The Insight Chorus - Part 1 - Impermanence & Emptiness

Patrick Kearney · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Patrick Kearney · 1:07:08

We've been going through the Satipatthana Sutta, and tonight and tomorrow night we're going to have a look at the chorus of the discourse, which is about insight.

We looked at the opening section, the udesa, the introduction, but if you look at the structure of the whole discourse, it consists of 21 sections, and at each of those sections there's a chorus which is essentially the same. The only difference is that it applies itself to the immediately preceding section. So it's like a song with 21 verses, each one ending in the chorus. Remember, we talked about how this is an oral tradition, so everything is chanted, sung. Think of learning a song with 21 verses and the same chorus. As we pointed out, repetition indicates importance. So if I learn this song and 20 years later I happen to be meditating and music pops into my mind and this song pops up, what am I most likely to remember? It would be the chorus. So this is the central aspect.

The Satipatthana Sutta is a kind of weird one. There's virtually no narrative. All you've got is the Buddha wandering around the Kuru country, and then he gives this discourse. At the end there's a prophecy: basically you do this and you get enlightened. The rest of it is just this series of meditational exercises arranged according to four categories: body, feeling, heart-mind (citta), and phenomena. We're going to have a look at those four later on. And it's very artificial.

According to contemporary scholars, it's likely that in its original form it was briefer. I don't keep up with this stuff these days. I've got Ajahn Sujato's History of Mindfulness, and he does this whole elaborate analysis of the text which looks very interesting, but I haven't studied it yet. The point being that it's quite possible that this discourse was built up over time and it seems to have functioned as a kind of meditation manual.

Let's say you're in an oral tradition, so the only way that you can convey information is through the mouth. And let's say you're part of an organization which is rapidly spreading and is in fact international. The only way you can standardize the teaching is by chanting something, memorizing it, and passing it on, so everybody chants the same thing. So I think that the Satipatthana Sutta would have functioned as a kind of root text meditation manual that people would have memorized, and different people might have added different things to it because they thought this would fit. And then we end up with the version that we've got.

Now here we're going to look at the chorus, which is quite brief. It's, I think, four sentences. The Buddha

would do the first appearance, which is all about body. So the first satipatthana, the first practice is tracking body as body, which we've been talking about.

Then the chorus begins, and this is typical: the Buddha is describing what the practitioner does. I think in the psychological world this is known as an operational definition. Something is how you do it. So he's defining the practice in terms of a description of how one does it.

"In this way she lives tracking body as body internally, or she lives tracking body as body externally, or she lives tracking body as body both internally and externally."

So you have the introduction of this idea of internal-external. And what's that about? I think this is a reference to our normal sense of subject-object duality. Our ordinary, normal, taken-for-granted relationship to the world is based on the fundamental assumption that I'm in here and you lot are out there. And so my world is neatly divided into these two parts. There's me here, there's you there.

Now this is not something I have to think about. It's not something that I have to remind myself of. If I'm lining up for a nice lunch I don't have to think about maybe I should grab this first before any of those other buggers get there. It's just built in. It's just inherent. This basic sense of separation and distinction. So there's a sense of a boundary between me in this body and you all and the rest of the world: internal-external.

"In this way she lives tracking body as body internally." So this would be our normal meditation practice where we're following physical sensation, and when I'm doing this I'm not tracking your physical sensation, I'm tracking this physical sensation in here.

"Or she lives tracking body as body externally." How does one track body as body externally? Well, we've got five physical senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching.

So looking at all of them, seeing is generally external—I see out there, I hear out there. We have smelling, tasting, touching, which are much more intimate, yet even they refer to an external world. With touch, I touch this externally. So this is where the mindfulness of body extends outward.

For example, let's say I'm doing walking meditation outside. I'm also seeing what's happening and hearing the sounds. I don't simply exclude that—"No, no, I mustn't see, I mustn't hear, I must just be doing walking meditation." It includes all of that. The meditation object starts to expand, and my relationship to the external world begins to be affected.

We've talked about how when we develop a certain degree of mindfulness, the world appears differently. It appears much fresher than before. A normal, routine sight or sound appears differently.

We've spoken about mindfulness as memory—remembering the present—so it's based on memory. Another mental quality based on memory is perception. In Pali, *saññā*—perception is recognition. When I meet someone, for example, the first thing I do is rapidly assess: have I met this person before? Stranger

or not stranger? I sort this out pretty quickly, usually quite quickly. Sometimes I have to think about it, but when I know someone, I just know them.

When a monk enters the interview room, I don't spend the first five minutes staring at him trying to work out what this is. I know. It's just obvious. And again, I'm not thinking about it—it's just recognition. This depends on the past, on memory. So perception and memory are quite similar.

There's a close connection here, because later on, when the tradition asks what gives rise to mindfulness, what stimulates mindfulness, one of the answers is clear perception. This has to do with what we've talked about as the earthy, grounded, direct, face-to-face quality that mindfulness has. It's a direct engagement with the object of experience.

So mindfulness and perception are very similar, but you can see the difference: perception is stale. I've been here before. I've met this person before. I know who this person is. I can anticipate what this person will do or say because I know them. There's a staleness in the encounter. It may even be that I'm not really paying attention to the situation because I already know.

Have you ever had the frustrating experience where you're talking to someone and explaining something to them, and you can see their eyes glaze over and they switch off because they've decided they know what you're trying to say? But they actually haven't. They don't know. But it takes a lot of effort to actually break through that wall of determined resistance: "No, I'm not going to hear what you're saying because in my mind, I've already categorized it."

One example I came across, which I've always remembered: Many years ago, I was traveling in India around the holy places, accompanying a French Buddhist monk who had spent years in Thailand. He was dressed all in Thai robes, behaving very Thai—*phak Thai bhikkhu*—and spoke fluent Thai. We used to stay at the Thai monasteries at the different holy places, and of course he would do the talking because he was the one who would get us in.

At one of the monasteries, the old abbot came out to see these visitors. This French monk starts speaking to him in Thai. The abbot begins with a few halting words in English: "Who are you?" or whatever. And this guy is responding in fluent Thai. The abbot's going, "What? What?"

What's that? What?" and really concentrated, trying to work out what this guy is saying. He just can't get a word. I mean, it must be his bizarre French accent when he's speaking Thai that he can't figure out a single word. It took this abbot several minutes and a lot of effort on the part of this monk before it finally dawned on the abbot: this guy is speaking Thai, and I can understand every word that he's saying.

This is perception, and it has tremendous power and this quality of staleness. Mindfulness is also a form of perception, but it's characterized by freshness. That this encounter, which I remember, is new. It's quite paradoxical. I remember it, but it's completely new. I've never been here before. And this encounter is entirely new. I've never been here before.

So we have this sense of recognition of the world based on this division, this subject-object division, which is built into our perception. And as the mindfulness develops, this begins to be subverted. I'm not simply mindful of what's going on in here; I'm mindful of what's going on out there. And the whole sense of this inner and outer world that I previously had starts to crumble, and something else is going on.

Basically, the sense of an absolute boundary between inner and outer, self and other, starts to fade, starts to crumble. And with it, the power of our sense of being a completely separate self begins to fade.

It comes out in different ways. Like people who practice together in silence over a period of time—they begin to realize there's a sense of community. There's this sense that I know these people, even though I've barely spoken to them, if at all. But you get a feel for the people.

Also, we start to recognize—we go through pleasure and pain. Let's say we go through our pain, internal, and we can see what we do when we're in that pain. And we might recognize somebody else behaving like that, and we know, oh, I know that. They're in pain. It's the same kind of pain, because they're doing the same sort of thing. And there's this sense of intuitive empathy that starts to develop.

So I begin to realize that the movements of body and mind that I'm tracking are not mine. They're not unique to me. They are, in fact, universal. What is true here is true everywhere. The experience that's happening is not personal. It's just nature. And nature is universal and belongs to everyone.

I think in our culture we tend to resist this one, compared to some Asian cultures—for example, the Burmese. In Burma, when you have the interview, the one-on-one with the teacher, it's very unusual for it to be private. Normally there are other people in the room. For example, you've got other meditators lined up beside you, so it's like an assembly line. So other meditators close to you in the line know exactly what's going on in your practice.

And from our culture, we tend to be uncomfortable with this because it's personal. Therefore it's private. And so here, when you have the interviews, it's always one-on-one, closed room, don't listen, hush-hush. And that kind of fits our culture. That seems to be appropriate.

I remember the mild frisson of shock that I had in Burma when I was going for an interview with the Sayadaw. And in the same room, sitting along the wall, was this family—Mum, Dad, Grandma, kids. And they're all kind of chatting to each other and looking interested. I think, who are they? Obviously they're the audience and I'm here to amuse them.

But they were the family who donated the meal for that day. Now they've just handed over loot to support the foreign meditators and they want to see what kind of return they're getting for their investment, which is perfectly reasonable.

But it's quite clear that for all those Burmese, there's nothing personal in this engagement. At all. It's just what it is. Privacy in Burmese doesn't exist as a word or a concept in the language. Similarly in India and

other places. It's like it isn't personal—just what it is.

So we get to see that as the mindfulness develops.

This first line conveys this development beautifully. Then in the next line: "She lives tracking the nature of arising as body, or she lives tracking the nature of ceasing as body, or she lives tracking both the nature of arising and the nature of ceasing as body."

This represents the arising of the perception of impermanence. The perception of impermanence is absolutely fundamental for the Buddha in terms of the development of insight. Insight is always expressed in terms of the three universal characteristics: anicca, dukkha, anatta—impermanence or change, pain and suffering and unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. They're always listed in that order because they progress from gross to subtle.

Of the three, the most obvious is impermanence. Have you noticed that things have changed? If you stopped people in the street and asked them, "Have you noticed that things change?" they'd say, "Oh yeah, things are really different." Everybody knows that things change. It's obvious. Impermanence is the most gross.

If you went up to someone in the street and said, "Have you noticed that you don't actually exist?" they'd probably wonder what you're talking about. It's not at all obvious.

Even the second one—if you asked, "Have you noticed that life contains pain?" they'd probably say, "Yeah, I've noticed that." But if you said, "Have you noticed that all conditioned experiences are dukkha, are unsatisfactory?" they'd probably look at you strangely and say, "What the hell's wrong with you? A bit pessimistic, aren't you? A bit negative? You must be one of these pessimistic Buddhists. You should get out more. Get a life, go surfing, whatever."

So it's a progression from the obvious to the least obvious, from the gross to the subtle. But the three of them are a package. It's basically the same thing—except it's not a thing—but looked at from different angles.

You find different people have different sensitivities. Some people are particularly sensitive to the perception of impermanence. Some people are particularly sensitive to the perception of dukkha. And some people are particularly sensitive to the perception of not-self.

Anyone care to guess which is the short straw? If you happen to be one of these people who's particularly sensitive to dukkha, you've drawn the samsaric short straw. I know because that's me, basically. I would much prefer to be sensitive to anatta, or even to impermanence.

What would it mean to be sensitive to anatta? Some people just get it without any particular difficulty. Usually they're people who in their normal everyday lives hold themselves quite lightly and are quite adaptable in any situation, playing any sort of role. If they go to the office and they're supposed to be the

boss, they walk in and they're the boss. If they go home and they're supposed to be the nurturer, then they're the nurturer. There's no conflict. It's like almost inhabiting different personalities that are appropriate for the occasion. I suspect such people would make good actors.

These would be people who you wouldn't regard as being particularly ego-driven. Not so stubborn people—though not necessarily. There's a whole range of characteristics and personality traits. We're talking in very broad brush terms.

I remember once running a retreat where a couple of the meditators, quite young people...

Although they were very young, had gone through drug addiction and were coming off it. They were using meditation as a support. And it didn't take long to realize that these particular people were acutely sensitive to dukkha. Obviously that's why they got into the drug scene—to get rid of it, push it away.

So these are the three characteristics that constitute the field of insight. Impermanence is always mentioned first, partly because it's, in general terms, the most obvious, but also because there's a sense in which you can do it. You can do impermanence. You cannot do not-self, because the one who's doing it is the self. You could do dukkha, but I wouldn't recommend it. Some people do it—people with very macho approaches to meditation. "I'm going to sit for three hours and sit through the pain, and I don't care." But this is not necessarily to be recommended. But one can do impermanence.

So previously the Buddha has been saying she lives tracking body as body. And we've talked about how what this is about is cultivating this clear, clean relationship to the experience. This sensation is just this sensation. It's not my thoughts about the sensation. It's not my judgment about it. It's not what I want it to be or don't want it to be. It's just this sensation, full stop—that's it. Just this.

But here the Buddha says she lives tracking the nature of arising as body, the nature of ceasing as body, the nature of arising and ceasing as body. Now what this is talking about is a foreground-background shift. Remember we talked about foreground-background. If I pay attention to something, well first of all, in each of the six sense fields, I'm presented with this field. So let's take the visual field. There's an entire field here. If I pay attention to something—in other words, if I look at something—then that something now occupies the center of the field and the rest of the field is around it. So center, periphery. Now that center can be shifted, so I can look over here—bang, center, periphery. I can look over here—bang, center, periphery, or foreground, background.

Now it doesn't matter where I look, there's always that structure: foreground, background, where the focus is on the foreground. And we've talked about this as constituting the structure of noting. To note something in the language that Mahasi Sayadaw uses does not mean to write something down about it or to name it. It means to be deliberately aware of it, to attend to it, so that that something now occupies the center of the field. And we talked about how this relationship is essentially active. I'm doing this. I'm directing awareness, bang, to this. And then there's the background. And the relationship to the

background is receptive. It comes to me. I'm not going to it.

Now, when I do this, and I do it particularly with this practice, as I keep doing it, I notice that my object—we call this the object of awareness or the meditation object—I notice that it changes. In the time that you've been here, has anybody noticed their meditation object changing? Yes? I'll take silence as assent. According to Buddha's custom, when he remained silent, he was agreeing.

So we tend to notice that the object of awareness changes. If you're practicing a method that is designed to generate insight, you will be encouraged to notice change by the way that the method structures your attention. Let's say you do Goenka Method and you've got a ten-day retreat and you spend the first three days doing ānāpānasati just focused on the breath at the nose tip to get some concentration going. Then what do you do?

You sweep the body systematically up and down, and what are you constantly being urged to see? The changing sensations. Don't stay at one part for very long—just keep moving. Why? Because you're being encouraged to see change. And this is what I mean by "doing change." You can deliberately cultivate that perception.

The way Mahasi Sayadaw structures this is through the framework of grounding object and secondary object, particularly beginning with distraction. I'm following my meditation object when suddenly I know that I'm distracted. We've been talking about this whole process. Now if I'm just meditating for serenity, as soon as I notice that I'm distracted, I simply drop it, forget it, and go straight back to the meditation object. I have absolutely no interest in this distraction whatsoever. As soon as possible—back to the meditation object. The emphasis is on the continuity of awareness with this one meditation object.

But Mahasi says no. As soon as you know that you're distracted—in other words, awareness has gone from here to here—as soon as you notice that turn, face it, directly encounter it, note it deliberately, maybe briefly, maybe for a longer period, and then deliberately come back to the grounding object. In other words, awareness goes here, then there, then back here, then there, then back here: here, there, here, there, here, there—change, change, change, change, change. The method is designed to stimulate that view of impermanence. It's doing impermanence.

Does that make sense?

"So just pulling the mind back without noting—is that not vipassana? Is it more of a serenity concentration practice?"

Yes, it's more on the serenity side than the vipassana side, where the only interest and concern is with a single object. You just don't care about anything else. The other stuff has no significance—it's not important. Whereas here, we've been talking about the nature of distraction. How does distraction work? There's the forgetting, there's the remembering, what feeds the distraction. In other words, look at the process of distraction. It's important. It's significant.

Now, it would not be significant to someone doing serenity practice. "I don't want to hear about distraction. I don't care about distraction. I just want to stay with the one thing." But with Mahasi, it's "No—start to be interested in the distraction."

Depending on the teacher, Sayadaw U Pandita is definitely more interested in the grounding object than in the secondary object. But even there, what he wants to know about are the changes in the grounding object. Let's say I'm doing breathing as a meditation object for serenity. All I want is a nice smooth experience. I'm not interested in how it changes. I'm not interested in whether the breathing five minutes into a sitting is the same as the breathing fifteen minutes into a sitting, or thirty minutes into a sitting.

But if I'm reporting rising and falling of the abdomen to Sayadaw U Pandita, he wants to know: How does it change in the course of the sitting? He wants to know how the secondary object changes. It's all about change.

So you're being trained to perceive change, and you start to see it even when before you never noticed it. The way I talk about it, I say: Start getting interested in the fact of change. Start being particularly interested in the intersections of experience—the place where one thing becomes another. That's interesting.

And I talk about it in terms of: Something happens. What's feeding this? Change. What does this feed? Change. Change.

So we start and the foreground of awareness is occupied by a meditation object that changes. So we've got foreground meditation object and we're noticing that there's change. There's a sense in which the background is change. Foreground, meditation object. Background, change.

At some point, there's a perceptual shift and we realize that what we're looking at is not a meditation object which is changing. We are looking at the fact of change and it's happening in this particular meditation object. It's a perceptual shift. Does that make sense?

Now this shift is not something that we can do. What we can do is train ourselves to be sensitive to the fact of change. But this foreground-background shift, when what we're noting is actually not so much the object but the fact of change manifesting in the object—this is not something that we can do. It's something that happens, or doesn't happen, when conditions are ripe.

It's very subtle. In fact, it's so subtle that it can happen and the meditator doesn't even realize it. And it can be days, weeks, months later that it suddenly occurs to the meditator, "Oh, this is what's been going on. I knew my meditation was different somehow, and now I realize that's what's different about it. Actually what I'm looking at is the fact of change, which is happening in these familiar things."

So it's not something that can be done, it's not part of our agenda. We can't do it, but we can prepare the ground for its arising. The Buddha often uses agricultural metaphors. I cannot make an apple appear, but

I can plant an apple seed in the appropriate place and look after the tree. And sooner or later, an apple will fall into my hand. But I can't make the apple appear.

So what we're doing is preparing the ground and cultivating the conditions so that this perception of impermanence will arise.

"Patrick, I'm a little bit confused. I'm probably suggesting I'm way away from being able to observe this, but are you saying that when the foreground shifts to the background—oh, sorry, yeah, so when the background comes into the foreground generally, and you notice that actual movement of that, is that the point of change that you're talking about here that's different to the aspects of change that we might see?"

Usually at some point you notice that that shift has already taken place. Generally you don't see the actual shift take place, although you can, but usually you notice it's already happened. As I said, it's so subtle that often people don't even notice it. When it happens, they don't notice it. It's only later that they realize this is what's happening.

We got a taste of that this morning when we were doing that exercise where you're holding the meditation object. Then you loosen your hold a bit and then allow things to move. That's designed to give you a taste of what that might be like. But the fact that you're struggling with the concept has got nothing to do with whether or not you're actually perceiving it. These are two completely different things. One has nothing to do with the other.

"When you say 'do,' we can't do it, I'm understanding that we can't necessarily say, oh yeah, intellectually, there's change. What we need to do is have an experience of it, so that it arises as an internal insight, rather than a thought about things."

It's not like an insight that arises from thinking about someone telling you that your mind changes. Most people will say that, but they really don't have the experience of that until they notice these foreground-background shifts. And that's another aspect of the relationship between concept and experience.

At Mahasi Center they have a number of different teachers who teach different populations, and so there's one or more teachers whose job is to teach the monks who have done the study—the monks and the nuns who have studied and have got their Dhammacharya or further degrees. Because the basic pattern for a career monk or nun is first you study, then you meditate.

And so these monks would come into the meditation center with a degree of understanding of Buddhist philosophy which would make a person from a Western university with a PhD in Buddhology look like a kindergarten kid. And of course they think they know. Apparently they're very careful about who to pick to teach these characters because these are the hardest nuts to crack—because they think they know. So the concept gets in the way.

And Sayadaw U Pandita always liked it when a new student would roll up and they know absolutely nothing about Buddhism, and they'd be delighted because the concepts are going to be minimum interruption here.

So this is the perception of impermanence starts to develop, and according to the tradition, insight meditation begins at this point. So let's say you're doing Mahasi meditation and you're told that the Mahasi method is an insight meditation technique. And so you start—yes, rising, falling, distraction, rising, falling, whatever. You are not doing insight meditation. You are doing a preliminary serenity practice.

Insight meditation begins with the perception of impermanence. When the meditation object is the universal characteristic of impermanence.

That's the beginning of insight meditation.

Further, her mindfulness—and I was mistaken in the early part of this, it's actually three sentences we're doing tonight, but I think we've got time for this—Further, her mindfulness, *atthi kāyo*, there is body, or body is, is established just for understanding, just for continuous mindfulness.

This sentence gets variously translated because the language is really simple but the concepts are really hard to get a hold of. Her mindfulness, *atthi kāyo*, is established, *ñāṇa-mattāya*, *paṭissati-mattāya*—just for understanding, just for continuous mindfulness.

So let's go through these terms. What gets established is the mindfulness, and this is again in relation to where the body is the meditation object. Mindfulness is established, there is body, or body is, or this is body.

What is happening here is that the Buddha is squeezing language to try to convey complete intimacy with the meditation object. And this expression, *atthi kāyo*, there is body, or that's body, represents what he calls *suññatā vakkanti*, the entry into emptiness. What it refers to is a relationship of radical simplicity and radical intimacy. It's just this. Just the experience itself, not projecting anything onto it, not assuming anything about it, not trying to get anything from it. It's just this.

So everything else falls away. Remember I talked about how when we start to practice we notice that our normal relationship to experience is one of "What's in this for me? What can I get out of this?" So I'm always judging the experience. This meditation period—is it good enough for my purposes? Am I developing a nice concentration or a nice insight? And even this inhalation, this exhalation—is it good enough? Is it serving my purpose? So the relationship is instrumental. I'm doing something to get something. Have you ever approached meditation like that?

What the Buddha is talking about here is where all that falls away and it's just this. I'm not doing it for anything. And it's nothing more than what it is.

Another way that the Buddha talks about it is *tathatā*, suchness, just thisness. So you have the term *tathatā*

, just thisness, and you have the *tathāgatā*, the one who is in a state of gathā, just this—the *tathāgata*, the awakened one.

"Just this *tatha*?"

Tatha, yeah. T-A-T-H-A. And then if you turn it into an abstract noun, like empty, emptiness, you add *tā* at the end—T with a long A, with a macron on top.

"Isn't there also a trick with that? It says coming and going or something like that."

Oh yeah, it's *gatha*. *Gatha* is past participle of the verb *gacchati*, to go. So *gatha* can be "is gone." *āgatha* is "come." *Tathā gatha* could be broken up as *tathā gatha* or *tathā āgatha*—thus gone, thus come. And different traditions translate differently. I think that in the Chinese, because Chinese is very different from Sanskrit and Pali in terms of its structure, they had to pick one of the two. I think they might have picked the "thus come" as the characters, but I can't remember now.

"Aren't you doing it to get enlightened? Is that a personal question?"

Well, yeah, obviously from the source of the question, it's a personal question. Because you're saying that the judgment about the breath or what I'm doing right now, is it good enough for my purposes? And then you just... it sounded like the idea was that you're not doing anything to get anything and yet which I'm happy with but I kind of feel that I ought to be doing it to seek enlightenment.

All of that—I'm doing it for enlightenment, I ought to be doing it for enlightenment—all of it belongs in the realm of concept. It's a concept about the experience, it's not the experience.

One time that struck me quite clearly over the past few years. I've been doing my own retreats at Saranath Buddha Sanctuary, this place where I teach in Malaysia in December, and they have these magnificent huts that as a visiting teacher I get to live in. Big tropical hardwood veranda for walking meditation and so on. And when I'm practicing there, every day I clean it out. So it's very minimalist and I sweep the floor and then I mop the floor. And I do it as a kind of mindfulness exercise.

And one day I was doing the mopping. And I wasn't thinking, I was just mopping. And then suddenly a thought arose in my mind. Years ago, doing Zen meditation, being part of the Zen tradition, I'd heard the expression—and this is Japanese samurai Zen—wielding the sword with empty hands. And I, of course, had no idea what they were talking about, other than carving people up. But it was like I suddenly realized I was wielding the mop and my hands were empty. There was nothing there except the mopping. It was totally intimate.

Now at the level of concept I'm cleaning the floor so I have a nice clean environment which helps me meditate. But in that movement, none of that was there. It was just that's all. And this is, there is body. This is what the Buddha is talking about. So it's the experience of complete intimacy with whatever it is that you're doing.

You're looking very suspicious.

I believe you conceptually, but I don't get it.

And I'm bending over the lines and put it on the back burner.

Put it on the back burner. It could be happening tonight or tomorrow. Because time's got nothing to do with it.

And then, so, atthi kāya, body is, or there is body, just for understanding, just for continuous mindfulness. Jñānamattāya patissatimattāya. The mattāya, it can't be translated literally, but basically it conveys the sense that there's nothing beyond this. This is not for anything. So there's understanding which isn't understanding for something. It's just, I know this.

And then you have the same with not sati but patissati. Usually the Buddha uses the term sati, mindfulness, but sometimes you find patissati. And different scholars have different ideas about this. Some people say, look, it makes no difference. Sati, patissati, take your pick. Who cares? It's the same thing. I always am suspicious of such things because when I read the Buddha, it seems to me that he's very careful with language. So if he says patissati, it's because he means patissati. So I'm assuming that there's something else going on.

The prefix pati indicates again. It's like the English "re," as in remember, recognize, recognize, know again. It has the same function. So patissati is continuous mindfulness. So mindfulness without a gap, unbroken. And when mindfulness is unbroken, when it's continuous, then it becomes really, really strong, very powerful, very quickly. It doesn't take long for this to get really strong, if it really is continuous.

Pati can also indicate back in a recursive sense, so to look back. In other words, here it's mindfulness of mindfulness. Remember we talked about awareness of awareness. There's this recursiveness within awareness itself. So we're not just aware, but we know that we are aware.

Here the recursiveness has matured to the point that it dominates the experience. And this recursiveness is always associated with clarity.

It's like when I am distracted by something—at first, when the distraction begins, I don't know that I'm distracted. Then suddenly I know that I'm distracted. In that sudden knowing, the whole situation becomes clear. Before it wasn't clear—it was like a dream. But then suddenly, bang, it's completely clear. The situation is totally clear.

With that clarity, the awareness is penetrating, stable, and again, clear.

So patisati indicates both the continuity of mindfulness—and if you read Anālayo's book on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, he goes for this interpretation. He says this is what it refers to. But to me, it also indicates the depth and the clarity of the mindfulness. In other words, it's mature. The mindfulness is

mature.

And again, the phrase matāya—paṭisati matāya—means all of this is not for anything else. There's no agenda here. All agenda is gone. Complete intimacy.

So the practice is radically intimate and radically simple. There is no sense, as I said, of any agenda, and therefore there's no sense of anyone who has an agenda. There's no sense of anyone who is defined by the agenda.

I walk into this retreat with an agenda. I come here because I want something. If we didn't want something, we wouldn't be here. So we've all come looking for something. We want something. And we are, at least in part, defined in terms of what we want.

When that agenda disappears, that sense of definition disappears. That sense of identity disappears. If there's no agenda, there's no self. There's just this.

I think, although there's more to discuss here, we've pretty much covered it. That's the first three sentences. We'll do the next sentence tomorrow night.

Any questions or comments?

"Would you mind just reading the original again?"

I should have them together on different pages. Here it is:

"In this way she lives tracking body as body internally, or she lives tracking body as body externally, or she lives tracking body as body both internally and externally. She lives tracking the nature of arising as body, or she lives tracking the nature of ceasing as body, or she lives tracking both the nature of arising and the nature of ceasing as body. Further, the mindfulness 'body is' is established just for understanding, just for continuous mindfulness."

So those are the three sections. And as you can see, there's a lot in those sentences. This is typical of the suttas. They're compacted for memorization purposes and meant to be unpacked. So this unpacking is commentary.

This is how all the traditions are conveyed—you have sutta and then you have commentary. After the Buddha, this whole idea of sūtra became highly developed. Have you come across the Yoga Sūtras, potentially? Those are centuries after the Buddha, but they're a good example of the genre. The prize basically went to whoever could pack the most meaning into the fewest possible words. This was an art among those who composed these texts. The job of the teacher was to take it apart and unpack it.

"Patrick, that last sentence—I think I've always come across a translation that says 'there is body, this awareness is established just enough for complete mindfulness.'"

That's the *matāya*. It can be translated as "enough" in the sense of—it can be either "just enough," no more than just enough, grammatically translated and interpreted as that. Just enough for this—a kind of minimalist approach. Or it could be, *matāya* could mean "for just this."

Yes, so what you're suggesting is actually a totally different interpretation—which I find more convincing myself. Certainly a much more raw and profound kind of interpretation. You're saying it is just as it is, as you've been saying—no agendas. Rather than the bare minimum you need to get through, rather than fifty percent on the scorecard.

I've seen those translations and they didn't make a great deal of sense to me. When I borrowed into the Pali, I thought no, I think they're talking about something else. But this again is my interpretation, and we've spoken about this process before.

This is something I did when I started my PhD in Buddhist studies. I was faced with the challenge that I wanted to do a meditator's reading of dependent arising, because previously—not so much these days—but most scholars who studied early Buddhism were not meditators, and they really had no idea what it was about. And so you get these bizarre interpretations.

But if you're in an academic context, you can't just say, "Oh, all those fellows there, they're all wrong because they didn't meditate, but I'm a meditator, so you can believe me." You can't get away with that.

So I had to figure out a methodology by which I could do a meditator's reading of these texts. I spent a long time studying methodology and was aided by my associate supervisor, whom I carefully picked. He was an expert in the Hebrew Bible, particularly the prophet Isaiah. He knew absolutely nothing about Buddhism except what I told him, but he knew pretty much everything there was to know about how to read an ancient text. So he was fantastic.

My first chapter was all about different ways of reading texts and different ways of reading these texts. The examples I gave: take someone like Mahasi Sayadaw. He's reading the text as a practitioner, but as a practitioner who is committed to the full Theravada orthodoxy. So there are certain interpretations that he finds permissible, and others that are not, and are simply never mentioned.

If you read Ajahn Buddhadasa, the famous Thai teacher, writing about dependent arising, he's coming out of the Theravada tradition, so he's got this loyalty to that tradition. But he's reading it as a practitioner who has no commitment to the Theravada orthodoxy. So he comes across as quite different.

You read someone like Jack Kornfield—he's reading the same thing, but he's not committed to the Theravada tradition. He's reading it in a completely different cultural context, matching it up against Western psychology on one hand, personal experience on the other, bringing the text and experience together. So you get different communities who read these texts in different ways, and they come up with different things.

Which is the right one? There is no right one.

If you're a practitioner, how do you know if your understanding of the Buddha is correct? It's really quite simple. Is this understanding leading to the lessening of *dukkha*? Is it leading to the cultivation of the wholesome and the abandonment of the unwholesome in your life? If it is, it's the right interpretation. If it works, it's the right interpretation.

So there's always room for different ways of reading, again because they're so dense. Grammatically there are all sorts of ways you can read this, and even philosophically there are all sorts of ways you can read it. But when a practitioner or practitioner community reads it, they're reading it from a particular angle, within a particular culture, for a particular purpose—and that will affect the whole thing.

One thing that Ed told me once, my associate supervisor—he said, "Imagine you're on this side of a river. On the other side of the river is the text that you're studying, and the river represents time, thousands of years maybe. If you're doing historical study, what you think you're doing is crossing the river to go to that text. But the other way of looking at it, or the other way of doing it, is you don't cross the river to the text. The text crosses the river to you."

In other words, here I am today reading this. It's a whole different project. And as practitioners rather than historians, that's what we're interested in. What does it mean to this community today? That's what's important.

And that's what governs the way that I interpret these things.

Any other questions or comments?

Okay. Thank you very much.

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