

Right Mindfulness

In

Early Buddhism

Satipaṭṭhāna myths and misconceptions



Maha-Satipatthana Sutta

The Great Establishings of Mindfulness

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

Myths and misconceptions

Wrong interpretation of the Teaching (Dhamma) or the Monastic Law (Vinaya) can lead to schism in the Sangha.

Such issues need to be settled (*samatha*).

How to resolve disagreements

“Ānanda, dispute about livelihood or the monastic code is a minor matter.

But should a dispute arise in the Saṅgha concerning the path or the practice, that would be for the hurt and unhappiness of the people, for the harm, hurt, and suffering of gods and humans.

(MN 104)

How to resolve disagreements (cont.)

“It may be that monastics are disputing: ‘This is the teaching,’ ‘This is not the teaching,’ ‘This is the monastic law,’ ‘This is not the monastic law.’

They should all meet together and thoroughly consider the guidelines of the teaching.

They should settle that disciplinary issue in agreement with those guidelines.”

(MN 104)

How to resolve disagreements (cont.)

“There may be a monastic who says: ‘In such-and-such monastery there is a senior monastic who is very learned and knowledgeable in the scriptures, who has memorized the teachings, the monastic law, and the outlines.

I’ve heard and learned this in the presence of that senior monastic: this is the teaching, this is the monastic law, this is the Teacher’s instruction.’

How to resolve disagreements (cont.)

“You should neither approve nor dismiss that statement. Instead, you should carefully memorize those words and phrases, then check if they’re included in the discourses or found in the monastic law.

If they’re not included in the discourses or found in the monastic law, you should draw the conclusion: ‘Clearly this is not the word of the Buddha. It has been wrongly memorized by that senior monastic.’ And so you should reject it.

How to resolve disagreements (cont.)

“But if they are included in the discourses and found in the monastic law, you should draw the conclusion: ‘Clearly this is the word of the Buddha. It has been correctly memorized by that senior mendicant.’ You should remember it.”

(DN 16)

Myth 1

The Satipaṭṭhāna
Suttas are the most
important *suttas*

Myth 1 (cont.)

“The most important discourse ever given by the Buddha on mental development (meditation) is called the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta.”

Walpola Rāhula

Myth 1 (cont.)

“[The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta] is by all Buddhists rightly considered the most important part of the whole Sutta-Piṭaka and the quintessence of the whole meditation practice.”

Bhikkhu Nyanatiloka

Myth 1 (cont.)

“In many a home, the *satipaṭṭhāna* book is reverently wrapped in a clean cloth, and from time to time, in the evening, it is read to members of the family. Often this discourse is recited at the bedside of a dying Buddhist, so that in the last hour of his life, his heart may be set on, consoled, and gladdened by the Master’s great message of liberation.”

Bhikkhu Nyanaponika

Myth 1 (cont.)

“And what are those things I have taught from my direct knowledge?”

They are: the four kinds of mindfulness meditation, the four right efforts, the four bases of psychic power, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven awakening factors, and the noble eightfold path.

Myth 1 (cont.)

“Having carefully memorized them, you should cultivate, develop, and make much of them so that this spiritual practice may last for a long time.

That will be for the welfare and happiness of the people, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and humans.”

DN 16

Myth 2

Satipaṭṭhāna can be
fully understood
through the
Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta

Myth 2 (cont.)

The opposite is true:

Satipaṭṭhāna will be *mis-*understood if one only considers the *Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas*.

Satipaṭṭhāna can only be understood by considering all the EBTs.

Myth 2 (cont.)

Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas
(MN 10 + DN 22)

Satipaṭṭhāna Saṃyutta
(SN 47)

Various other *suttas*

Satipaṭṭhāna in the
Abhidhamma

Satipaṭṭhāna outside
the Pali tradition

Myth 3

Satipaṭṭhāna
means “foundation
of mindfulness”

Myth 3 (cont.)

The word “foundation” implies that *satipaṭṭhāna* develops mindfulness.

Here is the standard explanation of *satipaṭṭhāna*:

“It’s when you meditate by observing an aspect of the body—keen, aware, and mindful (*satimā*), rid of desire and aversion for the world.”

Myth 3 (cont.)

Instead *satipaṭṭhāna*
develops *samādhi*:

Sammāsati >
sammāsamādhi

Myth 3 (cont.)

Satipaṭṭhāna is:

Application of
mindfulness

Focus of
mindfulness

Myth 4

Satipaṭṭhāna can
be done without
morality

Myth 4 (cont.)



Mindful fishing?

Myth 4 (cont.)

“When your morality (*sīla*) is well purified and your view is correct, you should develop the four applications of mindfulness in three ways, depending on and grounded on morality (*sīla*).”
(SN 47.3)

Myth 4 (cont.)

Morality is very broad:

- Positive and negative morality (*sīla*)
- Sense restraint (*indriya saṃvara*)
- Clear awareness (*sati-sampajañña*)

Myth 4 (cont.)

Correct view:

- Seeing the limits of the material world (*anicca*)
- Understanding how people are conditioned (*anattā*)

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THE
END