

Wisdom in Action

Right view

First of all, perhaps, with all the well articulated views of the goal available these days we have to be so careful not to become arm-chair Buddhists. We have to really practice to develop genuine wisdom. We can't just make up an intellectual view that fits with what we've understood to be the fruits of the practice and think that thereby we have made it. If we do we have just sold ourselves short and are simply feeding our egos with our lofty views. Because the fruits are a complete transformation of consciousness, not merely a new view taken on by ordinary consciousness, however accepting. The potential of the Dhamma is to end suffering, not to merely become its observer. Although acceptance can be the end of hatred and contentment the end of greed, neither of them reaches the end of the delusion that is their cause. The end of delusion brings about the non-arising of greed or hatred. So we have to see the way things really are and not just accept the way they seem to be.

In this respect also we can argue philosophically about whether or not there is a part of the mind that is aloof, merely watching or there is no such thing actually there is always either Dhamma or dukkha in the mind, never both. There is never the Dhamma watching the dukkha. So we establish Dhamma as best we can and endure any dukkha that still arises until we conquer the dukkha altogether.

If we experience insight we will also see that wisdom and kilesa come from the same place – the memory/perceptual process. So wisdom at its highest is not deliberate thought; it comes to us in the same way that the kilesas do – it is the very same mind, but freed of passions. Ultimately wisdom does not come from simply observing the passions – it comes when the passions cease; and this cessation comes about through a change of view and intention.

For most people, who live in the pursuit of sense pleasures, the kilesas are just trying to help, so we could perhaps say that within their sphere there is nothing wrong with the passions; but to the renunciant spiritual seeker they are obstacles that block the path. **Therefore we are abandoning one thing, one life for another, the worldly life for the spiritual; but we not trying to resolve anything.** There is actually no need to resolve anything since, with the culmination of the path, all such things are dropped completely instead.

It can seem as though we have a lot of emotional stuff stuck in our bodies. This is not so. The stuff, the karma, is in our minds and our minds in turn are stuck in – or rather stuck to – our bodies. If our minds detach from our bodies everything is cooled and transformed. We see that these emotions were the result of attachment to the body and that they are all suffering compared to this state of ease. Then the way to work through our stuff is wise reflection and direct observation of mind and body, not emotional catharsis.

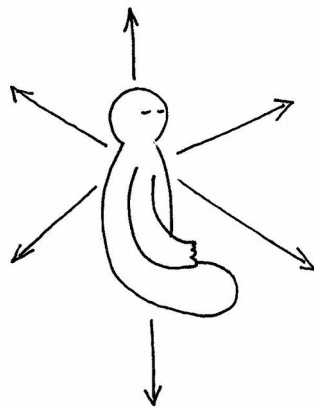
This detachment between mind and body needs to be very thorough, hence the need to go through all parts of the body and see their impermanence in order to let them go. At this point we realize that before there was no clear distinction between mind and

body as they were bound up with each other as feeling. That state of affairs leaves us no clear view or release. When body and mind separate, the body is seen clearly as well as the mind. Sometimes in this process stuff is released. There is also a clear difference now between mental or emotional feeling on the one hand and purely physical feeling on the other, and one of them has no direct effect on the other. In other words, one's mind is no longer directly affected by pain. And also, one gradually comes to value mental or emotional feelings over physical, and thus desire dwindles.

The point is not analysis but disenchantment – discerning the different elements of experience and feeling them out; yet we can also realize that feeling is flawed as a form of awareness because it gets involved with itself and has a life of its own. It is superseded by seeing and knowing, beginning at the body that is the source of all feeling.¹

Right view in action

Satipat ṭhāna, beginning with the body, provides a complete, dynamic, three dimensional model – or Abhidhamma, so to speak – for liberation. This is first of all an Abhidhamma of our everyday experience, clarified through mindfulness; although the advanced practitioner will also see the literal truth of the dimensions in the Abhidhamma of the full Buddhist cosmology. The essence of this is that we see the movements of the objects of the mind, as well as their content. Once we are centred in the body we see that thoughts have the characteristic of going outwards, and emotions in turn are the results coming back to us. If we think of ourselves sitting upright (hence once reason for the use of this posture in meditation) this is movement of the mind on the horizontal plane – our relationship to the world of objects. The vertical dimension of our experience, which is usually experienced as emotions (karma) coming up conflicting with thoughts going down, has now been occupied by the body.²



1 When the Buddha says the teaching is for *one who feels*, this is not to reify feeling, but because one sees the suffering of all feeling by experiencing their non-arising or ‘cessation’.

2 This is not a model that clarifies, or is applicable to, all experience, but only this particular one; and yet it will, if cultivated, clarify the very nature of experience itself.

Mindfulness of the body steadies the experience of feeling so that feelings no longer go upwards; the mind can then register the feedback of feelings without the feelings becoming mixed up with or going into conflict with thoughts. The confusion or conflict between thought and feeling is no longer there when we can see that they arise in this interplay, when we see these different dimensions. When we begin to see our emotions for what they are, we can find a way out of the conditioned patterns of the past to a life free of suffering in which we discover the vertical dimension as our refuge.³

On a deeper, existential level we see what we call emotions as formed through these movements of the mind according to **Dependent origination**, thus:

- Ignorance forms our worldly needs and values out of which come the habitual drives we call emotions (*saṅkhārā*)
- These draw the mind and heart out into the senses (*viññāṇa*)
- Which brings into being the duality of mind and matter (*nāma-rūpa*)
- And the sensitive interface of the mind (*salāyatana*)
- With matter, the body and the physical world (*phassa*)
- So that the mind must feel both pleasure and pain (*vedanā*)
- And yet will try to get pleasure and avoid pain (*taṇhā*).

The Path

The first ante-dote is discipline – to live according to form rather than desire, so that the will remains centred in the conscience and does not get lost in the senses. In this way *sīla* eventually leads to *samādhi* as we realize that everything arising in our meditation is kilesa, making us abandon it all very thoroughly and completely. The five hindrances⁴ are a surface expression of the kilesas – if the hindrances are based on wanting what we don't have or not wanting what we have, the kilesas are based on raw craving. The five precepts kept to a *very fine* degree can be enough to allow the mind to temporarily prevent the five hindrances from arising.

3 This body-based approach is distinct from the mind-only Abhidhamma that is flawed for a different reason, as is so evident in the eternal muddle that the Abhidhamma theorists get into while trying to see how it is possible to see impermanence in the present moment. In a “mind-only view” it is not possible. It is only seen clearly through mindfulness of the body.

4 The five hindrances are as follows:

- i. Sensual desire
- ii. Ill will
- iii. Sloth & drowsiness
- iv. Restlessness & anxiety
- v. Uncertainty

(AN 5.51. As translated from the pāl ṭṭy Thānissaro Bhikkhu.)

Sīla gets you in a good space
Enjoy the space
Enjoy space more than the objects in it
Concentrate on space
Turn objects out of the space

The second step lies in the relationship between the code of conduct (Vinaya) which is about holding on, and the Dhamma which is about letting go. The combination of these two represent detachment, the lightest touch – like in añjali where the hands are not holding on tight, nor are separate. This detachment is gained by a temporary withdrawal into space – *samādhi*, which then turns more stable through wisdom and dispassion, not by merely keeping spacing out. So independence is gained through detachment and not through that withdrawal in itself, (actually there is no permanent state of withdrawal.) The hindrances can be temporarily overcome by both *samādhi* and by *satipaṭṭhāna* – but it is when the two support each other that the result becomes potentially permanent.

So what is the relevance of *samādhi*? Without the experience of *samādhi* the best we can do is to work through our negativity about the path and become positive and happy in it. The experience of *samādhi*, however, completely turns the mind upside-down in its relation to the outer sense world, we are no longer interested in it in the usual way: not so much through desire but rather out of compassion. In terms of our inner world of thought or emotion, the seeing of suffering with wisdom now leads to a release of the mind back into *samādhi* and to that new kind of joy where previously the vision of suffering may have led to depression.

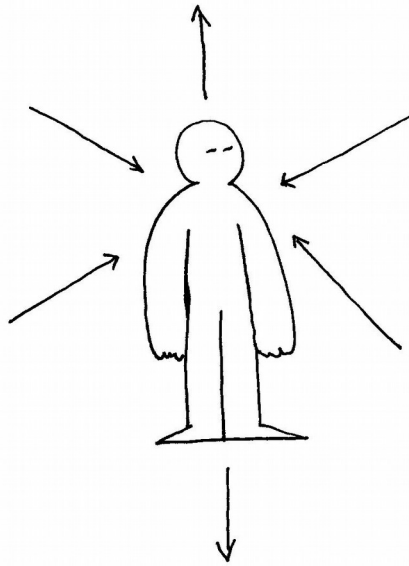
Note, however, that a mind with wisdom does not need to withdraw from the senses in order to let go. A subtler element of *samādhi* can build gradually in sensory consciousness,⁵ where there will be a greater and greater sense of space and ease in the mind, until a complete letting go occurs resulting in the more radical, blissful experience of full *samādhi*. This path of wisdom entails different levels of understanding which lead to different depths of letting go, and to increasing purity of detachment. These different levels will manifest as different forms of knowing in the mind and heart, as different insight knowledges. Through *satipaṭṭhāna* this knowing is raised to its highest levels of wisdom.

It will be noticed that these knowing qualities have a certain nature in and of themselves. The One Who Knows is enduring, loving, calm and dispassionate toward the sense realm. It is bright and spacious, light and joyful; in this pure state, the hindrances are no more; as for the sense of self, it will be seen as actually just a manifestation of craving, itchy old craving, and we can scratch it gently with the breath – very, very gently, soothing it away. A change of view of desire itself also comes naturally: We see that sense desire is like a porcupine going down a hole, it's easy to go in and difficult to get out (because of the direction of the porcupine's spines) unless it can turn around (unless we can turn our view around)...

⁵ Given that all the five hindrances are completely absent.

*the temple bell
was made of a bombshell
beautiful sound
beautiful turnaround
the temple bell*

For the mind turned around, the world of the senses is received by the calm and open heart, rather than being chased after as was earlier the case. There is no longer any sense of a duality between the mind and the world. The heart opens into space and gone are all forms of “closing focus” that elicits worldly feelings of pleasure or pain. The new unworldly, or heavenly, feelings that we are now experiencing open up rather than close down and are of a radically different order.



(Note how the vertical dimension remains the same.)

In terms of our commitment, to see the disadvantages of a human birth in comparison with a heavenly one is to enter the mundane path. The mundane path is common to almost all religions, but in Buddhism we see how goodness leads to brightness of mind during our lives.⁶ Yet, ultimately, there is no being (i.e. a permanent state or abiding), there is only knowing. To this knowing, non-clinging is already liberation – *Nibbāna*. Thus to see the disadvantages of the heavenly realms compared to *Nibbāna* is to enter the supramundane path. Worldly dispassion is part of both paths, mundane and supramundane. We walk the mundane path to the extent that we have worldly responsibility and we walk the supramundane path to the extent that we can relinquish this kind of responsibility; both mundane and supramundane path naturally follow the moral precepts.

⁶ And becoming this brightness is like being in heaven already.

The goal

And what can we say of the goal? It is said that under the Bodhi tree the Buddha called the Goddess of the earth to bear witness to his *paramī*; doing so she wrings out her hair and washes away the hosts of Mara. What is the significance of this? Back in those days, a woman was said to have her hair wet with grief. So the earth Goddess, in my view, is shedding the grief of the ages in response to the Buddha's great *paramī*. Liberation comes from seeing suffering and letting go of covetousness and grief.⁷ We let go of covetousness seeing the impermanence of the world, but let go of grief seeing that there is something far more wonderful in the mind.

*“Have you heard the world's going to end and we are all f...cked”, said the kid to me
on the street.*

*He held out his fist, palm down, as if inviting me to do the same. We touched fists.
“Safe” he said and walked away.*

I offer this for your reflection.

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⁷ See the opening of the Satipat ṭ ḥāna Sutta, MN10.