

Sunday sit with instructions, week 3

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The movement of *satipaṭṭhāna* is a gradual entry into simplicity, where knowing becomes simpler and simpler. How we know, how we are aware, is at the heart of *satipaṭṭhāna*. For a simile, there are two ways I would emphasize you can hold a small object in your hand. You might grasp it in a tight fist. Maybe if it's a fragile object, it's crushed. And you can't see what's in your hand because of the tight fist.

Another way is to hold your hand open, flat, open to the sky above. The object rests in the center of the palm, not crushed, clearly seen. *Satipaṭṭhāna* is to know without clinging and grasping, without bearing down, without strain, to know in an open-handed way, as if you're holding something delicate like a small butterfly that lands on your hand. Maybe you hold your hand very still, for the miracle of a butterfly resting on your palm. Maybe it even feels loving and caring to give time for the butterfly to rest there as long as it wants. So the knowing, that kind of tenderness, that kind of care, maybe that kind of love, to know calmly, to sense caringly in the path of simplification.

It begins with simply knowing your breathing, knowing you're breathing a long breath or a short breath. It's not knowing the whole story of your autobiography based on breathing and how this particular experience of breathing today fits into the whole novel of what breathing is all about in meditation. It's very simple: breathing in, long, breathing out, and then it gets simpler. Maybe it's no longer thought of as breathing. That's a concept. Knowing breathing becomes knowing the sensations.

Expansion and contraction. Maybe the idea of inhale and exhaling falls away to the simplicity of expansion and contraction, subtle pressure and release of pressure, feeling of smoothness or jaggedness through the inhale, through the exhale time. And then as the mind gets more settled, as the mind awareness tenderly holds the butterfly of the breath in a quiet, lovingly

still mind, there's an interplay between the breathing and the mind, where the mind moves less, not jumping around, not moving around with stories, concepts. Just here, in a very simple, quiet way, the natural centering of awareness with breathing, breathing with awareness, like the butterfly centers itself on your palm. And over time it becomes simpler.

Instead of knowing different sensations, it's knowing the pleasant and unpleasantness, the comfort and discomfort of breathing, not needing what's uncomfortable to be any different than it is, not needing what is comfortable to become any more than it is, just a simplicity of knowing, sensing what's comfortable and uncomfortable, pleasant, unpleasant, with the breathing. And generally, to become even more simple, we dip below the surface sensations that often attract the mind, the reactive mind. Dip below them to the deeper sensations of pleasure, well-being, connected to breathing, radiating from the breathing into the rest of the body, where the mind can become simpler and simpler, riding the experience of breathing, enjoying whatever feels wholesome and healthy. In this simplicity of being, there's a way of staying at being centered very tenderly, carefully, continuously with the body breathing. Awareness rests there, while at the same time, in the simplicity of mind that grows, the mind begins to feel spacious, open. The less the thinking, the less the stories are, the more space and quiet and the movement's simplicity continues with the relaxing, any idea of the doer of meditation, the idea of the one who is experiencing or is the victim.

Ideas of self are appropriate sometimes in life. But as the mind gets simpler and quieter, they're not needed. Sensations allowed to be as they are, almost as if each sensation is floating in space, independent of making me, myself, and mine in relationship to them. Sensations coming and going, vibrating. And then at some point, what stands out, what gets highlighted is the little knots, little waves of the mind stops or gets entangled for something. Little places of solidity and contraction that don't necessarily involve ideas and stories, but something more basic and deeper.

Simple desires and aversions, simple wantings and not wantings. And it's possible to become even simpler. It's possible to know the appearance of *dukkha*, of stress, suffering, the arising of it. When it does arise, as if it arises out of emptiness, out of sin, arises in space. So simple. And in the end, we might know the passing of it, allowing awareness to become quieter, softer.

Tenderly, as now the butterfly lands and takes off, lands and takes off. Things become so simple that there's nothing but phenomena appearing and disappearing. The mind simple, simply here, with nothing needing to happen, but being aware, not an awareness one does, but what one allows, an awareness it just is, with arising and the passings, that don't need to

be labeled or understood. Don't need to be anything but arising and some passings. Arising and passing... We're in the passing of all things. The mind does not have to work, doesn't have to register anything.

The mind can be at rest. The mind can let go of itself. Where the most wonderful thing is the passing of the mind as well. Where the next step in simplification is letting go. Letting go of the body, letting go of the mind. How simple can your awareness be and still remain right here in the only place where the greatest simplicity is found?

Right here, right now. The art of *satipaṭṭhāna* involves how you're aware. It's possible to know, to sense, to observe peacefully, to arrive here. At this moment there had to be a lot of letting go. This is a lifetime of letting go. Here and now, reality is constantly letting go.

Letting go is integral to being alive. It is safe to let go. On the other side of completely letting go is the heart's freedom. Repeating a story I frequently tell: when my son was in kindergarten, once a week they took beeswax off the shelf, made little creatures, animals. But when they took the beeswax, old, week-long, week-old clay off the shelf, it was hard and brittle. The teacher would instruct them to put it between the palm of their two hands and hold it there while the teacher told the story.

And the beeswax would warm up and get soft enough to shape. By the time the story was finished, they could shape the beeswax. Hold your practice, hold your experience, hold yourself, your heart, your breathing. Hold this moment as if you're holding it in the warmth of your two hands. Stay close. How you're aware is the key.

Stay in the present moment as if you're holding all things in the warmth of your palm, so that the natural process of simplification can flow and unfold. May you unfold all the creases in your heart so there are no more knots. Thank you.