

## Wednesday sit with instructions

**Gil Fronsdal**

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Satipaṭṭhāna practice begins with knowing, sensing, and relaxing. They can seem so simplistic, so ordinary, so nothing, that we can overlook that actually this is the heart of the practice. Everything you need to know about the Dhamma can be discovered by staying close to knowing, sensing, calming, relaxing, softening. One of the roles of sensing, to have that deep sensitivity to sensations, is that it helps to reveal where we're tense, where we're tight, where we're holding on and attached, where there's straining. That's not a small thing to discover. In a certain way, that's where we discover the path.

Sometimes we can, in fact, relax something, some tension. Sometimes we can only soften it. Sometimes we can simply soften around it. Sometimes what we can soften and relax is our relationship to it, our attitude, how we hold it in the mind. This deep sensitivity includes sensitivity to the tensions, the tightening, the pressures in the mind. Sometimes the relaxing takes other forms: releasing, opening, letting go.

Sometimes we see, feel, know that the tension, tightening that we can relax is not the physical tension, but it's found in the effort we make to relax. There can be a lot of attachment around wanting things to be different. The deep physical sensitivity that we're cultivating includes the physical sensations of the mind, our thinking, our attitudes, and includes any tension associated with how we're aware, how we're practicing. We're practicing. This includes the tension, pressures associated with being the doer of meditation, associated with being the experiencer, the victim of what's happening.

If you can go along with me for a few moments with an image for the practice, maybe this image can give you a sense of the value of this very simple practice of knowing and sensing and relaxing. It's an image of an hourglass with no top and no bottom. Above the neck of the hourglass is all our attachments, all the ways in which we cling to things. As we cling to life

experiences, sensations, thoughts, everything, they accumulate, they grow on the upside. If we're attached, if we're tense, we're holding on tight, it's like having a hatch, a door in the neck of the hourglass that nothing flows through. The weight of the accumulation of attachments over time just gets heavier and heavier.

There's no end in sight because there's no top. But to relax, to know, to sense, to open, be available, releases that hatch, and things flow through the very simple activity of knowing, sensing, softening, opening. As soon as they go through that, they open up into this vast growing space, where everything can flow outward freely, no obstructions in the lower half of the hourglass where there's no bottom, just spreading out into vastness to the degree that you can. Shift your posture slightly or greatly so that your posture, you're in a posture of making room to feel and sense your body more fully. For people sitting, maybe it's sitting up a little bit straighter, the chest a little bit more open. Maybe there's a way of adjusting the hands where they are, the elbows, the shoulders.

So you're helping the body be more receptive, more open, because the body is the instrument of practice. Yes. One of the great benefits of sensing the body is that it's a preeminent way of discovering where we're holding on, where we're tight and tense. Of course, it's not easy to relax some of it, but just to know it and sense it is enough. The knowing can be very simple. The sensing, each moment of sensing is very simple.

No need to be looking for something special. No need to be making, creating some special experience. Allow the sensations to come through. Allow the knowing that sees freely, calmly. Allow everything to flow through the neck of the hourglass. If you think too much, it clogs the neck.

If you're thinking a lot, feel, sense the physicality of thinking. Feel the tension or pressure, tightening, holding that might be part of thinking a lot. Sometimes there is no tension or pressure with thinking, maybe even no attachments. Simply you've given free rein to your mind to think as it wishes. Instead of that, remember to be deliberate, to be here, knowing, sensing, to be here, allowing knowing and sensing in its simplest forms. With breathing, sometimes the primary focus can be sensing, feeling the sensations of breathing.

Sometimes it's a calm knowing that quiets the mind, opens the mind. Sometimes there's a gentle alternation or knowing and sensing of breathing, the sensations of breathing. What's deliberate is to stay there close to it. What doesn't have to be so deliberate is the natural knowing and sensing that you're open to, that you're allowing. There's a way of knowing. There's a way of knowing that involves tension, clinging, holding on, or pushing, resisting, where knowing is mixed up with our reactivity, knowing which contributes to more ten-

sion.

There's a way of knowing, knowing calmly, that is opening, freeing, allowing sensations to flow, move, through the neck of the hourglass, out into the vast space, staying close to the immediacy of sensing. One of the capacities of sensing is to sense pleasure and pain, pleasantness and unpleasantness. It's helpful to be able to recognize the unpleasantness of tension and tightening, clinging, and to learn how to sense and know unpleasantness calmly, openly, like making sure that the neck of the hourglass is unclogged, open, with no agenda. It's useful to know what's pleasant, pleasure, in the immediate present, that supports the practice, that is part of the healthy momentum of practice. Knowing and sensing the pleasure of relaxing, calming, of opening, the pleasure of calm sensing, the pleasure of calm knowing. Maybe it's very subtle.

Maybe it's a subtle glowing of pleasure, pleasantness, a Dhamma pleasure that makes it feel bright, good to stay there, close to the sensing and knowing here now, and maybe especially with the flowing, shifting sensations of the body, maybe associated with breathing. Okay. As the bell rings to end the sitting, if it's okay for you, don't be in a hurry for anything. Don't be in a hurry, for example, to automatically go back into the world of thinking so that you lose touch with the world of sensing and knowing. Many years ago, I learned that a famous American philosopher had the idea that the present moment is like a saddleback. I think he had the expression saddleback or the present, meaning it's kind of like a U-shape, maybe gradual sides going up.

We can't pinpoint the present moment exactly, but somehow it's in that curve, that U, that kind of fades into existence, fades out in the future. She gradually appears from the past, where the past and present are not completely separate. So knowing this philosophical idea, I turned it upside down. The present moment is more like a gradual hill that goes up, comes down. If you're really present to recognize the naturalness and the simplicity of knowing what's happening in the present, you might be aware that something in you knows before your thinking mind knows. If your body is tingling, something knows that tingling is there before the thought, "My body is tingling."

One of the surprises in doing this practice was to discover that there's some kind of sensation that begins to appear, that is the beginning of a thought. If I'm right there aware of that beginning sensation of a thought, it vanishes and I'll never know what that thought was going to become. It might have been the answers to all my problems, but I'll never know. The thought begins offline. We identify so strongly with thinking sometimes, like "I am my thoughts." So this, we can kind of know something before it becomes a thought that we would associate

maybe with knowing.

It's possible to kind of feel that growing of the hill, going up the hill, something's coming, something's being known, it hasn't become fully conscious. But maybe even more valuable is the downhill side of the hill. Remember, the future is downhill. We can know a moment of real knowing and then that's not the end of the story. Then we can kind of glide, sense and feel and know and a kind of feeling of gliding down the hill, surfing on the waves, flowing with what follows that knowing. So I'm sitting up here, and at this moment for some reason, I know that my hand's touching my knee, resting on my knee.

I feel the pressure, the contact. So I might, the top of the hill is contact, touch, pressure. Rather than rushing off to the next thing to know, it's like... Kind of like I say contact. And it's like opening the door now to feel that contact, to sense it. What's that like?

So that knowing of a contact kind of, it's not abrupt ending. It kind of ends kind of gradually. Touch. For a few seconds, moments, just kind of gliding, sliding on the feeling of touch. Then it becomes richer, the sensations in my leg, in my hand. They become wider, fuller.

There's more there than just a touch. There's a glowing of warmth, kind of half pleasure, half pain of maybe a stretching muscle right in that area. It kind of feels nice, and there it is. It's a gliding... the opening, receiving, allowing. Sometimes the texts talk about it as if it's a bird that's up in flight but now it can glide on the updraft or someone with a cloth rubbing a brass bowl. They make contact and then they stay and they rub it for a while. They feel it, know it. So stay there.

It's interesting with the breathing you might know in-breath. That's the beginning of this journey to feel the sensations of the in-breath, or the next sensation. Sometimes this hilltop of the present moment, there's a dawning of... There's a sensation there, something sensing, some feeling, and then the mind naturally becomes interested or takes it in. We might realize that, oh, that's a piece of pain. Let's feel the pain. Or it might feel that it's a piece of pleasure or a cold or hot.

Like just now, say, doing all this, something in me vaguely kind of recognized there's a sound, mostly coming in through my left ear. Hearing, oh, it's, I think this location must have the record for the amount of blowers and chainsaws that any location can have. There it is. So familiar, knowing. It was kind of faint at first and caught my interest and then hearing. Then, oh, I don't know if it's a leaf blower or chainsaw. Or it doesn't matter. Just, oh, sound, hearing. Then to feel it.

I feel that I'm tightening up a little bit. Oh, so I feel that tightening. But I don't just feel it,

it's like that's just also the hilltop. Oh, tightening. Let's see what happens when I feel that tightening fully. Ah, it wants to soften. I relax, back to hearing the engine. Just engine. Then it fades away as I return to my body and my breathing. It's there in the background, no problem.

So knowing, sensing, it can kind of begin in some kind of gradual way until it comes into a fullness of knowing and sensing. For you to allow knowing and sensing to not be the end of the story, but the beginning of sensing and feeling more, feeling this more fully. So as you go about the day, as much as it makes sense for you, and as much as it feels right for you, go about at the speed that allows you to sense, using your body as an instrument for knowing, feeling, sensations of all kinds. Maybe go about at the speed that your cognitive mind, your cognition, stays close to the simplicity of knowing rather than being pulled into the world of stories and commentary. Stay close to the hilltop of the present, flow downhill into the future, sensing and knowing.

Finally, there's all kinds of sensing and knowing; it's a family of different attentional faculties. As we sense more, we awaken all kinds of capacities for sensing in different ways. One of those capacities is the sensing of pleasure and pain, pleasant and unpleasant. There is a particular kind of healthy feeling, wholesome feeling of pleasantness that's associated with the practice itself. One of the benefits of developing this heightened sensitivity is to be able to sense that, oh, this is good, stay here, be with the practice, flow with the practice, move down that hill into the pleasant. It's possible to know what's unpleasant. It's invaluable to know that; that helps you understand where the tension is, where the gripping is, where the tightness is in the mind, in the heart, in the body. At some point, being able to hold the unpleasant in the atmosphere of the body, of dhammic pleasure. Thank you.