

## Fourth Foundation: the Dharmas

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Let's begin this exploration of the Fourth Foundation of Mindfulness by reviewing the first three Foundations with an overview of the growth each develops. The First Foundation grounds our attention in the body and thus in the immediate experience, so we see that the body is not "me" and there's nothing to be attached to. The Second shows that our likes and dislikes also are not "me" and need not rule our behavior. The Third shows that even our minds are not "me."

These Foundations train us in observing and contemplating the immediate and fleeting elements of our experience. Each builds on the last, so it's important to practice with each, preferably in order. They lead to an intensive study of dharmas, or teachings, that reveal the delusion of self as the root cause of dukkha.

The Fourth Foundation opens with the Five Hindrances. They are conditions of the mind that obscure our understanding of each moment, mess with our practice and block our progress on the Path. Then it goes on to a list of lists: 5 aggregates, 6 sense spheres, 7 awakening factors, 4 noble truths. In all these lists, we examine causation – how each aspect of our mental activity asserts itself (its nature), how it comes into being, how it can be removed, and how it can be prevented in the future.

Those who've studied the Eightfold Path may be reminded of the sixth part of the Path, Wise Effort, which deals with the same causative factors, but goes a step further and has us use mental effort to remove harmful states of mind and nurture beneficial ones. The Satipatthana Sutta is about mindfulness – watching and noticing. We keep the attention open to what's going on inside us, spotting important thoughts, emotions, etc. and getting to know their nature, their genesis, their impermanence and prevention.

Wise Effort is about putting the knowledge we gain from these mindfulness practices into *actively* keeping our minds and hearts in healthy, happy states. Our delusion of a separate, permanent self fosters impulses that lead to the opposite. It urges us to seek sensory pleasure, whatever momentary whim we have to pursue to "make us happy."

Because those urges and impulses spring from a fundamental misconception of what's good for us, they end up doing the opposite. They cause suffering because, for starters, they're self-centered, taking commands from the least wise of our mind states, with little concern for the ultimate well-being of others or ourselves. So, even though we may think we're acting "for others," it's just for what we think they should have, or do. So our actions are usually

misdirected, and because they're selfishly motivated, they reinforce our tendency to behave in ways that cause us and others suffering.

Now that the first three Foundations have trained us in being mindful of our inner experience so we see how it's all impermanent, we can come to a more accurate understanding of these minds we live with and how they motivate us. We start with the most obvious, the mental activity that messes us up, The Hindrances. There are five of them:

Desire, aversion, unbalanced mental energy (or restlessness or dullness), and doubt (or uncertainty or mistrust). We observe them the way we did with Mindfulness of Mind. We notice when these phenomena are in our minds, and when they're not, coming to know their impermanence. Then we go a few steps farther.

We contemplate how they came up just now. How is it I find myself yearning for a treat when I'm working on something, like writing this talk? Well, it's hard. I feel hurried, unsure, afraid of doing poorly. Urges like getting treats arise from states of mind that come from what we call the ego, this deluded idea of self.

Often, just getting this far in mindfully watching will weaken the urge to soothe myself with some pleasure, and possibly make it fade away. It's like the Buddha when Mara, the embodiment of the Hindrances, tormented him on the night of his Enlightenment. The Buddha said, "I see you, Mara," and the rascal disappeared. Also, observing the mental habits that cause cravings will chip away at their future power. Unfortunately, we may not notice when various forms of the Hindrances slowly fade away, so it's good to look for progress, which can keep fueling our practice.

So that, in itself, may be how future cravings can be prevented. There may be other things that work, such as using Wise Effort. For purposes of this practice of the Fourth Foundation, though, we just continue to be alert for cravings that arise so we can study what preceded and caused them, what preceded their passing or clearly made them pass.

As with all the Foundations, this observation is done without clinging, with an unguarded or open awareness that accepts the truth that this craving is happening now, without self-centered judging or shame about it. We don't deny or suppress it, because coming to understand it is absolutely necessary for healing it. We examine these states of mind as we experience them internally, and watch how they play out in the external world, or would, if they got that far.

We do the same thing with aversions, those feelings of "I don't want this." We may feel this about things happening right now, or things that may happen, or have already happened. Aversions include fantasies of things being different, or obsessive planning with the goal –

often unconsciously – or pushing away fears or bad memories. In looking for how aversions come up, it's very important to look at what's happening *internally*. Focusing on the external (what's often called "the story") can trap us in repetitive suffering. As the Buddha said, it's like trying to fight a bonfire by throwing logs on it. Our attention to "the story" acts like those logs, feeding the aversion more energy. That's why anger tends to keep building. To practice with aversion, we need to catch it as soon as possible and keep our attention on what we're thinking and feeling internally.

We do the same thing, then, as we did with cravings: continue to observe what causes aversions, the conditions under which they pass away, and the causes and conditions that prevent them from arising in the future.

This all may sound like psycho-therapy. It is similar, but it's more detailed, disciplined and immediate, practiced as the mental states arise. A lot of it is done in daily life as well as in meditation.

With restlessness and sloth-and-torpor, we know it's an imbalance of energy. We may also know the antidotes. I usually have a short list geared for concentration practice. Analayo has a different one in his book *Satipatthana*. I love the fact that his antidotes for every Hindrance include, "good friends and suitable conversation."

Here's a reason why we may not want to use antidotes, though: they're meant to short-circuit the observation which the Satipatthana Sutta wants us to do. It makes restlessness or dullness go away, so we don't have much chance to look for their causes in that instance. Gil Fronsdal says to ask ourselves, "What would I be thinking or feeling if my mind weren't jumping around or fuzzing out?" This inquiry can reveal the specific causes and conditions for *this* instance of agitation or dullness. It can also lead to understanding what makes it go away, and how to avoid it in the future.

The final Hindrance, doubt, requires *contemplation* of what obstructs the mind and what frees it and hides behind some other state of mind. Analayo says the practice is to discern between mindstates that are wholesome and those that aren't. I often feel doubt before I sit down to give a dharma talk. It feels like the very common fear of public speaking, a lack of confidence. By confidence, I don't mean grandiosity or bravado. It's a simple recognition that, "Yes, I can," or "Yes, this is right." So the sutta tells us to observe when we're impeded by doubt or free of it, and what mindstates led to that, and which ones precede its passing away.

I have just enough time to talk about the next list, which is wonderfully important. The Five Aggregates, though, offers a list of elements that a very different culture thought comprised the self. This is not what we nowadays think makes us "me." I find it hard to work with this

scheme, and I've never felt I've successfully taught it. So I've taught it indirectly, as in my talk called, "The Experience of Self."

Elements more useful for our times may be emerging from brain science or neuro-psychology, in books like A Stroke of Insight or Buddha's Brain. I practice with disassembling my sense of self by looking around to see if there's anything in my experience, body or mind, that fits the notions I sometimes have of what amounts to "me." Others devote a meditation session to asking repeatedly, "What am I?" or "What makes me "me?"

However we approach this practice, whatever we think are the elements of the self, we just observe its presence or absence in the mind, its passing away and what seems to be its causes and conditions, and what removes it from the mind.

Every time I talk about the illusory nature of the self, I have to emphasize that we definitely do have a sense of ourselves, and we need that sense to function in the world. I recently got an email from an old student who found this confusing. I answered by saying that we need to have a sense of the space we occupy on this earth, and how we're related to other beings. We need to stand up for ourselves and *live up* to ourselves. Most of all, we need to love ourselves, because all we experience and therefore know of all other beings is inside our awareness, inside "us." So we literally *can not* love others without loving ourselves, or truly love ourselves without loving all other beings.

What we need to understand about the sense of self that we have, is that it has no empirical reality – other than our bodies, which we have now directly observed are not "us." There is no "me" that exists independent of all the experience I've absorbed through my five physical senses and various functions of my mind. Together, these sources of experience are the Six Sense Spheres.

And of course, that's the next list on the Fourth Foundation's list. You may be familiar with the Six Sense Spheres. You're probably also familiar with the last two lists: the Seven Awakening Factors and the Four Noble Truths. We practice with them all the same way, with some variation to fit their particulars.

So that, my dear friends, is the Satipatthana Sutta's Four Foundations of Mindfulness. I wish you a fruitful practice with them.