained states of tranquillity and re-birth in the **Brahma** realms.

The Buddha's method consisted of developing both tranquillity and wisdom, popularly called **samatha** and **vipassanā** or **saṃādhi** and **paññā**. The Buddha advocated various objects of meditation to achieve tranquillity as a preliminary course and then to switch over to **vipassanā** subsequently. Both methods aim at developing mindfulness. It is found through experience that **samatha** helps **vipassanā** to a great extent and **vipassanā** helps **samatha** to a great extent and that therefore both methods of training must be undertaken to supplement each other, to the benefit of both.

In conclusion it must be mentioned that both methods are most rewarding and indispensable to modern living.

“How can any one recover health through an effective medicine, if he ignores the physician's advice?”

With this view and after taking several meditation retreats I have selected this topic for my thesis. I have already gained immensely and it gave me no end of joy and interest in doing this work. My grateful and humble respects go to my Venerable teachers. May they attain the Bliss of Nibbāna.

Bhikkhuni Kusuma

Kusuma Devendra
31, Maha Megha
Maharagama, Sri Lanka.
27th Dec. 1985.

“Sammā Sati or Right mindfulness is in fact, the indispensable basis of Right living and Right thinking everywhere, at any time; for every one, it is applicable in the midst of life’s turmoil as well as in the peace of a monk’s cell. It has a vital message for all. Not only for the confirmed follower of the Buddha and his Doctrine, but for all who endeavour to master the mind, that is so hard to control, and who earnestly wish to develop its latent faculties of greater strength and greater happiness.”

The Heart of Buddhist Meditation
By Ven. Nyānaponika.

What is Mindfulness? - Sati

The definition of **sati** as given in the **Dhamma Sangani** is as follows:

“**Sati** is recollecting, calling back to mind, remembering, bearing in mind. **Sati** is not merely memory, but a lucid retention of both the past and the present. It is compared to an inward mentor, or adviser, discriminating between good and bad, and prompting choice. Not floating on the surface like empty pumkins or pots, on water.

“**Sati** is entering into and plunging down into the objects of thought.”¹ According to this definition, **sati** appears to be a neutral factor. But **sati** occurs only in the list of **dhammas** which are essentially wholesome. It does not belong to the factors ‘common to all kinds of consciousness’ ie. **sabbacitta sādharmaṇa**.

Mindfulness or **sati** is one of the twenty-five ‘states that are good’² and therefore accompanies every skilful consciousness, **sati** does not accompany unwholesome consciousnesses.

It is said in the **Atthasālini** (p. 249) in a mind devoid of right faith³ there is no **sati**. How then, do adherents of wrong views, remember actions performed by them? They do, but that is not through **sati** it is merely an unwholesome thought process occurring in that aspect.⁴ That is why wrong mindfulness⁵ is not included in the unwholesome consciousness. **micchā sati** is mentioned in the **suttas** in this context.

In this connection, it is relevant to mention the place of perception **saññā** in the function of cognizing and remembering. The mental factor **saññā** belongs to the group of factors that are ‘common to all consciousnesses’⁶. The definition of **saññā** found in the **Atthasālini**⁷ gives **sañjānana lakkhaṇa**’ to it. This means literally ‘cognizing

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1. Translation of Dhamma Sangani by Mrs. Rhys Davids -Buddhist Psychology. (abhidhamma) P. 16-1975. Oriental Books Reprint Corporation New Delhi.
 2. *Sobhana sādharmaṇa kusala cetasika.*
 3. *Assaddhiya citta.*
 4. *Tenākārena akusala cittappavattati.*
 5. Wrong mindfulness.
 6. *Sabbacittasādhāraṇa.*
 7. *Page 110.*

well.' The meaning of **saññā** **rasa** is recognising,¹ The essential property given to **saññā** is making marks as a condition for a repeated perception, for recognising and remembering². Therefore, it is the function of **saññā** namely the marking and remembering of an object's distinctive marks. The way in which one remembers the earlier phases of one's thought process is through selected marks by means of **saññā**³ and not by **sati**. **Saññā** functions in the groups of both wholesome and unwholesome consciousnesses, but **sati** occurs only in the group of wholesome consciousnesses. In the **khandha niddesa**⁴ of the **Visuddhimagga**, **sati** is described in the following way.

"It has the characteristic (**lakkhaṇa**) of not wobbling (**apilāpana**). It's function is not to forget wholesomeness. It is manifested as the state of confronting an objective field. Its proximate cause is strong perception or its proximate cause is the foundation of mindfulness concerned with the body, feeling, consciousness and mind objects."

In his introduction to the **Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta**⁵ Professor Rhys Davids says:

"**Sati** was described as memory, recollection, calling to mind, being aware of certain specified facts. Of these the most important fact was the impermanence of all phenomena bodily and mental and, it included the repeated application of this awareness to each experience of life."

He goes on further to explain - "when the Christians are told, 'whither therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' A way is shown by which any act, however lowly, can by the addition of a remembrance be surrounded by the halo of a high moral enthusiasm and how, by the continual practice of this remembrance, a permanent improvement in character can be obtained."

1. *Paccābhiññāna*.

2. *Puna sanjānana paccaya nimittākārena*.

3. *Nimittākārena*.

4. Chapter XIV page 524.

5. *Sacred books of the East, Dialogues of the Buddha Vol. II.*

cognisable by the eye, belonging to the past, the future and the present, and brethren, in a similar manner auditory consciousness arises because of ear and sound, gustatory consciousness arises because of tongue and taste, olfactory consciousness arises because of nose and smell, bodily consciousness arises because of body and touch.’¹

In this way the sensory apparatus of the worldling cheats him all along, he being completely unaware of the fact that he is forever being cheated by his own senses. His ego gives confidence and support to his own fangled theories and views. Hence Buddha has compared the aggregate of consciousness to a conjuror’s trick or an illusion *māya*. We may quote from the *Samyutta nikāya*:

**phenapindūpamaṃ rūpaṃ - vēdanā bubbulūpamaṃ
marīcīkūpmā saññā - sankhārā kadalūpamā
māyūpamañca viññānam - dīpitādiccabandhunā.**

‘The kinsman of the sun the Buddha, has compared corporeality to a mass of foam, feeling, to a bubble, perceptions to a mirage, volitional activities, to a plantain tree and consciousness, to an illusion.’ They are empty and without the core of a self.

Thus we see, acting without mindfulness, *sati*, the worldling takes for granted the consciousnesses which occur in the mind

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1. *Cakkhuñcāvuso paṭicca rupeca uppajati cakkhuvīññānaṃ
tinnaṃ sanghati phasso. phassapaccayā vedanā yaṃ
vedeti taṃ sañjānāti yaṃ samjānāti taṃ vitakketi yaṃ
vitakketi taṃ papañceti yaṃ papañceti taṇnidānaṃ
purisaṃ papañcasaññā saṃkhā samudācaranti atīṭhāgata
paccuppaññeyyesu cakkhuvīññeyyesu rupesu. sotañcāvuso
paṭiccad saddeca gandhanañcāvuso paṭicca gandheca
jivhañcāvuso paṭicca rase ca kayañcāvuso paṭicca
poṭṭhabbeca manañcāvuso paṭicca dhammeca...
monovīññeyyesu dhammesu.*

throughout the day and maybe, throughout a life time. The worldling does not even stop to question why? They are so sure of themselves, and their ideas!

It is only the liberated **Arahant** who fully realises the fallacy and the inadequacy of sensory perceptions. The Arahant therefore keeps guard at the six sense doors and with mindfulness and wisdom puts an end to the proliferation of diffuse, and discursive thinking, since they have no prejudice on self interest.

It is also possible for the ordinary worldling to develop **sati** according to the four foundations of mindfulness and achieve stability with regard to sense impressions, and thereby be able to cut down to a minimum unwanted diffuseness of thought, and the vicious proliferating tendencies, in this very life time. This apparently is a fringe benefit¹ of developing **sati**. The greater benefits lie in achieving the fruits of sainthood. This is why **sati** has to be developed.

1. *Diṭṭhadhammavedenīya vipāka.*

Development of Sati Mindfulness for Tranquillity (Samatha) Concentration (Samādhi)

Concentration could be termed “unification of the mind.” It could be developed by one who has perfected and purified virtue. The **Visuddhimagga** states that concentration is of many sorts and has various aspects, but the exercise in Buddhist terminology is the one - pointedness of the mind in skilfulness, which thereby acquires tranquillity.

“It is the state in virtue of which consciousness and its concomitants remain evenly and rightly on a single object undistracted and unscattered that should be understood as concentration” (V.M.p.85)

The unification of the mind that precedes absorption **jhāna** is termed access concentration.

To develop tranquillity and concentration, a person should approach the good friend, the giver of the meditation subject, and should apprehend from among the meditation subjects, one that suits their own temperament. After that the person should avoid a place unfavourable to the development of concentration,. should sever the ten impediments.

“ A dwelling, family, gain, class, building, travel, kin, affliction, books and supernormal powers” (V.M.p 91) A **vipassana** meditation centre available in the present day in Sri Lanka and other parts of the world usually fulfils all these requirements, and the yogis are generally encouraged to develop tranquillity only upto access - concentration level. Thereafter meditation proceeds using insight - **vipassana** techniques.

There are forty meditation subjects recommended for gaining concentration. Of these forty subjects only some are attempted. Usually, the ten **kasinas**, the cemetery contemplations and the **arūpa jhāna** subjects are avoided in a **vipassanā** centre. The other subjects are contemplated upon, in varying degrees for the purpose of achieving access concentration, and tranquillity of the mind.

The Development of Mindfulness - Sati

Six Recollections - cha anussati

In the **Visuddhimagga**¹ it is mentioned that “mindfulness itself is recollection² because it arises again and again; or alternatively, mindfulness is that which is proper³ for a clansman gone forth out of faith, since it occurs only in those instances where it should occur. Thus **anussati** means proper recollection”

There are six recollections listed in the **Visuddhimagga**⁴ which are conducive to the development of mindfulness. They are:-

- i Recollection of the Buddha, **Buddhānussati**
- ii Recollection of the Dhamma, **Dhammānussati**
- iii Recollection of the Sangha, **Sanghānussati**
- iv Recollection of Virtue, **Silānussati**
- v Recollection of Generosity, **Cāgānussati**
- vi Recollection of Deities, **Devatānussati**

i - Recollection of the Buddha

The recollection arisen about, inspired by, the Buddha, the Enlightened One is called **Buddhānussati**. The Buddha's special qualities are the object of recollection. A person who undertakes this meditation constantly recollects the special qualities of the Buddha meaningfully in their own language, if the Pali is unfamiliar. To begin with one contemplates in seclusion and later, at every opportunity during the wakeful hours of the day. In this way one acquires great happiness and

1. Chapter VII.

2. *Anussati*.

3. *Anurūpa*.

4. *Cha - anussati niddesa V.M.*

