Greed, Hatred and Delusion as Foundations for Mindfulness

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Tonight I'd like to revisit what's held as the jewel of the Buddha's teachings, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, focusing especially on the third part, contemplation of mind. *Satipaṭṭhāna*, remember, is often translated as a foundation or support, or more evocatively, as a posture for mindfulness, a resting place for awareness.

There are four *satipaṭṭhānas*: body, feelings, mind and *dhammas*, the last one including the main teachings of the Buddha. When we're in the third *satipaṭṭhāna*, we're directing attention inwards into our mind.

Sometimes the Buddha distinguishes between consciousness, *viññāṇa* in Pali, and the mind, the *nāma* component of *nāmarūpa*. Consciousness is the knowing of experience, while *nāma* comprises mental factors like will and perception, which can in themselves be known. The analogy often used is a movie theatre with consciousness as the screen and *nāma* as the picture we see on the screen. For *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation we include both screen and the movie, the knowing and the mental factors that can be known.

In this *satipaṭṭhāna*, we're looking backwards, you could say, looking into what's looking. We're letting attention rest within the mind that's asking attention to rest. This is possible because the mind has a receptive aspect, the mind door, as well as its active components like perception, attention and intention, the components that enable it to direct experience, to focus attention, to cognize.

The mind door is similar to the physical senses and is considered as the sixth sense in Buddhism. The receptive aspect of mind can detect mental activity and thereby act as a doorway, allowing that mental activity become conscious.

The guidance for this *satipaṭṭhāna* starts with: "And how does one abide contemplating mind as mind? Here one knows mind affected by greed as mind affected by greed and mind unaffected by greed as mind unaffected by greed." The Pali word *rāga* is used here which can be translated as greed, lust, passion, attachment or craving.

In Western culture, passion can be seen in a positive light, as when somebody says, "I'm passionate about gardening." Likewise, we often think of attachment in positive terms. Mother and baby, for example, are encouraged to make a strong bond of attachment. And if this doesn't happen, they both suffer emotionally. But in Buddhism, we speak of passion and attachment in the same sense as greed, lust and craving. Along

with hatred and delusion, *rāga* is described as one of the three poisons of the mind.

How can we think the attachment between mother and baby in terms of mental poison? And what about passion? Are we never to get enthusiastic about anything?

The Buddhist term *chanda* can be used to describe skillful desire. Ajahn Sucitto describes *chanda* as "desire as an eagerness to offer, to commit, to apply oneself to meditation. It's a psychological yes, a choice, not a pathology." *Chanda*, skillful desire, is in contrast to *taṇhā*, which is the desire that comes in reaction to our feelings. *Taṇhā* leads to suffering, as we vainly try to grasp pleasures that are always slipping through our fingers, whereas *chanda* is grounded in wisdom rather than reactive delusion.

If we're passionate about gardening, we can bring this into our Dhamma path by reflecting on the benefits, for example, care for the earth, respect for nature, beautifying the world, giving pleasure to others, promoting bodily and mental health. We can see gardening as *muditā*, appreciating the good things in life. But greed can easily slip in, as when we want to have the best garden in the neighbourhood. Although the activity is skilful, we can start grasping after its fleeting pleasures and turn it into something stressful.

It's similar for the attachment between parent and child. Parenthood can be brought into our Dhamma path by reflecting on the goodness involved. When the child brings joy, we can be grateful, remembering that joy itself is part of the spiritual path. But again, we have to guard against role identification, otherwise we will be devastated when the child disappoints us or flees the nest. Once we get emotionally involved in how we want our children to turn out, we're on the slippery slope.

Because we're not yet enlightened, all our attachments are going to have some level of greed as well as compassion, goodwill and *muditā*. Even during meditation practice, we'll all spend some time craving a better meditation. In this Sutta, the Buddha clarifies that this is not a problem. All we have to do is recognize the mind state of greed when it is present. We don't have to judge it as wrong or combat it in any way. We only have to know the experience of greed while it is present.

By simply noting "greed, greed" whenever this arises, we learn not to identify with the mind state. It is just another phenomenon arising due to conditions. It doesn't represent me. The more we clarify this, the less we will be troubled or controlled by the state. Greed will be welcome when it comes, because we're interested to get to know its raw energies.

Whenever we notice ourselves wanting a better meditation, we have a golden opportunity to get to know greed. There may be some pleasant feelings associated with thoughts of insight, peace and tranquility. Probably also unpleasant feelings associated with the fact that these aren't happening right now. Acknowledging both the pleasant and the unpleasant moves us towards equanimity, the objective observer, the bird-watcher in the hide.

This, of course, is a very wise and worthy state of being, the state we normally cultivate in *vipassanā*. But

to get to know the mind state of greed a bit better, we can creep out of the hide, get a bit closer to those birds which fascinate us. Of course, we have to be very patient, knowing we'll scare away the birds at the slightest noise. And we must be prepared for a long wait back in the hide whenever this happens, letting body awareness cool whatever passions have been generated.

When we're studying the mind state of greed, the bird we want to see more clearly is the knowing of pleasant feeling. We relax as best we can to allow pleasant feelings become more prominent. Then we focus attention on the mind that watches these, the knowing of pleasure. This is a tricky business. Our attachments to pleasure run deep and of course we can only enjoy pleasure if we know it, are conscious of it.

We're so deeply attached to the pleasure of knowing, of being conscious, that we simply take it for granted. The sense of self grows strong as we resist the notion that consciousness might not actually be me, mine. Could it really just be something that's happening? A chance combination of some sense object out in the world being detected by a sensor based in my body, animated by a moment of attention. It's hard to think about life in these terms. It gets too complicated for our brain to cope with.

In my case, reflections like these stir the desire to build a better picture of what's going on. This is another example of greed mixed in with *chanda*. In this case, dhamma *chanda*, the desire to understand the true nature of the world.

Armed with the instructions to know the mind affected by greed as the mind affected by greed, I don't have to curb greed, but simply let mindfulness rest in this instance of third *satipaṭṭhāna*. Attention retreats from its usual external orientation to explore the experience of knowing. There's a sense of moving inwards to what feels like my core. But what can be said about the experience?

There's certainly a pleasure in knowing experience. Pleasure is most clearly epitomized as pleasant sensations in the body. Greed tends to embroider these with thoughts of me and mine, but mindfulness detects the effort needed to blow up these bubbles of thought and the stress involved in that. Seeing the futility of grasping, greed fades and equanimity allows awareness to rest more easily in those pleasant sensations which now acquire perceptions of ease and goodwill.

At the same time, I start to lose touch with what I had termed the core of myself, the sense of being the one who knows experience. I realize that I cannot actually experience pleasure and maintain the sense of myself as the knower of pleasure.

As usual with any *satipaṭṭhāna* contemplation, mindfulness brings us to the edge of our comfort zone where we are resisting the limitations of our human condition. Resting awareness within the discomfort allows us bit by bit to make peace with our limitations. This exercise helps us come to terms in particular with the limitations of consciousness, learning that we cannot have that broad overview of all experience which brings the sense of being the observer, the one who knows, while also knowing any one experience

in any detail, such as pleasant feeling in the body. We have to compromise, let attention move in and out as conditions dictate.

At times like these, it could be useful to practice with the second part of the instruction on greed, to notice when the mind is not being affected by greed. While we are willing to compromise to allow attention move around as circumstances dictate, the mind is not being dominated by greed. However, reflecting the mind is not affected by greed brings us to another edge to the comfort zone. It's pleasant to experience a quiet mind without the strong pushes and pulls associated with greed. But because it's so pleasant, greed also wants to know the mind that is not affected by greed. It's a conundrum.

We slowly learn to accommodate this limit to what we can know by allowing greed to come and go as we explore non-greed, the absence of greed. In my experience, energies of greed burn in the face and head but are continually being cooled, washed away by the more calming energies of the breath. The exercise helps us get to know greed in a non-judgmental way. Moments of greed meet moments of non-greed. It's not a battle, just a dance.

But a dance doesn't last forever. Greed can turn to anger at its inability to possess the pleasant, calming feelings associated with non-greed. To help us work with this, we have the next line of the Sutta which goes: "One knows mind affected by anger as mind affected by anger, and mind unaffected by anger as mind unaffected by anger."

Anger is a manifestation of ill will. It's a reaction against what we perceive as unpleasant. Within the context of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation, anger isn't a problem but an opportunity to get to know ill will. In milder forms, ill will might take the hue of disinterest or dullness. We simply turn away from the world of experience, shield ourselves with mental fog. If the perceived threat penetrates that fog, ill will might take more active forms like irritation, impatience or suspicion. If the sense of threat grows really strong, we forget any agenda except defending ourselves and ill will could manifest as fear, hatred or rage.

The Buddha's metaphor of the two arrows illustrates the sad stupidity of ill will. We have the initial unpleasantness. For example, someone insults us. The hurt we feel at the insult is like being pierced by the first arrow. Rather than tend to this wound, we react with anger. This is like stabbing ourselves with the second arrow. Every time we speak or act on this anger, we remind ourselves of the insult, unwittingly stabbing ourselves again and again.

The metaphor graphically illustrates the pain we inflict on ourselves through anger. The pain of the second arrow isn't immediately obvious. In fact, we generally feel better when we react with anger. The insult hurts, makes us feel small and insignificant. But the reaction of anger builds us up again, makes us feel righteous and strong. In our psyche, it is the other person who is diminished as we hurl insults back at them.

It's similar for all the other shades of ill will. At a surface level, they make us feel better. Impatience and

irritation insist that the problem is out there. We would be fine if it wasn't for the idiot in the car in front who insists on stopping at all the traffic lights. It's only when we look at the experience in more detail that we can feel the second arrow.

Suppose the memory of a hurtful remark comes up in meditation. The body grows tense and in our mind we might fire daggers at the person who hurt us. While the image and thoughts put the enemy outside ourselves, we feel the push of aversion within our own body. At times it becomes apparent that anger splits us in two. The angry, assertive part holds all the power and feels like me. It flails about, tightening this muscle and then that, but it can never really pin down the you it seeks to crush.

Eventually we give up the useless battle and let the images fade. Tensions start to relax. As they do we have to admit that the anger was only a distraction covering up our original hurt at the harsh words. There's nothing for it but to feel those hurting sensations. This is to tend to the wound of the first arrow.

It's not easy to bear with the hurts and fears that underlie anger. Much easier to contort our body and mind in ill will. But with each reaction the habit grows. Eventually we see no good in the world. Everything is useless. Nobody is trustworthy. We're on the slippery slope towards a life of bitter isolation.

If we can learn to bear with unpleasant feelings, this has a transformative effect. The enemy is no longer out there. What we were crushing, we realize, was our feeling of hurt. Those feelings are embedded within our flesh, which might be trembling in fear. But there's also an impulse towards self-compassion. Within the fire of purification we learn to forgive ourselves for the hurts we've unwittingly caused and this makes it easier to forgive others.

We won't be able to tend to these inner wounds unless we allow the mind state of anger to reveal itself in mindfulness. Easier said than done. Most of us have been strongly conditioned to repress anger. This may be true for women even more so than men. The cultural message in my youth was, "Nice girls don't get angry." This forms a powerful part of our self-story and causes us to suppress anger.

It's not that suppression is always wrong. In daily life, it's often wise to suppress anger. To be able to suppress in a skillful way, we need to get to know the forces of suppression within us. In my experience, suppression is felt as a fierce weight on my head which bears down through my forehead. Just sitting with this allows healing. And then, in a social situation where I need to contain anger, that suppressive force can come to my aid. I can welcome it joyfully as a friend.

Occasionally, expressing anger might be wiser than suppression, especially if our habit is to hide anger in passive aggression. Learning to assert ourselves is part of our spiritual path. Of course, we need to be ready to apologize when we get it wrong. A good rule of thumb is to do the opposite of what you really want. If you want to let rip at somebody, that's the time to take a few deep breaths before opening your mouth. If you're scared to say anything, want to clam up and nurse a new grievance, that's the time to summon courage and let it rip. Surprisingly, the release can sometimes propel us to a position of deeper

friendship.

Anger plays a huge part in human life, for the most part destructive, but can be used skillfully when we've learned to befriend the state through mindfulness. Thus, we want to welcome the mind state of anger whenever this occurs in meditation. Allow awareness to examine all its various facets in body and mind. See where we're clinging. Let go if possible. Bear with the pain if not.

Within the honest gaze of mindfulness, we sense that anger keeps missing the target. It aims at the imaginary enemy but hurts only our own flesh. Seeing this futility the habit of anger fades and alternative pathways for coping with life's difficulties start opening up.

The skillful response to life's vicissitudes starts with accepting situations as they are. This doesn't mean becoming a passive doormat. We can recognise a situation as undesirable without letting that disturb our mental balance. "It's undesirable, but it's happening and I have to deal with this reality, not waste time thinking about how it ought to be." Acceptance fosters calm, which in turn allows for clear thought about how we might respond. If necessary, we can act vigorously to combat a threat and our actions will be more effective without anger clouding the mind.

A big part of exploring these alternative pathways is to notice when the mind state of anger is not present. This can prove a great boost to our spiritual self-confidence. Especially as awareness deepens, it might seem as though we must be the most hateful, angry person in the world. It's important to be able to counter that with direct proof that we can also be free from anger. When you're practicing *mettā*, for example, you could stop for a moment to acknowledge that the mind is not angry at this moment.

At times, however, even the absence of anger can prove challenging. When the heart is filled with *mettā*, the last thing it wants is to feel anger. And yet to notice the absence of anger, we have to remember what it is that's absent. So this practice deliberately recalls anger.

We must allow anger to arise, remind us of what is absent, and then fade, letting us see the absence of anger. This is certainly a challenge, but it develops the ability to work through anger towards whatever traits we detect in the absence of anger. These will probably include compassion for our human condition — at the mercy of strong desires and yet incapable of satisfying these.

The third exercise in the Sutta is to know mind affected by delusion as mind affected by delusion, and mind unaffected by delusion as mind unaffected by delusion. Greed hooks us to pleasant feelings while anger binds us to unpleasant feelings. When delusion predominates, we're ignoring sense data, dismissing it as unimportant. This happens when the experience is not very stimulating, neither threatening nor enticing. Ordinary activities like walking, standing in a queue, brushing our teeth, relaxing after a meal — all these are easy prey for delusion. Similarly, when things go quiet or the mind goes dull in formal meditation.

We withdraw to shield ourselves from the experience of sensations and feelings arising and passing at

their own pace and without any respect for what I would prefer. Wrapped tight in a blanket of ignoring, we make up a little story. We tell ourselves we are an individual who lives within our body-mind system, that we are in charge of this subjective inner world, deciding what to say and where to go, what thoughts to think, and — if only other people didn't keep messing things up — what feelings to have.

While we're young and healthy, it's very pleasing to think that this lithe body and these feelings of vibrancy and strength are mine. If we're clever, then we feel proud of this, assuming cleverness is our personal achievement. Whatever advantage we have, we assume this is ours. The illusion gives us energy and confidence, helps us pursue our dreams. But it also makes us vulnerable.

The older we get, the more trouble we find. We were proud of our beauty, so now we're aghast at being wrinkled and ugly. We delighted in striding up mountains. Who is this old geezer who pants when climbing a few steps? We could motivate people, galvanise a crowd into action. How come I'm now alone and ignored? Sometimes we feel bewildered, sometimes ashamed, as if we have caused this decline, sometimes angry, believing the world has failed us. The illusion has now become a source of misery. We nurture delusion at our peril.

So we need to be vigilant. Watch out for those moments when we quietly withdraw and ignore what's going on around us. How easily this happens. How often have you resolved to follow the breath, only to discover five, ten, twenty minutes have elapsed without ever noticing the abdomen rising or falling? We've been completely lost in thoughts, worries, daydreams, plans.

If we catch ourselves early in this delusive drift, chances are the thought stream will be somewhat daft or inconsequential — wondering about tomorrow's weather, whatever happened to our old school books. These fairly neutral thoughts are typical of the deluded mind. It's not that greed is getting us all excited about a plan or daydream, or that anger is compelling us to rehash old grievances. Instead, it seems we're thinking just for the sake of it.

Why do we do this? Thinking divides the mind in two. There's the thought and the thinker. An external world and me. While the thoughts and images vary from weather to school books, the thinker feels constant. This allows us to perpetuate the idea of a permanent, real entity inside — a me which is at the centre of experience, knowing it, feeling it, commenting on it.

We also delude ourselves that we are in control. We can easily pretend that we've made the decision to open a door, until we try to do this mindfully and see how difficult it is to stop barging through rather than feel the hand moving towards the doorknob and the thousand other sensations that arise and pass before we step through the door.

Even when the mind has steadied in *vipassanā* and we're no longer lost in thought, the illusion is propelled by subtle, barely verbalised perceptions that associate I, me, mine with pleasant feelings. It seems that I'm the observer of all my experience. If we direct attention towards that sense of self, a subtle

image may emerge, perhaps a glow of light or a pleasant feeling. We perceive this glow, this feeling, as me. But as soon as we rest attention there for a moment, we notice the glow shifts position, and now it seems like I am looking at things from a slightly different perspective. What in fact has happened is that the initial image faded, like all phenomena do, and we've created a new idea of self around another pleasant experience. When we see this sense of self shifting around like this, we begin to get a feel for the delusion that ensnares us.

We don't want to let the focus on delusion make us believe that the sense of self is innately wrong. It's quite the opposite, in fact. We need a healthy sense of self to accomplish anything, including getting ourselves to be mindful. We just want to see through the belief that this self is a substantial, permanent entity located somewhere within the body-mind system.

In fact, the instinctive tendency towards delusion can even be used beneficially. Delusion is fuelled by a need to feel whole within ourselves, self-sufficient, autonomous. When practising *mettā* for ourselves, we allow this powerful selfing instinct to find expression as conscious good wishes for ourselves. We are evoking a sense of self in order to care for ourselves. In this instance, the instinct to identify as a separate self is being used wisely. The idea, "this is me," energises the body and mind, lets us get ourselves together to accomplish things.

But at times we sense that idea fading. Attention rests on sensations without any central headquarters and no one commenting. We witness the body and mind operating according to their own laws. We see that the perception not-self fits this experience and sense the liberation on offer when we stop clinging to the idea of a self. Despite this, selfing starts up again.

On our way to liberation, we have to make peace with the mind affected by delusion. We need to cultivate a friendly attitude towards the deluded mind. The *Satipaṭṭhāna* Sutta gives us great support for this, letting us welcome delusion as an opportunity to explore delusions. Delusion will be present in all states of anger and greed, as well as more neutral states, like dullness. Whenever you feel a strong sense of self, use the reflection, "This is the mind affected by delusion," to establish yourself in the third *satipaṭṭhāna*. Allow the experience to unfold in whatever way it will.

Perhaps you'll start questioning that sense of self, wondering if it's really true. Perhaps anger will be stirred at the very thought of having your identity questioned. Perhaps greed will be stirred at the delightful self-image presented by delusion. We're also asked to notice the mind without delusion. At times when the central headquarters disappears, try reflecting, "This mind is not affected by delusion." As for anger and greed, noticing the absence of delusion may well prove a challenge. It may bring up grief as we acknowledge that the only way we can know this peaceful state is by continually saying goodbye to any budding sense of self.

Curiously, the exercise can also strengthen self-acceptance. Absence makes the heart grow fonder, we say. As clinging fades, appreciation for this suffering being, this body-mind system that seeks liberation, flows

more strongly.

I'd like to end with some of the instructions given in what's termed the refrain of the Sutta, a section that's repeated again and again throughout all four *Satipaṭṭhāna*. Firstly, we're asked to practise the exercises internally, which is what I've been discussing — noticing our own greed, hatred and delusion. We're also asked to practise these externally, meaning we notice these in other people.

When we're in a crowd of frantic shoppers, we could pause for a while, acknowledging the greed driving our thoughts and feelings, and then reflect, "This is most likely what's driving all the other shoppers as well." When we're walking outdoors or in a similarly tranquil situation, we could take a moment to reflect on the absence of greed in our own mind and very probably in the minds of others around us. We do the same for anger and delusion.

If we see someone in a rage, we can reflect on the ill will driving their thoughts and feelings. Curiously, this can stir compassion rather than deepen our hostility. When we're in a social gathering, we can take a moment to reflect on the absence of ill will amongst the people present. This might deepen our sense of connection and trust. If someone is tipsy or talking in a highly charged melodramatic manner, we could reflect that delusion is dominating their mind at the moment. When we're meditating with others or we see someone absorbed in gardening or other grounded occupation, we could reflect that delusion is not a dominant force in their minds at this moment.

Recognising the presence or absence of greed, anger and delusion in others is a form of *mettā* practice. It brings other people into consciousness at quite an intimate level. This may stir a degree of comradeship and we start to see the others in a friendlier light. At other times the opposite may happen and the exercise brings up some emotional reaction. This is part of the purification process, helping us acknowledge others as human with similar challenges and limitations as ourselves and also with a similar potential for liberation. If we can bear with the negative emotions mindfully, the payoff is purification and increasing ability to relate skilfully to others.

The next instruction in the refrain is to see the arising and passing away of these mind states. Say someone treads on our toe and we feel a surge of anger arising. Very quickly that anger is going to persuade us of whatever story aversion normally brings up, and we'll be stuck in a very solid sense of self and think that life has always been this miserable way and always will be. If we can catch that moment of anger arising, we see that this story is being constructed, willed into existence. We're choosing the story out of habit. Although this is very unedifying to see, it's ultimately liberating. We learn to respond differently, tell ourselves more helpful stories that are closer to the truth. Same for greed and delusion. If we see them arising, we realise we are cooperating, willingly buying into these states. Of course, we have to be patient with these deeply conditioned habits, but slowly intuition starts to find more helpful ways of reacting.

To see the passing away of greed, hatred or delusion is also very instructive. For example, when we come

home from a shopping trip, we could sit down, relax and feel the frenzy of shopaholism die away. This gives us a taste for the absence of greed. Let's see the value of the state. If we've had a blow-out with a colleague, we could go somewhere quiet, wait for the anger to die down, detect when the mind becomes rational again, appreciate the absence of anger. Similarly, we can detect the final moments of delusion. If we've been the one telling the melodramatic story, we can track the buzzing giddiness till it touches down to reality. Who knows what we will find? Perhaps relief? Humour? Shame? Whatever arises is part of our path to non-delusion.

Let's finish with a verse from the Dhammapada: "Let the discerning one guard the mind, so difficult to detect and extremely subtle, seizing whatever it desires. A guarded mind brings happiness."

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