

Bhante Sanathavihari

*Right Effort: Understanding an Often Overlooked Mental Discipline on the Eightfold Path*

Week Four: “Cultivating and Maintaining Wholesome States”

November 26, 2022



Hello, and welcome back to our series on wholesome effort, or *samma-vayama*. In the previous episodes, we covered guarding the six senses, or *sanvara*, protecting our mind from external influences and not allowing unwholesome states to arise in the mind when they are not present. Then, in the next episode we covered *pahana*, which means the removal of or eliminating unwholesome states in the mind. We did this by replacing an unwholesome thought with a wholesome thought and focusing on the experience and taste and flavor of that wholesomeness/ We focused on the experience of letting go, the experience of lovingkindness, and the experience of compassion, and we focused on choosing the states that we are going to cultivate and entertain instead of just letting the mind do its own thing and letting unwholesome states perpetuate and continue in their normal way and contaminate the mind.

Today, we're going to be focusing on the two last parts of this harmonious, wholesome effort, which is *bhavana*, to develop or to cultivate, and *anurakkhana*, which means to maintain, to keep generating those wholesome states which are already present in the mind. When we talk about bhavana here, we're going to be focusing on the practice of *satipatthana*, which many of us know as mindfulness, *vipassana*, or insight meditation.

Here, we need to get in touch with what satipatthana means. Most of the time, satipatthana is translated as the four foundations of mindfulness or the four foundations of awareness. We can also break down the word into *sati*, *upa*, and *thana*. *Sati* means mindfulness or awareness. *Upa* means toward, toward one. And *thana* means to place.

So what are we doing with our mindfulness or our awareness? Well, we're bringing it in and placing it near or towards oneself. But what exactly are we placing the attention on? The Buddha said that there are four parts, dimensions, or facets of our experience which we are focusing on. First is *kayanupassana*, observing the body. *Kaya* is the body. *Passana* means to observe. So

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we're not letting ourselves be taken in by whatever's happening out in the environment. We are placing our attention inside—as I said earlier, *upekkha*, translating it as *upa ikkhati*, placing the attention inside. So we're placing it on the body, bodily movements, and bodily sensations.

The next one is *vedananupassana*, observing feelings—not emotions, but feelings, pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, which means neither pleasant nor unpleasant. There might be some sort of physical movement or physical sensation, and then there's some sort of feeling that arises from it, pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. There's some movement in the body. It's unpleasant; that's pain. We can think about that when we talk about feelings and *vedananupassana*.

Then we have *cittanupassana*. I like to think about this as the state of mind, the flavor of the mind, the mood of the mind, or the affective part of the mind. So once there is some sort of unpleasant disturbance, movement, or sensation in the body, then there's some feeling about it, which is unpleasant. Then from there, the mind gets perturbed, and maybe you get angry or you get sad. That's observing the mind. Sometimes in Buddhism, we think about the mind as the heart mind. It's not only the intellectual part but the heart of the mind, thinking from the heart. So this is really my emphasis when it comes to *cittanupassana*, observing the heart mind.

The last facet of this meditation is *dhammanupassana*. Dhamma means experience. As I said earlier in the *Dhammapada* verses, *Manopubbangama dhamma*. Thinking leads to experience, or thinking creates experiences or states, and we can think in a certain way which generates unwholesome or wholesome states.

Within this realm or facet of observing or mindfulness, we're paying attention to these wholesome and unwholesome dhammas, *kusala-dhammas* and *akusala-dhammas*. We're watching them in the mind. And the Buddha is very particular about these dhammas. First, he

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talks about the unwholesome dhammas that we need to remove because, remember, *sabbapapassa akaranam*, getting rid of the unwholesome; *ku salassa upasampada*, generating the good; and *sacittapariyodapanam etam buddhana sasanam*, purifying the mind, cultivating the mind, this is the teaching of all the buddhas.

Here, we’re going to be focusing on becoming aware of when the five hindrances appear in the mind, the five hindrances being sensual thoughts, hatred, tiredness or laziness, anxiety and worry, and confusion or doubt. These are the five hindrances, the particular unwholesome states of mind that the Buddha wants us to focus on when we’re practicing dhammanupassana, watching dhammas, experiences or thoughts or states.

We need to be aware of them and remove them. How do we remove them? We need to cultivate the good ones. Which are the good ones? The *satta bojjhanga*, the seven factors of awakening. The first is *sati*, mindfulness. Next is *dhammavicaya*, which means investigation of dhamma. Investigation of dhamma means being able to discern between a wholesome state and an unwholesome state: what’s a kusala-dhamma and an akusala-dhamma?

Next is generating *viriya*, the energy or strength that comes through this practice; then generating or becoming aware of when *piti*, joy or rapture, arises in the mind; becoming aware of when *passaddhi* arises in experience, which means relaxation and tranquility; becoming aware of when *samadhi* arises in the mind, which means stillness, unification, or concentration of the mind; and becoming aware of when *upekkha*, equanimity or looking inside, a very equanimous way of looking inside, arises in the mind.

This is the landscape of the practice of satipatthana, and satipatthana in this context means bhavana. Bhavana means the practice of satipatthana, and satipatthana here means generating

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and cultivating the seven factors of awakening because we're focusing on developing wholesome states in the mind.

“When there are no wholesome states in the mind,” the Buddha says, “Now we actively generate and develop and think wholesome thoughts, wholesome states, wholesome experiences in the mind.”

We've all been developing mindfulness throughout these last episodes, starting with the practice of *sanvara*. When we practice *sanvara*, we are mindful. We are aware not to let our attention drift to things that might cause unwholesome states to arise in the mind. We've also been developing *dhammavicaya*, which means to discern between the wholesome and unwholesome.

In the second part, *pahana*, we were seeing when an unwholesome state arises, and we were replacing it with the wholesome. *Viriya*, this energy and strength, is the kind of energy that comes from this practice. The more skillful you get at this practice, the more hypermotivated or enthusiastic or better you get. There's a sense of empowering of the practice that happens through developing it. That's a wholesome state. There's some sort of vigor that comes from this practice that feels good, and that's a wholesome state.

And then there's also the wholesome state of *piti*, meaning joy. The mind becomes happy. The mind becomes happy when it's aware, when it's able to distinguish between wholesome and unwholesome, and when it has the vigor, strength, and energy behind it to continue the practice because unwholesome states and unwholesome thoughts are not not there.

We remove the *akusala-dhammas*, the *akusala-vitakkas*, or the *akusala-sankappas*. However we want to talk about these unwholesome states of mind, we're able to discern and get rid of them

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and cultivate wholesome ones. And that makes the mind very happy. When we're focused only on wholesome thoughts, that brings *piti*, or rapture and joy, and then that leads us to *passaddhi*. The mind becomes tranquil, peaceful, and calm. The body becomes completely relaxed. And with a joyous mind and a calm body, we experience *samadhi*, the unification of mind, the concentration of mind, the wholesomeness of mind, and the stilling of mind.

When that arises, we become aware of it. We let that sink in, and we take in that good feeling that comes from the mind not moving around and being perturbed and just staying in that very wholesome state of mind. That leads to *upekkha*, equanimity, being able to completely not be perturbed, to see clearly, and to be able to see in a special way.

Then this leads us to the result or the effect of the practice of satipatthana, which is *vipassana*, or insight. Insight itself is also a wholesome state. In the first episode, I said that *silā*, our behavior, contributes to our *samadhi*, which is our mental composure, our concentration, our wholesome state of mind, and that contributes to wisdom.

Through the practice of generating wholesome states and cultivating the seven factors of awakening, you will get the result of insight, wisdom, *panna*, and that's also a good feeling.

There are three types of feelings I'd like to share with you. There are the sensual feelings that we get every day in our everyday interactions when our senses come in contact with things that lead to greed. That's really what we need to remember. When I say sensual, I mean something that leads to greed or aversion.

Then there are these unworldly feelings. These unworldly feelings are the pleasurable, pleasant feelings, or even unpleasant ones, that arise from wholesome actions, wholesome thoughts, and

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wholesome experiences like *jhana*. As I said earlier, the bodhisattva realized that the pleasure of *jhana*, this unworldly, unsensual happiness, is something that we can partake in without feeling bad about it. There’s nothing wrong with indulging in this kind of pleasure.

What I want to convey with this general review of *satipatthana* and *bhavana* is to focus on the pleasant taste or experience of this practice. Sometimes we get too caught up in the head, or sometimes we think, “No, it’s not good to feel something pleasant. Something pleasant is going to disturb my mind.” But we should be able to discern if that pleasant experience is arising from something that is related to *dhamma*, which is acceptable to rejoice in, or something that is not related to *dhamma*, which is *akusala* and leads to greed, hatred, and delusion.

The final part or final step to this practice of *samma-vayama*, wholesome effort, right effort, is *anurakkhana*, or maintenance. So not only do we try to protect our mind and guard the senses from unwholesome stimulus coming into the mind and generating unwholesome states, not only do we make an effort and strive to remove unwholesome states in the mind by replacing them with wholesome states, not only do we purposely develop wholesome states in the mind when they’re not present, but when these wholesome states are present, we continue to generate them. We continue to develop them. We continue to practice them all the time.

And how do we do this? The Buddha very clearly tells us in the *Satipatthana Sutta*. He says, “While standing, walking, sitting, or laying down, you can practice mindfulness in all these positions.”

This is not to be taken too literally that we do standing mindfulness, walking mindfulness, sitting mindfulness, and laying down mindfulness, although you can. The Buddha means that throughout the day, you find your body in these different positions. Whatever position you find

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your body in, you can practice satipatthana. You can practice mindfulness in whatever way the body is.

Later on, the Buddha gives examples and says that when a monk is walking, he knows that he's walking. When he's stretching out his arm, he knows that he's stretching out his arm. When he's eating, he knows that he's eating. Even when he's defecating and urinating, he is aware because when you're going through your everyday experience, an unpleasant, pleasant, or neutral feeling can arise. That unpleasant feeling can lead to aversion, the pleasant feeling can lead to desire or craving, and the neutral feeling leads to ignorance, delusion, and unconsciousness, or *avijja*. So the maintenance is practicing all the time.

We also see this in another sutta called the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*, the Lovingkindness Sutta. The Buddha says there that one should be practicing this all day. Right from the moment that we wake up until we go asleep, one practices this meditation all the time.

The final step of cultivating and maintaining means bringing in this practice that I shared with you in the last couple of episodes of protecting your mind and generating wholesome states to overcome unwholesome states. I want you to tap into that tranquility, that *passaddhi*. I want you to tap into that *piti*, that joy that comes with the practice. I want you to tap into that *sukha*, that happiness. That's really important.

To get the experiential fruits, tap into that motivation because when something feels good, you want to do it. That's why we give in to the unwholesome things: because it feels good. Not everything that feels good is bad, so in this practice, there are things that feel good, and I want you to tap into that because it's really helped transform my practice and given me the best

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benefits when I allow myself to indulge in these blameless practices. There’s nothing wrong with them. No one gets hurt.

I really want to push this part of satipatthana. Focus on passaddhi, piti, samadhi, and upekkha, the joy that comes from these things. And in your everyday life, when you see this awareness arise and you see any wholesome state of mind arise, embrace it. It’s OK. Smile. Whatever happens, tap into that.

So I hope that you found some benefit. I hope this was interesting to you. I’ll collect all the references and citations in this talk to make it easier for you to go back if you want to go into more details because I just gave a very general overview. This is just an introduction to right effort, samma-vayama, and the four right strivings or wholesome strivings. I hope you enjoyed this, and may you be well, happy, comfortable, and peaceful. Have a good day.