

## Wednesday Dharma talk

**Gil Fronsdal, Fu Nancy Schroeder**

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There are two stories from Zen, Chinese Zen tradition, that I think of them as *Satipaṭṭhāna* stories. And one was about a minute in a town with a river running through it. There was a kind of a saucer, psychic, shaman kind of person who could read people's minds. And he heard about this Zen master in town, and so he was sure he could read the Zen master's mind. So one day they were both out walking along the river in opposite directions. And so the saucer kind of approached the Zen master to look into his mind.

And what he saw disturbed him greatly, and he left town never to come back. In that river there were boats, people rowing boats, there was a little sailboat, activities along the pier. When the sorcerer looked into the mind of the Zen master, he saw rowboats on the river, sailboat in the river, and people working on the pier, and that was it. That was all. There's also a Zen story of two Zen students of different Zen masters speaking about their teachers. One of them said how great the teacher was, all the amazing meditative experiences and psychic powers, something quite lofty.

And the other said, oh, well, when my teacher walks, she just walks. When she eats, she just eats. And the first student said, Oh, bow down deeply. You have a great teacher. Why are these things held up as being so important, so invaluable? And maybe something that would be appreciated in someone who's practiced for a long time, become a teacher, isn't this way too ordinary?

What's ordinary, way too ordinary, is a mind that reacts to the world around us. A mind that sees things and wants them, sees things and doesn't like them and judges them. A mind that sees through the filter of conceit, all forms of conceit. The conceit that sees oneself as better than others, that sees oneself as somehow less than others, even the conceit of seeing that one is equal to others. What's all too common is a mind that's filled with fear, anxiety,

with confusion and ideas and fantasies and concerns for the futures in the past, caught in the future, caught in the past. If that's what's normal, if that's how much the world suffers.

When I was in Burma practicing there, remember one day I was maybe waiting for the dharma talk or something. I remember doing a walking meditation in front of the abbot's cabin. And that was, my mind was just purely mindful and still, quiet. And I had some, I don't remember what it was, but what I do remember was relatively innocent thoughts. But I could see that in having those thoughts, there was stress in them. There was a little tension in them.

There was a little *dukkha* in them. And I was kind of stunned first that something so simple as how I was thinking could have within it something that we can call suffering, or stress or tension. I saw how subtle *dukkha* could be, and I kind of was struck by, wow, if this is true for most of my thinking, wow, there's a lot of *dukkha* in there. And then the next moment kind of stopped me in my tracks. I said, if this is true of my thinking, there are billions of people in this world thinking all the time, wow, there's a lot more suffering in this world than I thought. I thought, you know, that there was a big things, but there's got to pervasive and the subtle ways in which the mind works.

There's a little bit pressure, pushing, wanting, holding on, clinging, resisting, in these very, very simple ways. But what's a mind like that thinks without any tension, any stress? That when it knows something, it knows it simply. When it feels and senses something, it feels it simply. The first time I did so, in retrospect, my first retreat in a sense, I've told the story that I was about 20 and left, 20 or 21, and left on a small farm to take care of the farm and the animals there alone for a week. And I'd never been alone for a week before.

And in the course of that week, my mind got clearer, simpler, and clearer. Remember the first thing that amazed me was that I would just look at things in the kitchen and build house and outdoors. And everything seemed to sparkle. And then what was most surprising was every thought I had sparkled. It didn't matter what thought it was. Just like, wow. It was kind of like every thought was special because there was space around it. It wasn't being crowded, and it wasn't being engaged and picked up or resisted, or it didn't necessarily create a chain of association right to the tail end of every sentence. And it was kind of like, I was kind of, wow, it sparkles in there.

So we come to the second exercise in *Satipaṭṭhāna*, and it's phenomenally simple. It's so simple that I ignored it. You know, when I read the *Satipaṭṭhāna* for years, it simply says that they call it the mindfulness of postures. And it uses the *jānāti* word, the knowing. When walking, one knows. I am walking. When standing, one knows. I am standing. When sitting, one knows I am sitting. When lying down, one knows I am lying down.

Whatever posture one has, whatever posture one is in, one knows that posture. So this is a beginning to open mindfulness up practice to not just sitting and meditating, but starting to spread it into the activity, different ways in which we are through the day, to be able to recognize something as basic and simple as the posture. And why? One reason is, or one thing that, one white reaction that maybe I had in previous years, I was so focused on the activity that we were knowing. Yes, the activity of walking or standing, sitting, laying down, as if that was the point. But what I didn't appreciate was the knowing part, to know.

The object of a knowing was simple, too ridiculously simple to warrant knowing in my little mind. But how do you know it? How special is the knowing? Can you know something as simple, that's really simple, so that the very act of knowing is something you enjoy. The very act of knowing is something you value, treasure. After all, it's what gives humans their species name, sapiens. So it must have some value to know. And so we're learning here this art and craft of knowing in a way that is welcoming, is wonderful, is satisfying, is meaningful, enjoyable. How would you know so that an act of knowing itself is something that you appreciate, maybe even marvel at?

So the whole, it's like there's two halves to what's happening. There's what's happening and how we know it. And I was so focused and concerned with what was known. And I didn't understand how important it was to also know the other half, the act of knowing itself. And so already in this retreat, I've encouraged you to know calmly, to know in a calm way. I used to practice knowing in *vipassanā*, staccato-like. Sometimes I would pounce on things. I would jerk my mind around to know something different. I would resist knowing. I would hold back.

So I was knowing was not, you know, it was... in the beginning was not so simple, not so clean and not so enjoyable. But I didn't even know that I was practicing knowing in an unenjoyable way, because I was so concerned with the object of what was supposed to be known. So if, in knowing if you're walking or standing, sitting or lying down, the real, one of the great things is this marvel, this miracle that we as human beings can know anything at all. How did that happen? How did this evolve? Isn't this kind of a marvel? To be conscious this moment, to be alive this moment, for us to know, cognize now, it's something that really only happens in the present.

The other reason, another reason for this very simple practice is because many of our moments through our day are very simple and ordinary. We're not supposed to only be mindful when things are extraordinary, like meditating, sitting down, that's really where it's at, that's special. I can't wait to get to that special place. Meditation only do the special thing. Some

circles it's a high status thing to do. Meditate. Not so much sweeping the deck, cleaning the toilet, replacing the napkins in the napkin holder, emptying the trash. Not so much as standing in a long line waiting to have your meal. But actually everything is special. Everything is the location, the place of practice.

Everything, every posture, every situation is our temple. And so to begin appreciating the ordinariness, that that too is places we can discover, the special way of knowing that is satisfying, is meaningful, that makes space, gives time, it's calm, it's clear. It's clear. The other reason to be mindful of these very simple things like posture is that part of what we're doing in the beginning of *Satipaṭṭhāna* is in fact making more room in awareness to allow the awareness to be filled with present moment experience. Often if awareness, the mind is like a space, it's crowded, claustrophobic, crowded with all kinds of thoughts and reactions and stories and judgments and anxieties. And my mind has been so active, spinning so fully that I kind of imagine that if only the California electrical grid could be plugged into my mind, there would be no electricity problems.

Okay. To settle in to the present here and not have the mind complicated, have the mind uncomplicated, have the mind that has lots of room because we have all these different ways of being aware, many, many ways of being aware that work better if we have a mind that's ready to receive it all, hold it all. The more simple we are to be able to open up and feel the global body, the more then we'll feel all the sensations the body has to offer. The body is sensing all the time, but our conscious mind might not be paying attention. This inner life, this life of ours is so rich, so multifaceted, so amazing how it operates and works and can work without a lot of effort on our part. And to be able to become quiet enough, still enough to make space for that.

So a big part of this practice is allowing awareness, allowing knowing to happen, allowing sensing to happen. So we can allow all the different capacities for sensing and knowing to operate. If we're always in charge, always directing attention to someplace, we leave out so much of what's here. And more important, we're leaving out so much of how the whole inner deep life can grow, can heal, can reveal, can find a harmony, can find a peace. Another reason for attuning oneself to posture is we have this English word posturing. Posture often expresses so much more than just a way of positioning the body.

Posture expresses attitudes. Posture expresses intentions and purpose and where we're at in any given time. Posture can express our emotions. Some people don't even know they're angry until their hand's in a fist, and then they know to have, to know that you'd really pay attention to posture, be available in this simplicity of awareness, it's open to it all. The pos-

ture can reveal so much about ourselves. We can discover so much of what is driving us, influencing us by this subtle shift, subtle and not so subtle shifts in our posture.

And we can learn there are postures which are more satisfying, more dharmic than other postures. There are postures we can assume that support awakening, that support what's wholesome, that support being more alive in awareness. And there are postures that we collapse, we shut down, we become numb, less alive with capacity to sense and feel. So clearing the mind of its busyness, settling the mind of its agitation, taking time to make room in the mind, taking time to make time to be with what's happening here. And one of the things that we can, part of this attentional faculties that we have, is all kinds of information. We're gathering. Our senses are gathering information, gathering messages in a sense.

And powerful messages provided has to do with things that, in that category of pleasure and pain, pleasant and unpleasant. And part of Dharma practice is guided by feeling and sensing the pleasure, the pleasantness, the goodness, the warmth, the radiance, the glow, the happiness, the pleasure of the Dharma. The pleasure of how we know and how we settle and how we concentrate and how we feel and sense, how we relax. That teaches us, ah, this is the way. Here, this is good. Tension is not the way. Straining is not the way.

So as we continue practicing with this simplicity, simple, simple mind that just is present and available to be aware, we start gathering different information that guides the practice, supports the practice. And then you don't have to be the one to figure it all out. Sometimes it's almost like the path is opening up in front of you with every step, and you know where to step. So with postures, the four postures, the practice is beginning to open up into more of our life. And then the next exercise in *Satipaṭṭhāna*, it goes one step further into mindfulness in activities. And now the form of attention that's being called upon, used here, is called, usually it translates, can be translated as clear comprehension, clear understanding.

And that's more than just knowing. You're in the community room downstairs, and there's a desire, simple desire for tea. Seems like it would be good to have a cup of tea. Maybe you're a little bit dehydrated. Tea would be good. Sit on the deck peacefully and have your tea. How nice. What a great place to be mindful and present. But then you think about it or just have that desire. But then there's a clear comprehension. In one minute I'm supposed to be in the kitchen for my job. Or one minute ago I was supposed to be. I think this is not the time to have tea. Right? On the deck.

That clear comprehension is part of this natural system that we have that knows things. It's part of the knowing family of cognition, knowing the context that we're in, knowing what's appropriate and not appropriate in any given time, knowing what's useful and helpful. And

the marvel of it all is it doesn't necessarily have... There's a way of having clear comprehension that is not something that we had to figure out. But there also, there's this kind of natural functioning through the intelligence we have that can help us understand what to do when we're doing it. So I'll read you the section on clear comprehension. Okay.

A practitioner is one who acts with clear comprehension when walking forward and coming back, who acts with clear comprehension when looking ahead and looking away, who acts in clear comprehension when flexing and extending their limbs, who acts in clear comprehension when wearing one's clothes, one's... here they say bowl, one's plate, who acts with clear comprehension when eating, drinking, consuming food and tasting, who acts with clear comprehension when defecating and urinating, who acts with clear comprehension when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent.

I don't think it's saying, when you do these things, think about it carefully. Think about it, understand what you're doing, and what it's pointing to is a natural capacity for the mind to not just know, but also to understand. Simple understanding. If you're standing in line for a meal here, one of the great things to do to wake up your body is to just twist your body back and forth and fling your arms to the side like a big... The airplane just let them flap and... That's a great thing to do sometimes if you're in the middle of the parking lot alone. But when there's people standing a foot or two away from you, it just might occur to you. You might have enough clear comprehension, this is not the time and place. It doesn't take a lot of figuring it out. It's just the mind knows. Maybe it knows non-verbally. Some clear comprehension is not verbal. It's not this deeper knowing system.

And this is what's kind of the marvel of *Satipaṭṭhāna*, the relaxing and opening and settling into these natural attentional faculties we have and be available for it, allow it to be. We're kind of making room for these things to grow and develop. And there might be some deliberateness in it, to be present, to know, to recognize, to feel. But the deliberateness is really a lot to be available to these things, to allow, to make room to know, make room to feel. The most intentional part of the *Satipaṭṭhāna* that you're supposed to really, I don't know if you're supposed to, but it's so important you should not waste any time, you should do it right away and do it well and as much as you can and you've got to get busy doing it, being calm. Calming the body.

So you can't actually, this relaxing and calming the body and mind, you can't really do that in a hurry. You can't try to pack in as many calming moments in a minute as you possibly can,

because it's so important. But that's the most deliberate, intentional thing. The rest of it is kind of deliberate in the sense of deliberately staying open, deliberately allowing these deep attentional faculties to begin operating here. And maybe we learn to do some of that sitting in meditation or in walking meditation, but then to continue doing that through the day in all our activities.

And it is learning, training how to be alive in a very different mode than how people usually live, where people are distracted from themselves, caught in things, attached, not really intimate and connected to themselves, and not really present in a full way for this world. So the practice now extends into the whole day, but not as a strain and not as something to get exhausted. There's a way of doing this *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice that is not tiring, that is enjoyable, and that's the art to find. How can you know an in-breath? How can you know the simple movement of expansion of the chest, the tingling of maybe coolness in the nostril? How can you do that so it's like, it feels like your time was well spent? That wasn't, that was good. That was received well. There was the knowing that knew that, the sensing that felt it. Was allowed to be full, appreciated, enjoyable.

As if you have all the time in the world, as if it's the most important thing in the moment, as if you have nowhere else to go, be or to attain or to reach, just this moment, this sensation, this knowing, knowing calmly, sensing easefully, and even if there's pain, sensing it easefully. It is possible to practice mindfulness *satipaṭṭhāna* in a way that doesn't cause any strain, where it's more easeful to spend the day doing this all day long than it is surfing the internet. Many years ago I met a man. He said before he discovered Buddhist practice, that he felt like a musician without an instrument. And then once he discovered the practice, he had his instrument, his body and mind here. Find out how to be in harmony, in tune. Find out how to be attentive, how to attend, find out how to know, feel, relax this instrument of yours, this temple.

So maybe, just maybe, each moment of knowing is an act of love. Each moment of feeling is a meeting of two things in love, sensing and sensation. As I've often said, children who are not seen growing up don't feel loved. There's something about being seen, which is kind of like being like love. I've heard psychologists say that kids need to be seen, adults need to be heard. Meditators need to do both. To see ourselves, know ourselves, listen to ourselves, to learn how to do this. To let these wonderful attentional faculties we have, to learn to let these things be beautiful, be enjoyable, be settling, to know in a way that's reassuring. All of us need different things. See if you can provide it with how you know. If you need safety, if you need safety, provide it with how you know, how you sense, if you need reassurance, if

you need kindness, if you need simplicity, if you need lots of space, if you need a lot of time for some deeper processing, let the knowing provide that time.

How you know, how you sense, how you relax the body, mind. How you're mindful can be nourishing, can be onward leading, can be medicine. When walking, be with the simplicity of walking. When eating, be with the simplicity of eating itself. When having tea, be with the simplicity of having tea. Allowing the practice to grow and fill your whole day.