

Tuesday sit with instructions

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As a way of beginning the instructions for this retreat, maybe a foundation for the practice of this retreat, is the value of noticing how you're aware, to noticing the characteristics of awareness, the quality of awareness, whether it's sensing, feeling physically, or whether it's knowing, some kind of cognitive recognition. Part of the quality or characteristic is how much baggage comes along with awareness, how much tension comes along, what are the expectations that are there, maybe unrecognized, what are the emotions that seem to be entwined with awareness. What are the beliefs that feel like they belong intimately with awareness? How much do you feel like you're the doer of awareness? And how much does awareness do you? It just happens as you're aware.

Or is your awareness closer to sensing, the physical connection to the sensations? Sensations are always in the present, always present moment phenomena. And how much of your awareness involves knowing, recognizing? Some people tend to sense more than they know. Some people know more than they sense. But generally the two operate together in some form.

But when the cognitive functioning of the mind predominates, it might not have to do with the present moment anymore. It's the knowing mind that can start kind of knowing the past and the future and fantasies. Right? And knowing can be very simple about the present. There can be knowing that's non-verbal and non-verbal knowing before it becomes a thought, a sentence, a phrase, before it becomes an image, a story. And as the practice of sensing awakens a deeper sensitivity...

There can be a sense of intimacy between sensing and the sensation, where awareness is not up in the control tower, but where awareness arises right there in the meeting between sensing and sensation. Sensing and the sense object. And knowing also doesn't have to be

in the control tower. Knowing might begin deep within, even before its words. And as you sit here in your meditation posture, the posture might be familiar to you. Maybe you've assumed this posture often before.

Is the posture comforting for you in its familiarity? Does the familiarity of the posture, the felt sense of it, bring forth a deeper sensitivity to the body. If there's something comforting about the familiarity, does that also guide you to a deeper sensitivity? And then within this body, as part of your sensitivity, to feel how the body experiences breathing, not how you want to experience breathing, not oriented around what you want to see happen, but rather listening deeply to your body, sensing deeply to your body, how breathing makes itself known through the sensations, the sensations of movement. Where in the body are there movements associated with breathing? Not trying so much to do something except to listen or to sense with the kind of non-interference of listening.

And as you breathe, there's knowing, maybe an almost natural knowing that comes along with being sensitive to the sensations. It could be as simple as knowing, the knowing that's it. Now there's an inhale, now there's an exhale. Be curious about how simple that kind of knowing can be. Maybe it doesn't involve words. Maybe it does.

Maybe it's half words, words that have no weight. Sensing the different sensations and breathing. Sensing the beginning and end of an inhale, the beginning and end of the exhale. Is there some way of knowing, recognizing the sensations of breathing that awaken a greater sensitivity? Almost as if knowing functions like the word yes. Yes, this is what to feel. This is where to be right now, here with the breathing.

And with awareness centered on the body breathing, letting the awareness, the sensitivity, broad and wide. So you're aware a wider field of the body. So you notice tension in the body, mind, heart, becoming sensitive to the sensations of tension. And if there feels like there's a tendency, orientation for the tension to want to relax, loosen how it's tight, allow for the relaxation, allow for a calming of the bodily tensions and agitation, relaxing the thinking mind, calming the thinking mind, so the mind has more room for sensations and for the simplest knowing of the sensations here and now. And if there's a lot of thinking, you might switch from focusing on the content of your thoughts to sensing the sensations of thinking, the physicality of thinking, and maybe a deep, quiet, maybe nonverbal knowing of what it, the sensations of thinking, the impact on the body to be thinking, and then settling back into the body, breathing, living close to the sensations here and now of breathing, turning on a light in a dark room, so you can see. Turn on the light of awareness in your body, so there's a greater sensitivity, resting in the sensitivity of the body, allowing for sensitivity.

No need to be operating with any idea of a project to accomplish something here. Sensing here and now. Knowing simply here and now. Is enough to recognize the quality of your knowing, the quality of sensing. Could it be simpler? Is there within how you're practicing a possibility to relax, soften the body and mind, and perhaps some way of recognizing how simple awareness can be.

It's due for it to feel or sense or know any stillness or spaciousness that's here, around you, within you. And is there any sensing or knowing that's so simple it arises out of the stillness, out of space? And then as I ring the bell to end this sitting, or even as I say these words, stay sensitive, stay awake to see the new knowings, the new sensations, the new experiences that appear. So I offer that guidance with the idea that you're all experienced practitioners. Yes. And even if it wasn't suitable for you at this juncture, that somehow maybe if you heard it well enough, it can register the point to a possibility for you some other time.

Certainly for all of us, I believe, the level of activity and strength of thinking in the mind goes up and down in a retreat. It's not often in unexpected ways, and so you have to adjust your practice accordingly and not live with the wrong expectations of what's possible. And sometimes, as I've often said, sometimes meditation is manual labor, just kind of coming back over and over again. And one of the tools of this tradition of insight is mental noting. But it's all too easy for mental noting to be the meditative equivalent of using a sledgehammer. It's going to be really loud and digressive and very much up in the head.

It's possible to adjust the voice that does the mental noting. So it's in harmony with how the state of your meditation, state of your mind and heart. It's possible to adjust the way the inner voice says the mental note, so that it's a comforting voice, a comforting voice, a settling voice. A voice that is there to calm the system. It's also possible to think of the mental note as the beginning of a journey, not the end of it. Once you've noted something, the journey is then to open to it, to feel it, to know it more fully. And that journey might take two seconds, might be brief if something is passing through. But when the mind is out of control, sometimes mental noting can be the anchor that keeps us here and maybe helps quiet the mind, not agitated more.

So in this teaching of *Satipaṭṭhāna*, it focuses on staying close to breathing, establishing awareness of breathing. And breathing, the rhythm of breathing in and breathing out can be kind of like a through line of the present moment that we always staying close to, like the beat in music which is keeping us there, connected to the music, like maybe the rails of a railroad that keeps the train going as we're looking out the windows. And so there are these things of knowing, the practice of knowing, of recognizing, cognizing, in very, very simple

ways. And one way to consider what knowing is, it's that knowing of what's happening in the present that's not dependent on the past and the future. It's just this moment for what it is. Of course, there's knowing that there's richer and fuller.

But the kind of default is really simple. And a knowing that helps settle something reassures us here, now. And then sensing, staying close to the embodied feelings of sensations in the body. So those two things, the work as partners go together to help us kind of enter into this present moment more fully, where we're sensitive, caring, about the quality of sensing and knowing how we practice. To practice without strain, to practice without hesitation, to practice wholeheartedly without over-efforting, to practice wholeheartedly without... So we don't fall back into some kind of complacency here.

And you're allowed to relax. And the word that's used for relax in Pāli... I think has richer connotations than my word relax, for allowing the whole system to move toward direction of becoming tranquil, the whole system becoming calm, calming, waves of calm. So in this first day of instructions, one of my hopes is that you'll become now more curious in the different ways that you sense, different characteristics of how you know, in different situations, different circumstances, different ways of knowing. Sometimes the knowing is more active and more involved and more discursive. Sometimes knowing is simple.

Sometimes just knowing arises without you planning it. Look at that. Who would have guessed that your mind could know without you and your involvement? And sometimes it's the spontaneous knowing of the simplest things. To be sensitive, to notice that can teach you a lot about how to know easefully, how to know peacefully, how to know without inserting a lot of self-effort and self-directedness. So maybe knowing and sensing and relaxing can be a theme for the day.

And as you know that you need other things, like... Maybe as you walk in meditation, you know you need to walk faster to get the energy up, then walk faster. And when you know that what supports you to be more intimate and present, it's like walk slower, walk slower. But maybe that knowing of how to adjust comes from some deep place inside rather than a guessing. So as you do your walking meditation, how does the balance of knowing and sensing come into play? How does a dance or the music of knowing and sensing operate in the simplicity of walking?

We're beginning this retreat, and I'd recommend that this retreat's long enough that on this day of practice, give yourself over the practice fully as you can, as is appropriate. But don't have any agendas, projects to do. Don't be in a hurry to attain anything. This is the non-attainment day. Just get to know yourself better. What's happening here in the present mo-

ment, get to know how you know, how you sense the simplicity of here and now.

Being curious about the qualities, characteristics of sensing and knowing and how it works for you, and how it might work spontaneously on its own so that more and more... The primary effort that you make is not to be mindful and aware, but rather to allow awareness to exist, to arise, to be here. To allow yourself to be present for how we sense and know. To allow, to give permission, to make room for how knowing occurs, arises, appears and disappears. How sensing occurs, arises and disappears. Stay close to this world of sensing and knowing, and maybe that world become richer, fuller for you.

So thank you very much. And it's a phenomenally good, valuable, profound experience. Thing that there is in this world, a group of people coming together to do this profound practice. I know from time to time it doesn't feel that way, from time to time. But it's true. Thank you for being here.