Understanding Clear Comprehension

After the introduction of Anapanasati, mindfulness of breathing meditation, other aspects of the First Foundation of Mindfulness, Kayanupassana, are developed. Here is the quote from that part of the Satipatthana Sutta, translated by Nanamoli:

The Four Postures

“Again, bhikkhus, when walking a bhikkhu understands: ‘I am walking’; when standing, he understands: ‘I am standing’; when sitting, he understands: ‘I am sitting’; when lying down, he understands: ‘I am lying down’; or he understands accordingly however his body is disposed.

“In this way he abides contemplating the body as a body internally, externally, and both internally and externally…And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That too is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body.

Full Awareness

“Again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu is one who acts in full awareness when going forward and returning; who acts in full awareness when looking ahead and looking away; who acts in full awareness when flexing and extending his limbs; who acts in full awareness when wearing his robes and carrying his outer robe and bowl; who acts in full awareness when eating, drinking, consuming food, and tasting; who acts in full awareness when defecating and urinating; who acts in full awareness when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent.

“In this way he abides contemplating the body as a body internally, externally, and both internally and externally…And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That too is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body.

Practicing mindfulness is primarily organized around Anapanasati with the intention to integrate the ability to be presently aware in any setting, any posture and any time. This general quality can be organized around the concept of *sati sampajanna, mindfulness with clear comprehension*.

To be thorough in his analysis, Analayo has researched the Chinese version of this discourse called the Madhyama-agama (mah-dyah-mah ah-gah-mah) in order to clarify some differences in the wording and, perhaps the practice (from pp 50-51 in “Perspectives On Satipatthana):

From the Pali Canon version: “…when walking a bhikkhu understands: ‘I am walking’; when standing, he understands: ‘I am standing’; when sitting, he understands: ‘I am sitting’; when lying down, he understands: ‘I am lying down’; or he understands accordingly however his body is disposed.”

From the Chinese version: “Walking one knows he is walking, standing one knows he is standing, sitting he knows he is sitting, lying down he knows he is lying down, [falling] asleep one knows he is [falling] asleep, waking up one knows he is waking up, [falling] asleep [or] waking up one knows one is [falling] asleep [or] waking up.”

From the Pali Canon version: “…a bhikkhu is one who acts in full awareness when going forward and returning; who acts in full awareness when looking ahead and looking away; who acts in full awareness when flexing and extending his limbs; who acts in full awareness when wearing his robes and carrying his outer robe and bowl; who acts in full awareness when eating, drinking, consuming food, and tasting; who acts in full awareness when defecating and urinating; who acts in full awareness when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent.”

From the Chinese version: “One clearly knows one is going out and coming in, one contemplates and discerns it well; bending, stretching, lowering, or raising [any of one’s limbs], one does it with appropriate comportment; wearing one’s outer robe and [other] robes, and [carrying one’s] bowl, one does it properly; walking, standing, sitting, lying down, [falling] asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent—all this one clearly knows.”

Superficially, this passage seems overly simplified—when I’m walking I know I’m walking—so what? The primary goal of Buddhist practice is to become directly aware of impermanence, the experience of dukkha and the absence of an autonomous and controlling self. The intention with this particular passage is to invite the practitioner of mindfulness to extend awareness of intentionality beyond whatever formal meditation practice provides.

*Cetana* is the Pali word for *volition* or *intention*, and its function is to coordinate the various conditioning functions in any moment of self-organization. Its operation is synonymous with karma, that is, to condition responses to environmental cues. Mindfulness of breathing cultivates the intention to go to the breath and sustain awareness of the breath consistently. What about when a person is not sitting still in meditation practice?

There is a traditional practice in mindfulness meditation retreats called walking meditation. The essential function of walking meditation is to generalize mindful intentionality regarding every action one takes. When practicing walking meditation, one “trains” to be mindful of the intentionally of attention regarding each subtle shift of attention while walking very slowly over a course of 30 feet or so. Primary attention can be shifted from breath awareness to the soles of the feet or remain aware of the sensation of breathing. The practice is to notice changes of focus—from in-breath to lifting a foot, then the intention to notice moving the foot forward, then the intention to lower the foot to the ground, and then the intention to note the pressure of the heel of the foot contacting the ground. These notings are related to breath awareness, rapidly shifting back and forth. With ongoing practice, one becomes more adept at tracking how intentions shift from one moment to the next, from one focal point to the next. Through this practice, the mind becomes quicker to notice changing focus and more agile in moving from one point to another without the “heaviness” of craving and clinging.

Sharon Salzberg mentioned an interview with Sayadaw U Pandita—she entered into the room with a commitment to observe intentionality in every moment. When she knelt down to sit before him, her hair fell across her face and she used her hand to sweep it back in place. He immediately asked her “Did that intention arise on the in-breath or the out-breath?” This observation reinforced the need for unrelenting commitment to integrate mindfulness of intentions into daily life routines.

Although it is not in the Pali Canon, the term *sampajanna* is key to understanding and applying this passage in the Satipatthana Sutta. The translation for this is *clear comprehension*, and there are four categories for contemplation of one’s actions emphasizing benefits for Awakening:

* **Suitable purpose**: Developing goals that are consistent with the process of Awakening. Is my goal organized in a way that values Right Speech, Right Action and Right Mindfulness? Another mundane application is to decide whether a particular project is worth doing—a “cost/benefit analysis”.
* **Suitable means**: Is a particular way achieving the goal is reached the most appropriate in regards to realizing the stated purpose? On a mundane level, consider whether the tools and skills applied to realizing the goal or purpose the most suitable?
* **Minding the domain**: This involves mindfully monitoring the suitable means for achieving the goal to make appropriate adjustments as circumstances warrant. In terms of the Satipatthana Sutta, this means mindfully monitoring the fours foundations as self-state organizations come and go—how intentions interact with actions and expectation in an ongoing way, alert for a need to change the means in order to realize the purpose and see through delusion.
* **Non-delusion**: This clear comprehension relates to the ultimate goal of practice, which is to become clearly aware of the three characteristics: impermanence, the absence of an enduring and autonomous self, and the distress and confusion that comes about due to craving and clinging.

The term *sati sampajanna* often appears in Buddhist commentary as synonymous in function to vipassana. In talks about the Satipatthana Sutta, terms such as diligence, clear awareness, mindfulness and setting aside covetousness and ill-will towards the world. Sati sampajanna combines clear awareness and mindfulness.