

Monday sit with instructions

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As the *Satipaṭṭhāna* instructions move into knowing pleasant and unpleasant, a few things to say about that. It's a movement towards greater simplicity. We don't have to understand the story of what's happening. We don't have to be judging it and understanding its complexity. At some point, we know it close enough, and we know an experience whether it's pleasant and unpleasant or neither.

And the word for pleasant and unpleasant is *sukha* and *dukkha*, which are not really captured well with the English word pleasant and unpleasant. That's adequate, but it's a richer, fuller word. *Sukha* can mean pleasure or pleasant, could also mean comfort. It can mean ease, easeful. It can mean happy, well-being. It can mean certain kind of reassurance, to use a very vague term. It's good. There's a goodness in it.

And then the *dukkha*, the unpleasant, it means pain, but when pain is light, it means unpleasant, uncomfortable. It can be a feeling of nothing more sophisticated, maybe, as something feels off, an offness, this awkwardness. When it's emotional, kind of more, it can feel like suffering or anguish. It can be a manifestation of what feels like to have tension and stress, but maybe the most sophisticated of all descriptions of *sukha* and *dukkha* is not in words, but with expressions. *Sukha* is, and *dukkha* is, ouch.

And as we move into the second foundation of mindfulness, I'd like to emphasize not the pleasant and unpleasant of the direct experience we're having, but the pleasant and unpleasantness of, oh, we are aware of it. Are we aware in a way that has an ouch? Calm sensing, calm knowing, calm observation. Enjoyable knowing, enjoyable sensing. Easeful knowing, easeful sensing, easeful observing, as opposed to knowing and sensing and being mindful with tightness and strain, with a taskmaster telling us we should and have to.

I've known people who have held on really tightly with mindfulness as if literally holding on to dear life. Just, you know, so much energy goes into the forceful, forceful mindfulness. Even the idea of trying to know might be too much. There might be trying as a might, depending on how we use the word, might come along with an ouch. Is there a way to notice how it feels like to be aware? Can we be aware in a way that we look forward to sensing and feeling, knowing and observing?

Why do we, and for to be able to do that, we have to start getting a feeling, a sense for how we're aware. Are we fixated on something? Is it a kind of fixation that we've tightened up with awareness? Or is it a kind of being absorbed in one thing like the breath that feels soft and restful, enjoyable? It's a lot easier for the mind to want to be aware if the mind's enjoying it. There's a pleasure there.

I'll tell you a story. When I was a Zen monk, for a period of time I sat next to my teacher at the meditation hall, and we would eat in the meditation hall, all our meals, in a formal meditation posture, and we'd have three bowls to eat our food with. And I decided that to be simple and efficient, we need everything in my big bowl. Put it down. Then eat everything in the middle bowl. Put it down. And then eat everything in the small bowl. And put it down. I was kind of delighted to be so efficient and simple. And, you know, just get it over with. Just sit there and meditate.

So my teacher was, you know, after some while, noticed what I was doing. And so then after a meal one day he said, Gil, just eat naturally. And then I realized that... So I said, okay, well, naturally, okay, I'll try that. And what's the surprise was there was some kind of inner knowing, inner kind of, you know, eat a little bit of one bowl, then maybe from the big bowl, then maybe it somehow felt like I'll go to the small bowl for a little bit. And then maybe go to the middle bowl and back to the big bowl. I don't know, the sequence was just, oh, you know, it was no... It was just kind of this flow. An inner... I don't know if knowing is the right word, but there was an easeful flow. Something in me made the choice. Maybe it was based on flavor, maybe it was based on my body's sense of what nutrition I needed or how to mix things. I don't know what, no idea. But the natural, the being really efficient, involved it, for me, a degree of tension. I was kind of like, okay, this is what I'm doing. I'm holding on to this and finishing it, as opposed to just floating between the different bowls. Look now this, put it down, do the next.

So the same thing with awareness. Maybe there's some kind of way that a pleasant, enjoyable knowing and sensing has that naturalness to it. Not that you give complete freedom for the mind to just go everywhere all at once. But if you're with the breathing, to enjoy how

you're attending to the breathing with a natural attention. Maybe you're with the belly moving and maybe there's a naturalness to just kind of floating on it as opposed to piercing it. Maybe it's a naturalness that the belly is kind of a big area. There's a kind of, it floats, it moves, it goes to the right, to the left, top, bottom, just in a very easeful way, feeling the sensations. It's rooted there and the sensing feels, it's just kind of receptive, open, delightful, not forceful, not dutiful. It's just a wonderful expression of being alive. Aren't we fortunate to have this capacity to know and sense.

And the naturalness of it, just kind of moving gently, slightly, small little millimeters or centimeters around. And maybe there's a natural way in which something settles and quiets in the belly. And there's a feeling that, oh, now the sensation of breathing is in the chest. Okay, so now that's the place where that's the middle bowl that I'm eating from. Now I'm just kind of feeling and sensing that. Now I'm sensing, and the sensing feels relaxed and open and intimate. It's, I want to sense because I like sensing. Sensing, I'm not adding a lot of baggage to the sensing. There's not a lot of extra, like, ideas of what sensing is about and what I should be doing, and I'm doing it right and wrong. It's really simple. And yes, is it pleasant? Is it enjoyable? Maybe those words are too grand. But there is, it's certainly not an ouch. Maybe it's a very subtle ah, this naturalness of awareness just doing its own thing, becoming absorbed, being present, or sensing deeply.

Sometimes the awareness gently moves to a different place because it moves from one little millimeter of the belly to another or more distance. Because it's natural for just like the eyes float, so awareness as is floating, but it's staying right there in the experience. It's not wandering off in thought, and it's pleasant. Sometimes the awareness moves, sometimes somehow the body shifts and moves what's predominant and what's strong. And sometimes you follow it, the shifts. And sometimes as we start becoming intimate and absorbed and connected to breathing or to some other sensations, there's a pleasure, pleasantness, sense of well-being, joy, happiness, that somehow is in that meeting zone between this, the object of awareness and the awareness. Something like, there's some kind of atmosphere that gets created, some kind of glow or radiance, sometimes beyond the edges of breathing. Something feels really nice. That's not quite the breathing and maybe not quite the awareness, but somehow with the way the two mingle, dance and work together and massage each other, massage each other. And sometimes it doesn't feel that way. Sometimes it feels unpleasant. And it's really, the unpleasantness is so simple, it's just not a problem. Sometimes it's unpleasant because there's a lot of baggage, a lot of extra ways to add it to being aware. Stress, strain, conceit, the conceit of doing it really well or thinking you should, the conceit of thinking you're doing

it terribly, and it's all extra.

The movement of *Satipaṭṭhāna* is to simpler and simpler, less and less extra. And there's something very simple, basic, about *sukha* and *dukkha*, that maybe helps you be simple, helps you find that way, where the simplicity of awareness can be pleasant, enjoyable, can contribute a sense of well-being at the center of all things, because awareness is at the center, not conceit, not judgments, not clinging. So if you're comfortable enough with your breathing to approach someplace in your body, where your breathing is enjoyable, pleasant, even if it's very, very small, or someplace in the cycle of breathing in and out, where in that cycle you feel some pleasure, some pleasantness, not to deny that there might be something uncomfortable, but have that touchstone into the present of what is pleasant, enjoyable. And as you're with your breathing, you're sensing, you're knowing, observing your way of being present. Is it more on the unpleasant side or more on the pleasant side? The how you're aware. Maybe how you're aware oscillates a little bit, so it's not a steady pleasant or unpleasant. Maybe there's a rhythm if the mind wanders off, and you're going to start again with your breathing. Can you make that whole transition from thinking to breathing? Be a pleasant transition. Easeful. Gentle. Enjoyable. Take your time. No hurry.

Awareness needs an object to be aware of. But for this sitting, as you're with the breathing or some other experience, prioritize how you're aware, how you're sensing. Let it be calm. Let it be natural. It's less what you do, but what you allow for as you feel how it's like to know and sense. Is the mind tense in any way, tight? Can the mind be relaxed and softened? So it changes what it feels like to know and sense. Okay. Some of the ways that awareness can be pleasant. It could have a warmth to it. It might have a sense of care, kindness. There might be a radiance of joy, inspiration, an atmosphere of goodness around it. The pleasure of knowing and sensing might be found in its simplicity and in the sense of freedom all around it, openness all around. It might be that the naturalness of awareness somehow appears to be beautiful. Beauty in the simplicity of knowing, sensing ease and freedom of awareness floating, allowed to do its own thing. Some of the pleasure of awareness is how the natural awareness, the pleasantness of it, the goodness of it, invites the mind to become quieter, stiller, more sensitive and available to being aware. Perhaps some of the pleasantness of being aware is when sensing and knowing feel very light, having the weight of a butterfly landing on a flower without disturbing the flower. Perhaps the naturalness of awareness is supported by a simplicity of being, where just to be alive is enough for awareness to be appreciated, enjoyed, for its own sake, moment after moment.

So if it works well enough for you, maybe the emphasis of today can be staying close to how

you're aware, how you sense, how you feel, how you know. There's a strong tendency to be overly preoccupied with what we know, with the experience we're having, with what we're thinking about, what we're judging. But let the emphasis be, the love be, with what, with how you're aware, the nature of knowing itself, the nature of sensing and observing, with how you're present, there are capacities to be aware, is one of the greatest gifts that we've been given as human beings. By centering yourself in how you're aware, the naturalness of awareness, allowing it to arrive and be, and you might shift from trying to use awareness to focus on your experience, to let reality be concerned with how it comes into your awareness. You don't have to do so much. Reality will find its way. It will arise within your experience, within your knowing, within your sensing, in its own way. Continually searching and focusing on what's happening might not be so necessary if you're present, appreciating the naturalness of awareness, living in the naturalness, abiding in awareness. Let it be reality's issue, how it wants to be known, how it wants to show up, and you can stay calmly knowing, calmly aware. And if nothing comes into awareness, appreciate knowing nothing. May you offer a deep care, deep love for this very human ability to know and sense, and it will care for you. May you enjoy this day.