

Study and Discussion Questions for *Early Buddhist Discourses*

Chapter Four: The Greater Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness (*Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta*)

Study Questions

- 1) What does the fourfold foundation of mindfulness (*sati*) aim to achieve?
- 2) What are the four foundations of mindfulness?
- 3) What techniques of meditation are involved in the first foundation of mindfulness? Which bodily activities are involved?
- 4) What are the four elements that comprise the body?
- 5) Summarize the techniques of meditation that relate to the cemetery.
- 6) How does a *bhikkhu* live mindfully observing feeling as feeling?
- 7) What are the mental phenomena relating to the five obstacles that a *bhikkhu* should observe so as to establish mindfulness?
- 8) What are the mental phenomena relating to the five aggregates of grasping that a *bhikkhu* should observe so as to establish mindfulness?
- 9) What are the mental phenomena relating to the six internal and external bases of sense that a *bhikkhu* should observe so as to establish mindfulness?
- 10) What are the mental phenomena relating to the seven factors of enlightenment that a *bhikkhu* should observe so as to establish mindfulness?
- 11) Give a summary description of each of the Four Noble Truths.
- 12) How does craving arise from the various sensory objects, sense faculties and modes of sensory modes of consciousness?
- 13) What result can be expected for one who develops these four foundations of mindfulness? How long must one develop the four foundations of mindfulness to achieve these results?

Discussion Questions

- 1) Is the development of mindfulness a useful tool for achieving religious goals? Is there a connection between mindfulness and moral conduct as the Buddha suggests? Do other religious or philosophical traditions contain psychological or meditative practices similar to mindfulness in Buddhism?
- 2) Is there any reason to believe that the development of mindfulness is effective in providing control over one's bodily or mental faculties?
- 3) Why are breathing and focalization techniques recommended as the best means for achieving mindfulness? How do such techniques relate to more well known practices like yoga and Lamaze?
- 4) The suggested cemetery meditations seem to be a grotesque, even macabre, way to view the body. Are such negative images of the body warranted? What purpose might these meditations have?
- 5) Do the meditative practices suggested for achieving mindfulness make a person aloof and disengaged from the world or more involved and engaged with the world?

- 6) What does mindfulness reveal regarding the nature of bodily and mental phenomena? How does this relate to the Buddha's teaching of dependent arising?
- 7) The discourse gives one of the more detailed accounts of the Four Noble Truths found in the Pāli Canon. Is the Buddha right that "suffering" (*dukkha*) is a pervasive feature of human existence (i.e., the First Noble Truth)? How should one understand what the Buddha means by "suffering," for, surely, most people are not in constant *physical* pain? Should birth, old age and death be considered "suffering?"
- 8) Is selfish craving the main cause of suffering, as the Buddha explains in the Second Noble Truth?
- 9) According to the Third Noble Truth, the cessation of craving involves "aversion" towards and "renunciation" of agreeable pleasant sensory experiences. Is this not an ascetic extreme (of the kind the Buddha himself rejected)? Are not pleasant sensory experiences among the proper aims of a person's quest for happiness?
- 10) Are the specific suggestions of the Noble Eightfold Path (the Fourth Noble Truth) a reasonable way to end selfish craving (and thus suffering)? Is the Path truly the "middle way" the Buddha suggests or is it tipped towards the extreme of asceticism? How does the Path compare and contrast with ethical practices promoted in other philosophical and religious traditions?