**Creating A Self**

The core aspiration of all Buddhist teachings involves becoming clearly aware of how the “Selfing” process occurs, and this process is most effectively described in the Satipatthana Sutta, (sah-tee-pah-tah-nah soo-tah) the Four Foundations of Mindfulness Discourse. The first foundation focuses on embodied sensory experience, the second foundation focuses on the instinctual reactivity that is a fundamental aspect of any creature—to avoid pain and promote pleasure. The third foundation describes the conditioned qualities of consciousness that can occur at any moment of subjective experience. These first three foundations are part of any sentient being’s subjectivity, while the characteristic elements of the fourth foundation provides the “story line” of human personal identity, and this introspective ability is unique among the inhabitants of this planet.

In Pali, the Fourth Foundation is *Dhammanupassana* (dah-mah-noo-pah-sah-nah), translated as *Mindfulness of Mental Phenomena*. The word dhamma has two interactive meanings: Small d *dhamma* describes a person’s *subjective flow of experience that includes self-talk as well as a larger, comprehensive conceptual view of how the universe works*; big D *Dhamma* describes *the appropriate conceptual structures, procedural rules, and practices that nurture the process of Awakening*. *Anupassana* completes the word and is translated as *contemplation--keeping the dhamma in present-moment awareness.* Present-moment awareness involves *sati* (sah-tee), usually translated as *mindfulness*, but more practically understood to involve *not being absent-minded*, and *clearly aware of the conditional, constituent elements of subjective experience*.

My intention with this talk is to provide an overview of how important it is to study the categories that are described in the fourth foundation and then develop contemplative awareness to their highest potential, providing beneficial insights regarding them towards the process of Awakening. Over the centuries after the time of the Buddha, the system called *abhidhamma* (ah-bee-dah-mah), typically translated as Buddhist “*higher learning*”, was developed, providing conceptual understanding regarding how various conditioning functions that are reflected in consciousness create our personality structure.

The Fourth Foundation has several contemplations that categorize these functions: 1) the Five Hindrances, 2) the Five Aggregates, 3) the Six Sense-Spheres, 4) the Seven Awakening Factors, and 5) the Four Noble Truths. Analayo has done some comprehensive research on the versions of the Satipatthana Sutta that were developed over the centuries in India and China, and discovered that the categories mentioned above, the standard Theravada version, are different in significant ways from the two known Chinese versions. This overview covers the standard Theravada version of the Fourth Foundation. In future talks, each of the Dhammanupassana categories will be reviewed more thoroughly.

The Four Foundations structure attempts to integrate several processes that are co-occurring in a person’s selfing process, and this integrative function is reflected in the Five Aggregates contemplations: *Bodily sensations* are *perceived* and associated with *feelings*; these functions are shaped by self-creating *mental formations*, and all are reflected in *consciousness*. In the untrained mind, effective functioning of these aggregates are distorted by the Five Hindrances, which adversely affect the clarity of consciousness, and therefore the hindrances must be set aside. The Six Sense-Spheres represent the process through which sensory stimulations are interpreted by conditioning factors that affect the mental formations, “fettered” by craving and clinging. The Awakening factors, which support the creation of all wholesome mental formations, are unencumbered by the hindrances and foster the process through which the fetters created by craving and clinging are overcome. The Four Noble Truths are “revisited” as the Awakening Factors transform a conceptual understanding of the path to Awakening into direct realization.

Of the contemplations, the most important to develop in the Fourth Foundation are described in the Mental Formations category of the Five Aggregates. These categories develop into either unwholesome, unwholesome, or “just present” self-state organizations.

The Pali word for consciousness in this context is *citta* (chee-tah), and the mental formations that are reflected in consciousness are called *cetasikas* (cheh-tah-seh-kahs), translated as *those self-creating functions reflected in consciousness*. The ways cetasikas are organized to form a person’s “selfing story” are categorized in important ways:

**Universal**, appearing in every moment of consciousness.

**Occasional**, which may or may not appear in every moment of consciousness.

**Universal Unwholesome**, which shape each moment of consciousness afflicted by craving and clinging.

**Occasional Unwholesome**, which may or may not shape each moment of consciousness afflicted by craving and clinging, depending on external and internal circumstances.

**Universal Wholesome**, which shape each moment of consciousness unaffected by craving and clinging.

**Six Beautiful Pairs**, which are wholesome moments of consciousness that maximize the function of self-organization in the ethical operation of a well-trained consciousness.

**Three Virtuous Formations**, conforming to Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood.

**Compassion** and **Sympathetic Joy**, conforming to Right Intention of the Noble Eightfold Path.

**Right Understanding**, the quality of wise attention that fosters and completes the Awakening process.

The interactions between the various contemplative categories are developed to maximum effect by diligent cultivation of the Seven Awakening Factors, which are refined mental conditions associated with the Wholesome Mental Formations category. The Awakening Factors are Mindfulness, Investigation of Mental Phenomena, Energy/Right Effort, Joy/Enthusiastic Engagement, Tranquility, Concentration/Unification, and Equipoise/Balance. These Factors will be explored more deeply in subsequent talks.

The entire satipatthana system can be understood *sequentially* or *interdependently*: *Sequentially* in that mindfulness of the body (especially sensory awareness while breathing in and out) is most easily accessed, followed by feelings, the mind and then investigating the very fleeting and immaterial experience of the mental formations, reflected in consciousness, unafflicted by the hindrances. *Interdependently*, as the categories are mutually influential.

Unwholesome mental formations produce self-states that hinder the process of Awakening, while unified, coordinated, and persistent wholesome mental formations nurture the process of Awakening, monitored by Mindfulness.

A subcategory of the Four Noble Truths doctrine is the Noble Eightfold Path, within which is found the conceptual structure of Right Mindfulness—understood as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. At the end of the entire Satipatthana Sutta the realization of the Noble Truths is described in this way: the Wisdom Aggregate concept of the Noble Eightfold Path has two characteristics: “Right Understanding” and “Right Intention”. Right Understanding suggests that every choice, every self-state experience has a consequence, either driven by craving/clinging or free from craving/clinging. Right Intention suggests that liberation in the mind emerges from self-state experiences that are filtered through the lens of kindness, compassion, generosity, not attached to ego defense or gratification. These two are studied and practiced, developed to the highest level of internal awareness.

The ultimate goal of spiritual development in the Buddhist system is the experience of Nirvana, a quality of awareness that is non-dual, that is, the experience of the moment does not involve the misperception that there is an autonomous/enduring self. This experience produces a radically different understanding of Wisdom: Right Understanding becomes Right Knowledge—total subjective liberation from believing that there is an enduring/autonomous self. Right Intention transforms into Right Release—the motivations for behavior after such a profound subjective experience are less ego-bound and more able to manifest the qualities of Right Intention with more authenticity and persistence.