

Saturday Dharma talk, week 3

Gil Fronsdal

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To introduce the next step in the *Satipaṭṭhāna*, I'd like to tell you a tale. Once upon a time, there was a great, beautiful city deep in the woods that had been abandoned and forgotten mostly. Nothing particularly bad happened to the city. It's just that a lot of the people left to be soldiers to fight wars, and wars never ended. So their children became soldiers, and their children became soldiers. It went on and on, and they never returned to the city.

And some people went forth to become merchants in the world. There was no end to building businesses and making money. So, of course, there was more work to be done for the next generation, and the next generation, and commerce became the family lineage. Those people never returned. Some people became romantics, artists, writers, sensualists, and all kinds. They found the world was full of wonderful, sensual things to do, and they never returned to the city.

And so it went. After a while, no one was left. There were all these different pursuits that people went after. Many years later, there was a young person who grew up in this wider world of war, commerce, arts and crafts, sensuality, knowledge gaining, and research—all kinds of wonderful things. But none of it really spoke to the heart in some deep way. The heart felt somehow unfulfilled, left out, empty with the ordinary pursuits, and didn't know what to do.

It happened to be that the person's great-grandparent, now 106, heard about this young person's angst and dissatisfaction and said, "Oh, you might not have been told this, but our family came from this city that's long since been overgrown. The forest has gotten thicker and thicker." "Really?" said the young person. "Yeah. And if you go there and go to the family home and go into the center of their family home, you'll find your family treasure that will help you find what you're looking for." "But how do I find the city? How do I find the home?"

"Well, as you go through the woods, just follow the brick path. And when you get to the city, follow the easeful path. And when you get to the family home, follow in the house the complete path. And when you find the inner sanctum of the home, then follow the dark path with no light." This was a little bit cryptic, but that's all the instruction that was given. So the person knew about the brick path because a little bit of it poked out of the forest and always wondered what was going on.

So went into that beginning and started walking, but kept getting lost. Eventually would go in circles and find the path again, look around and think, "Oh, that's where the path goes," and get lost—a lot of getting lost. But then, remembering the great-grandparent's instructions, they were something like, "Just follow the brick path right in front of you." So looking down, right there was the brick path, and then continued to look down, just seeing where the next step should go. The next step should go. And sure enough, that was all you needed to know the path in the forest.

Eventually came to the city, but it was a big city and there was no map, no addresses, no signposts. How to find the family home? Follow the easy path. At the entrance to the city, there were lots of paths to take. Some were steep stairwells going up hills, some were over rough rocky trails. But there were two paths, two roads that went kind of a little bit downhill, kind of parallel to each other.

One was just lined with trees. The other one was lined with stores of every kind. Bookstores were very exciting. And, you know, there were also cookie stores, and cookies they kept well in tin cans. How exciting. Toy stores and all kinds of wonderful stores and art stores, beautiful art. "Wow, that's nice... That must be the easy, the easeful path with so much beauty and wonderful things."

So the person went down that path and spent, I think, a few years going down that path, but after a while, just felt kind of exhausted. All the pleasure and all the beauty and all the cookies. "No, this can't be it." So made their way all the way back to the beginning and took the other path that had the... Also going downhill in a nice way, lined with trees. It was like forest bathing, going down that path. "Wow, this is a very different feeling of ease, very different pleasure than the cookies and toys and bookstores or whatever."

And followed it down. It was very nice to walk in it. It was so nice, almost forgot the purpose. But that path eventually dead-ended, dead end, right up against the front door of a house, the family house. Went into the doors, unlocked, and went in. "What does the complete path mean in the house?"

In that entryway that was clear, there was this... It just went through the front door into the entryway and directly in front there was a massive door, you know, big, strong, powerful metal door with lots of locks on it. "Well, that must be the inner sanctum, but how do I get in there?" But on either side of the entryway there were doors going to the side. "The complete way, what does that mean? Maybe I'll find the complete way."

So the person turned into one of the side doors and went through a room there and, "Well, that's interesting and nice here," looking around, but there was another door. And hanging on the doorframe on the right was a key. It looked like a kind of key that fit the padlock. Went through to the next room. More key in that next one, kept going. It turned out that it went around in a big circle around that inner sanctum.

By the time the person came back, had known the whole house, experienced the whole house, knew it all, had acquired a key—so all the keys needed for the padlocks—and opened a door to go into the inner sanctum. "The dark way, the dark path, what is that?" Well, there was no light in that inner room, but there was a big box in the middle. "Yeah. But dark, it's supposed to be dark, so close the door," and was in the complete dark. Just there with that box. "But what does that mean? That family treasure must be in the box. But how do I open the box? There's no lid. What do I do here? Shake it?"

But then in the dark, begins, put his hand, their hand very carefully, all around it, just feeling it, the texture of it, the move forward. And it felt very nice to touch. And then by that time was tired from all the traveling, so took a nap, woke up in the dark, didn't know what else to do. So used the hands again to feel really tenderly, carefully this box. And lo and behold, in one little spot in the back, something that felt like a button. Pushed that button and this drawer opened up.

But it was dark. So what's in the drawer? The person put their hand in and picked something up. It was soft, warm, fit really well, resting in the two palms of their hand. Kind of the shape of a heart, and it was beating like a heart. And this was curious, it felt very tender, and it's all in the dark, doesn't know what to do with this heart, this thing.

But then, "I better be careful with it, caring for it." It seemed like something to care for. And held it carefully and just like, "What do we do here?" And then it seemed like the right thing to do was to bring that, whatever that was, right up against the chest. And lo and behold, it got absorbed right into the chest. And now this young person had found their heart. There was a waiting there. Always waiting.

So, the four foundations of mindfulness, we end this world of ours as jungle, forest, lots of

temptations, lots of things to do. But there is a path through it. And the path is right in front of us, right here. It begins with the body, with very simple things in the body. Don't look far and wide. Don't think about great philosophies of religion.

No great goals, of great experiences. Just right here, breathing. The next in-breath is a step on the path. The next out-breath is a step on the path. Feeling the body. Right here, it's on the path.

Relaxing. Such an immediate thing to do. It can't be this simple. Just know your posture. Standing, walking, sitting, lying down. Know it.

It must be more complicated than this. It sure is. When you bend your arm, know you're bending it. When you're eating, know you're eating. When you're peeing, know you're peeing. When you're turning your head, know you're turning your head.

Know the activities you're doing as you do them. Here and body and body activities. Know it well. Walk that path. Know the parts of the body. Know the sensations of the body.

And then the city, when you come to the city, go in. Don't just stay on the outside. And there are different paths in the city to be taken. But there's two that are parallel. There's the pleasures and pains that do not nourish, do not restore, do not feed the inner life. And there's the pleasures and pains, the places of ease, the joys, the happinesses, the path that really nourishes something really deep that comes from our depths.

Take that path. Know what really is wholesome. Know what really is healthy. Know where you can bathe the depths of your being. And then you'll come to the house of this very fierce thing that we don't really know what it is. But the mind, the mind is the house because what isn't part of the mind?

The complete path in the mind, know it well. Know all the parts of it. Know the parts and know the whole. Be complete. The expansive mind. Know the freedom of mind.

Know what it's like to be deeply at home, at home in your mind. Settled, peaceful. And then the... What's the box? That's real intimacy with something that you can know about your mind. Different mental activities and hindrances, the activities of the mind, all the thinking.

But there's also, as you know it, feel it, get to know everything and allow it to become simpler and simpler, maybe you don't know as much anymore. At some point you don't know anymore. You're not operating on knowledge. You're not operating under even knowing what you're doing anymore. But you know to be tender, to hold carefully. Just be there.

Maybe in the dark, maybe in the unknown. Maybe just right here, in the greatest intimacy of what you can touch and feel. No, without even knowing what it is. And to hold it, whatever that is, in the tenderness, care of the palms of your hand, and palms of awareness. And feel it's beating. Feel it appearing and disappearing, coming and going, until something about it disappears.

And then, maybe then, you discover your heart. It's always been there, the family treasure, the freed heart, the heart that's free of clinging. So as we go through the *Satipaṭṭhāna*, the last foundation is a movement both of simplifying, no longer enamored or seduced or pushed around, attached to all the stories that we live in, and knowing that all the stories in some ways are disconnecting from a deeper intimacy. And a deeper intimacy is closely related to who we are as a human being. But even there... There are simple attachments, simple ideas, things we cling to, assuming that we are those things.

It also paradoxically disconnects us. It gives us a sense of, like, this is real, now I know who I am. But at the same time, it divides us. It does it to be loose the whole. And to be able to drop the ideas of self. And instead of knots getting knotted up, with mind getting knotted up and things.

Learning how to hold anything that's here, what's most intimate, what's most here in the palms of our awareness, in the tenderness, the softness of awareness. Just be right there, just hold it. You don't have to know what it is anymore. And then in the final step in the whole path of *Satipaṭṭhāna*, the attention is to something that's not specified. It's not saying a specific thing. It's more of a general sense, something that you kind of know more generally and openly and maybe impactfully for sure.

But maybe we don't have to know the details of it. It says, one understands, one knows this, "Here is suffering." So suffering is certainly kind of real. But it doesn't say here, know the suffering of having warts. Know the suffering of poverty. Know the suffering of broken heart.

Know a suffering of fear, hurt. Just as no suffering, no suffering without the story. No suffering without the identification with any part of it. No suffering without any getting knotted up, without being for or against it, without pushing it away or clinging to it, just know it. And I propose know it, tenderly, gently. You don't have to know more than it.

The here is suffering. No. But by now, through all this *satipaṭṭhāna*, this simplicity of this knowing, this simplicity of just holding and being, having infinite patience to be with it, not trying to fix it, not trying to get rid of it, but this kind of care, like you're just holding your own heart in your hands. If your beating, living heart was something you could hold for a little

while, you would probably hold it with great, great care, gentleness and protection until they had a chance to put it back in there. So that way holds suffering that way. No suffering. In this very, very simple way.

And as I've said a number of times, the whole path of *Satipaṭṭhāna* is going simpler and simpler and simpler. So by now, at the end, there's something about having matured in this practice that allows us to know suffering very simply. And as we hold it in our hands, hold it carefully, what we see is that suffering, what we call suffering, a big word in English. The small sufferings, the big sufferings, medium sufferings. It's not constant, and as a beat, kind of. It arises... And it sees us, comes and goes, it appears and disappears.

And what kept it constant, what kept it look like a permanent thing, was all the ways we're relating to it, thinking about it, attacking it, trying to fix it, concerned about it, afraid of it. We have a complicated relationship, and seeing it through these complicated relationships gives it a semblance of being a thing, solid, solid. But when it's no longer being seen as a thing, as something to relate to, in the dark, just allowing it to be there. No relationship to it, just holding it careingly, knowing it, feeling it. And seeing that in the mind can be just right here in the present moment, nowhere else is. That what we call suffering is something that comes and goes, shifts and changes, it's fluid, it's transient, it arises and passes.

So in the text it says, here one knows the arising of suffering. And I've said now, talked a few times now about how significant it is to see something when it arises. And then it says, you know, when it sees us, it's equally significant to see when something's not there, even if it's only not there temporarily, for whatever reason. Things arise, things pass. When suffering is seen that way, you can't say that the suffering is a constant. You can't say that suffering is fully, completely there, but you can't say it's not there. It comes and goes.

Many things in our life come and go. Meals come and go. Day, daytime comes and goes. Hunger comes and goes. Periods of meditation come and go. Periods of walking meditation come and go. Inhales come and go. Exhales come and go. Believe it or not, thoughts come and go. Suffering arises and goes. It arises, it ceases, arises again, ceases.

What's happening when there's a pause, a gap between the ceasing and the next arising? If there's no clinging, if nothing is taken as me, myself, and mine, in that empty space between the ceasing and the arising, there's freedom. You might see there's nothing there to cling to. There's nothing there to put your mind on, to focus on. Right there, there might be a sense of vast openness, vast space in the mind's searching, the mind's wanting, the mind's orientation to be concerned with what's happening. Reactivity, the mind's momentum can rest, can take a break. The mind can be put down for a long-deserved break. The mind can

let go of itself. The mind can see itself in that pause, in that break, that it too can cease. There too, there's freedom.

There's freedom in seeing things arise and pass, coming and going, maybe similar to sitting at the beach and watching the waves wash up and down on the sand. It doesn't really make sense to get attached to one of those waves. I don't think too many people get really attached to a single wave making up on the beach as you're watching it. It would be kind of a drag. I mean, it's kind of like, why would you have your mind do that to a wave which is so ephemeral? The whole purpose of spending a day off on the beach, watching the waves, is to give the mind a break. Let it put everything down. And to come to this very unusual, special kind of very settled mind, focused mind, quiet mind, that sees the arising and ceasing of suffering without even needing to know what kind of suffering it is. It's that simple. There is freedom there.

There is where we can let go and let it be. And that knowledge, that understanding, wow, it is possible to be free. It is possible to have a mind that doesn't get attached to anything, cling to anything, react to anything. A free mind is possible. And there's something about being right there in the transient, shifting, changing, impermanent aspect of our experience that is freeing. And then in this *Satipaṭṭhāna*, the last step it says, "Here, one knows, This is the practice to the cessation of suffering. This is the practice leading to the cessation of suffering."

This right here, seeing things arise and pass, seeing in the arising and passing, not seeing any self in it, there's no self in that experience. And in that no self, there's freedom. Right there in the suffering, seeing its impermanence. Right there in the suffering, seeing the suffering, and letting go into no longer assigning names, meaning to things, so that that meaning-making, name-making, signifying part of the mind can rest right there, seeing in the comings and goings, there's no need to take anything or interpret anything as myself, the self. Without self, there's a kind of emptiness, wonderful vast emptiness here. And then there's a strange, wonderful thing that to be with suffering and have no wishes and designs for anything, including getting rid of it, there's a freedom there called the wishless.

There's something about being so intimate and tender and present that we're really right there, like we're feeling the beating heart in our hand, feeling the beating, arising and passing of our suffering. Maybe something that's been difficult all our life, a challenge all our life, something that has seemed impossible, big project. Allowing ourselves to get simple, allowing yourself to arrive... Do the path that brings us right here into the present moment. Settled. No desire, no tendency to not be here. Just here in the present with the experience.

And eventually be able to hold the suffering in such a simple way that coming out of it almost is something that sets the mind free. Something that allows the mind to let go. The vast emptiness of freedom. And then you know your heart. Then you know the heart of the world, of everyone. Then you know that it's possible to not cling to anything in this world.

Satipaṭṭhāna is not a geographical path. It's a path inward, here, to your own heart. May this path, may through this path you find your heart, and you free it to have a heart free of all clinging, and then you'll know that your heart is a treasure.