

# *Satipaṭṭhāna* (17) How to Know

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Often we take our knowing for granted. We constantly recognize things throughout the day, but we do it at a subconscious level. We think that if we take the time to recognize each thing we come across, we would never get anywhere. There is so much to recognize.

Our brain can process things subconsciously. We know how to find our way through the door without thinking about it. Even though so much is done on automatic pilot, knowing is still an essential quality of being human. Without it, our human life would not be possible. Because we are so interested in our desires to do, want, or think about something, we seldom take time to see how special it is to recognize, to know.

The knowing faculty of the mind becomes increasingly important for deep mindfulness practice. It does so naturally. It is not like we have to work at knowing. But the deeper the practice goes, the more acute and clear our knowing becomes. In this way, knowing becomes more and more liberating. It is a way of freeing ourselves – a way to greater and greater freedom.

Knowing is very basic. When practice is strong – meditation is going well; you are concentrated and quite calm – it is interesting to notice what it is like to come out of meditation, get up from your seat and start walking. If you are really calm and settled, there is probably little tendency to want to rush into the next thing. As you begin to walk, there might be a relaxed, almost automatic, knowing that you are walking. You are so present in walking, that you just know you are walking.

There is a famous story about two Zen students talking about their respective masters. The first one said: “My teacher is so great. He can enter into the deepest states of concentration, walk on water, fly through the air – all kinds of miraculous things.” The second one said: “Well, when my teacher walks, she just walks. When she eats, she just eats. When she talks, she just talks.” The first student bowed down deeply and said, “Oh, your teacher is really advanced.”

The simplicity of just being in the experience while having it can be such a pleasure. When meditation is quite centered and settled, it is a pleasure to inhabit what you do. As you walk, know you are walking. When you are standing, know you are standing. When you are sitting, know you are sitting. And when you are lying down, know you are lying down.

This second exercise of *Satipaṭṭhāna* can also be a way of continuing meditation into our daily life. The first exercise gets us settled. The second one encourages us to stay present – to stay in the calm knowing in our daily life. There is continuity.

What can easily happen is that when our meditation ends, we may be somewhat calmer than before, and then we get up to do things – make breakfast, go to work. It is interesting to watch how quickly and easily we lose touch with the simplicity of, “When walking, just know you are walking.” We are ahead of ourselves planning breakfast – what to make, what ingredients to use – and thinking about where our device is for reading the news. We wonder what podcasts to listen to while we have breakfast. On and on – we are already in the flow of all these different things. We are ahead of ourselves, thinking ahead.

There is nothing inherently wrong with that. However, it does involve a loss. It can be a loss of a deep inner connection to the present moment and to oneself. It certainly can be a pleasure to do some of these other things. I hope you do some of them with joy and delight. But if we keep losing ourselves in them throughout the day, we are lost. Many people are lost to themselves because of all the things they are doing, thinking about, and concerned with.

These simple instructions – “When standing, know you are standing; when walking, know you are walking” – are an opportunity, especially coming out of meditation, to continue our calm state and experiment with how to live that way.

When we are calm, settled, and quiet, knowing what to do next and how to do it can happen organically and automatically. That is really cool. We do not have to be the agent. We do not always have to be the one figuring it out. To have the arising of knowing and intention from this place of calm tends to bring forth some of the best qualities of who we are.

When you pay attention as you leave meditation, you can also notice how quickly you lose your calm. This became an important turning point for me in my meditation. I noticed how quickly I gave up my calm, settledness, and clarity when I got up from meditation because I was on to the next thing.

To stop or slow down and notice: what is that next thing? Where are you rushing off to? What are you getting caught in? What are the feelings? What are the beliefs? Why are you sacrificing your calm, clarity, and centeredness? Why are you sacrificing them for other things? Is it a worthy sacrifice? If you rush to look at the news while you are having breakfast, is the cost-benefit analysis in your favor? Is that the best use of your human life? What happens to a deep sense of connectedness in a life that arises and flows out of that?

To know simple things in the moment, as simple as our posture, and enjoy that. Also, to do things in a way that we start becoming more sensitive to what we are doing with our minds, feelings, and life. To see clearly how we rush off, get involved, or get preoccupied – and then ask: “Is this worthwhile? Is this the best use of my time?” If it is, go ahead and do it consciously. If it is not, maybe there are better things to do.

I would suggest that, for most of us, being calm to some degree – even when we are having fun or being playful – enhances everything, makes everything richer, fuller, and more embodied. It is not the kind of calm that would limit us, but rather one that allows for a deeper wellspring of engagement with life. It is a great thing.

*When you walk, know you are walking. When you are standing, know you are standing. When you are sitting, know you are sitting. And when you are lying down, know you are lying down.*

Thank you.