

Satipaṭṭhāna (14) Lucid Awareness and Non-Clinging

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

refrain, abides, know, *paṭissati*, lucid, *paṭi*, independent, *nibbāna*, onward leading, body, breathing, noting, feel, relax, observe, exercise

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The last step of the refrain of the *Satipaṭṭhāna* is:

One abides, mindful that there is a body, just to the extent necessary for knowledge and lucid awareness. Dwelling independent, not clinging to anything in the world.

Again, “abides” is a very important word. It means one rests or allows. Abiding is not a lot of work.

Mindfulness has now transitioned from whatever directedness or efforts were needed to show up and be present to allowing oneself to just be present. It is more like being rather than doing. One abides in awareness of a very simple recognition: there is a body. It is very simple – no judgment, no complications, no analysis. It does not have to be different in any way.

It is a simple recognition, just to the extent necessary. I love the expression “just to the extent necessary.” We are not looking for a super high standard of doing the absolute best we can – but rather, just to the extent necessary. “Awareness is established just to the extent necessary for there to be knowledge.” It is very simple knowing that is not work. It is not actively knowing. For example, it is just knowing there is a body. Knowing that we are independent – not dependent on anything. Knowing that we are not clinging to anything.

“To the extent there is knowledge and lucid awareness.” The phrase “lucid awareness” – *paṭissati* in Pali – consists of the word *sati* (mindfulness) and the prefix *paṭi*. *Paṭi* is a reflexive prefix that means reflecting back on oneself. *Paṭissati* is awareness that is aware of itself. I translate it as “lucid awareness” because we know we are aware in a lucid, clear way.

The practice leads us to a place where there is simple abiding in awareness, which is lucid and able to know things very simply. That sets the stage for moving into the freedom of not being dependent on or clinging to anything in the world. It is not that we do not depend on, for example, shopkeepers having food so we can live. Rather, awareness is at rest in itself. The mind and heart do not need anything to rest in a peaceful place.

The last phrase, “Not depending on anything, not clinging to anything in the world,” is one way of describing *nibbāna*, the full realization of practice. You do not expect to sit down and do that quickly, but it is something that grows over time. The idea of this practice growing over time is inherent in the whole way in which *Satipaṭṭhāna* is laid out. We are describing a path, a process.

There is a sense of onward leading movement slowly over time. This onward leading movement is not linear, where we can expect to make steady progress. The movement is up and down, back and forth. Our lives are complicated. Our states of mind are different at different times. But over time, we are slowly moving in one direction – towards freedom.

There is a process, a path, a journey that unfolds over time. You do not want to get tripped up with that – caught up in striving, comparing yourself, and wanting to be further than you are.

I love the principle “To go from A to B, be fully at A.” If you want to go somewhere in mindfulness practice, do not worry about getting anywhere. Just focus on being fully present for what is. The practice of being fully present for what is – that is onward leading. It will unfold the way it is supposed to unfold. Our dedication is not to making progress – but rather to showing up and being fully present here. The progress takes care of itself.

To summarize, the Buddha talks about a path to liberation, to *nibbāna*. And what is that? It is:

Observing the body in the body. Ardent, aware and clearly comprehending. Having put aside grief and covetousness for the world.

This is a high standard – to have put aside covetousness and grief or distress for the world.

The Buddha then asks, “Well, how do you do that?” How do you practice “observing the body in terms of the body?” You sit down to meditate; sit upright, and you establish awareness. With awareness established, you become aware of your breathing. Because the mind easily wanders off, the tether to the present moment is knowing – knowing the breath.

Some people will use the practice of mental noting. As they feel the breathing, they say, “in, out.” Or, “rising of the belly, falling of the belly.” A mental note is a way of being slightly emphatic with knowing the breathing as you know it. It is like a tether to the present moment.

As the practice deepens, we become aware of our body. We become aware of the whole body at some point. Then the onward leading movement goes towards relaxing the body. This part of the process – knowing, feeling, and relaxing – can be repeated over and over again for a long time. Some days, you emphasize one step more than another. Sometimes you stay at step one, barely staying there because the mind is so busy.

Wherever you are, just be fully at A. Practice with what you have. That is what is onward leading. Practice where you are, not where you think you should be.

As we settle and there is more tranquility, we settle into that tranquility. Then we observe. We enter the phase of practice where there is observation or watching. It is a nonreactive, noninterfering perceiving of experience.

We experience it internally and externally. One way to understand that is awareness is now open 360 degrees. We are aware of the full body in a simple, relaxed way. As we settle into that further, we abide with awareness that begins tuning into the changing nature of experience. With the inconstancy of change – things coming and going – it becomes clear after a while that it does not make any sense to cling to or resist anything because everything is flowing.

It is like we surrender to a sense of flow in the body of everything arising and passing, everything moving. We see clearly that when we get involved in thoughts and concepts, we start solidifying our experience again. So we dip back down into the flow of the river of life, flowing through us, with all experience.

Because we are not clinging, at some point, we are just present in the simplest possible way with lucid awareness. Awareness becomes freed from how it gets agitated, contracted, or cloudy with concepts, clinging, wanting, not wanting. It is just lucid awareness – lucid consciousness that is not working to be mindful, not working to do anything. It is like something we abide in, rest in, or allow. That very still, quiet mind – where we allow things to be, where we are not for or against anything – is very equanimous.

That allows for an even deeper letting go. It is clear that our hearts and minds no longer depend on anything for their well-being. They are self-contained or self-existing with a sense of well-being and freedom that does not depend on anything at all.

Having the experience of “not clinging to anything in the world” as a reference point for what is possible brings a lot of wisdom and inspiration. You will probably cling again. You will probably have a sense of depending on things again, but you now understand a different perspective and way of being. Hopefully, you will hold your clinging and feeling of dependence much more lightly. You sense the practice is moving beyond it, to be free of all that.

This is a journey. Now we have done the first exercise of the *Satipaṭṭhāna*, gone through the breathing and into the refrain. There are 12 more exercises, each with the same refrain.

On Monday, I will begin the second exercise, contextualizing it a little. We will never lose track of breathing. The guided meditations will often come back to breathing, which I hope is like an anchor or foundation that supports this journey. But the other practices are also relevant. If you do not care for focusing on breathing, at some point, these other exercises might be more meaningful for you. Thank you.