

Thursday Guided Instruction

Gil Fronsdal

November 20, 2025

Keywords: sati, mindfulness, awareness, attention, mindfulness of thinking, insight tradition, present moment, body sensations, breathing, emotions

As I really was beginning to learn the practice of *sati*, the practice of mindfulness, something that I came to have a very deep appreciation for, sometimes with a sense of wonder, wow, sometimes even a feeling that this is what is sacred, was when my attention had the ability to attend peacefully to everything, nothing left out.

That we have a variety of attentional capacities, faculties, that contribute to our capacity to be aware.

And having an awareness that has a place, has a room for everything, which is not the same thing as condoning things or agreeing that things can be the way they are.

Oddly enough, it's not rejecting anything, and oddly enough, it's not even accepting everything.

Because accepting is a little bit too active, but simply to allow whatever is occurring to arise, to be in the awareness, in attention.

And then wisdom can decide whether something should be accepted or not accepted, whether we say yes or no to certain things.

But this amazing capacity to settle back, open up, and be aware.

Nothing is unacceptable, nothing is unallowable.

In this amazing field of attention, and all the different attentional faculties we have, includes seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, sensing with the body.

It includes cognitively knowing, recognizing what we're aware of.

It even includes a rudimentary kind of thinking about things that happens almost naturally.

And one way of understanding it, that sometimes attention relates to how we attend to things.

And when an attending can be done with care, with love, with compassion, we can attend peacefully.

And in this mindfulness practice, one of the key ways of attending is calmly, to calmly know, to calmly feel and sense, to calmly perceive or experience as it occurs in the present.

And if there is thinking, and you can't stop it, which is kind of impossible, sometimes thinking stops itself, which can be nice, but you can't really stop it yourself.

And sometimes if you're thinking, you can shift how you're thinking.

We so strongly identified, some of us, so strongly identified with thinking.

We think that whatever way we're thinking is who we are, how it's supposed to be.

But I've seen and recognized in myself and other people that a different part of the brain operates when we think than when we're talking.

Sometimes we have a little bit more wisdom if we talk, right, carefully, talk kindly.

And it is possible to shift how you think, to think from a different part of the brain, almost a different operating system, that you think from a wiser place, a caring place, a calmer place within.

So if you're going to think anyway, can you shift how you think?

So you think in ways that supports the meditation, gently, calmly.

Give yourself instructions.

Calmly recognize how you're aware.

Are you aware calmly or are you agitated or resisting or bored or aversive?

Ask yourself how you're aware.

Are you aware with the operating system of thoughts that is judging and expecting and planning, remembering?

Can you shift more to that operating system that simply narrates, instructs the present moment here with a voice or with images that are reassuring?

And in doing this, what makes this all sacred, wondrous, is that thinking does not have to be the enemy of practice.

It doesn't have to be a problem.

It's one more thing to include in the awareness.

So there can be, from this deeper operating system, simple instructions.

Let me recognize that I'm thinking anxiously.

Let me recognize that I'm thinking filled with desires.

Let me recognize that I believe every thought.

Let me recognize that somehow I believe I am my thinking.

That's where I'm located.

Very simple, quiet instructions.

Maybe they're even non-verbal instructions.

As you think, sense, feel the experience of thinking.

Sometimes you can feel if it's in the head, tightening, pressure, agitation.

Sometimes you can feel there's so much energy that you can run the California energy grid.

Sometimes the quiet, inner voice, inner knowing, can recognize that you keep getting pulled into the world of thoughts, lost in it, stuck in it, and that quiet inner voice that recognizes, that attends to this fact.

One option is to go, oh, this is bad, which doesn't help anything.

The other option is to go, isn't this amazing, that my mind is out of control, wow.

And often it's more valuable to feel, sense the underlying physicality of thinking.

And if it's easy, to relax it, to open it.

And then sometimes that quiet inner voice that hopefully becomes your friend, becomes your wise companion, can gently, quietly tell you, suggest, is there any emotion associated with the thinking?

And sometimes the emotion associated with thinking is the fuel for it, what keeps it going.

Maybe even keeps us stuck in the particular thought trains we've jumped onto.

If there's a lot of planning, sometimes there's apprehension under it.

Sometimes if there's anger, angry thoughts, it isn't so much that the anger is the fuel, but it might be an underlying fear or hurt.

It might be useful to wait to really attend to thinking, that kind, quiet, calm attending, until you're a little bit more settled.

Today's the fourth full day of the retreat.

So it's only now that I introduce, to introduce this mindfulness of thinking.

So maybe you have a little bit more capacity to settle, find a calm place within, to begin attending to your experience calmly, spaciously, openly.

So to begin the instructions or guided meditation, if it feels right for you, you might feel your body globally as wide and panoramic, sensing and feeling you can of your body, which means to feel all the different sensations.

Sensations that only occur in the present moment.

If we're in our lived experience, the experience of being alive is expressed through the sensations of the body.

And if something in your body is difficult, see if you can make your awareness wider, bigger, or as if you're observing the body sensations from a distance, maybe taking a few moments to feel how the body responds to the rain on the roof.

And then wherever it's most comforting or easy, become aware of the body breathing, aware of how the body experiences the rhythm, the sensations of breathing.

And as you exhale, to relax, soften, release the holdings in the body.

Maybe with every exhale, gently, quietly the deep voice within, or the deep nonverbal knowing within, say to yourself, relax or soften, being careful that the inner voice or the inner knowing says this calmly, peacefully, maybe even lovingly, relax, or maybe it's okay.

And as you breathe in, the simplest possible, easiest possible recognition, maybe with the word in or lifting as the chest rises.

Maybe attending to the inhale with a welcome, with an allowing, receiving.

And if it becomes difficult to attend to the breathing, because you're thinking a lot, to use the same thinking mind to recognize that your thinking might keep you caught in thinking.

Recognize you're thinking, maybe with a very simple thought, word, thinking.

But do so from this deeper place within, the deeper thinking, the quieter, calmer place.

And if the thinking continues, from that quieter place, see if you can have no problem with the mind thinking.

But do quietly give yourself instructions in mindfulness of thinking, so you can shift away from identifying with your thinking.

Shift from being the thinking.

Shift to observing, sensing, knowing thinking from this other place with a knowing, with a sensing that might be reassuring, maybe occasionally with the little words, it's okay, ever so gently.

Instruct yourself, encourage yourself to ride along with a full exhale, to be lifted along with a full inhale, a full attending to the present moment that is accompanied with an attitude of yes, yes to being aware.

And sometimes if you're settled, you can be aware of a silent sensing, of a non-verbal knowing, the way of sensing, knowing, feeling that occurs beyond the edges of verbal thinking, in the space between thoughts.

In a few moments I'll ring the bell to end the sitting.

But instead of ending your practice, have the ringing of the bell as a reminder to be curious about all the shifts and changes that will happen in your mind, your body, your heart.

Just knowing that the sitting is coming to end before you open your eyes and move your body.

Feel and sense, accompany yourself in the changes.

Thank you.

One of the strengths and simultaneously one of the weaknesses of our insight tradition is giving a lot of instructions.

If all you do is quietly return to your breathing and attend, care for, accompany your breathing, that'll keep you in the present moment and so much unfolds from that.

So you can keep it that simple if you like.

And sometimes it's good to not think of the instructions as instructions of things you're supposed to do.

It's not a prescription, but it's a description of what you can be aware of if your awareness is open, receptive to this lived life we have.

Look at that, I'm thinking.

Look at that, I'm having emotions.

Look at that, body sensations.

Hear that, there's rain on the roof.

Reality, we just kind of keep showing up for us.

And when we include everything in it, nothing left out.

The instructions don't have to be instructions.

They're just describe what we're aware of.

And one of the ways I love thinking about this practice is with the word attending.

I think it's directly connected with the word attention.

Attending.

To me, attending is a word of care, of love, of respect.

And how can we use our capacities for being aware to attend to our world, to attend to ourselves calmly, peacefully, in a way that keeps us in this miracle of the present moment, to practice mindfulness of thinking as a way of just recognizing what's happening, to be honest, to be complete, but also as a way of not being overly caught in thought or locked in or believing in or investing in what the thoughts are saying and maybe shifting the source of thinking from someplace that's more wise, more caring, someplace where that can give you the kind of simple instructions that supports you to be present here, that supports you in being continuous, supports you in being inclusive of everything, simple thinking that supports you to become calmer.

Moments maybe, with no verbal thinking, no image thinking, and maybe no clinging and wanting, just alive in the miracle of the lived moment.

So I'll be meeting, today is Thursday, so I'll be meeting the people who saw Adrian two days ago.

And those of you who saw Adrian two days ago, so it goes to see if it's a... you saw me last time, you'll see Adrian today.

If you saw me two days ago, you'll see... I'm confusing myself.

Coming out of meditation, some things are too complicated.

And... but check the board.

Today is Thursday.

And for meeting with me, it is a little bit raining.

So right now there's only one umbrella by that back door here that says IRC on it.

So every other person can use it.

But bring it back.

And maybe we'll find another umbrella that we can put there.

So there's two.

And it'll be dry once we get on the deck.

It's under an awning.

And Denise will be sitting in with me today.

And Denise has posted a signed-up sheet for offering a few practice discussions with her this afternoon.

So I hope you have a wonderful day.

Enjoy this day.

There's a way of using this kind of weather as a way of lovingly keeping you kind of close in, close in to the practice moment by moment.

Thank you.

So I have a few announcements for those of us online.

Just a couple.

The first one is I'm offering a drop-in group tonight at 6:15 Pacific.

The link's at the bottom of the schedule page.

And anyone's welcome, an auditor or a regular full retreatant.

And in addition today, some of you have practice discussions with me one-on-one, some in just a few minutes.

So please check the schedule.

Your appointment time is listed at the bottom of the schedule.

But the meeting room, the link to the meeting room is either in the note you got a couple of days ago, or if you go to the resources page, it's at the bottom of that page, it'll say Inessa's meeting room.

So I think you should be able to find it.

So I'll just say that one more time.

You can find a link on the resources page, resources and handouts, I think it's called.

And at the very bottom of the page, there's these three different links mentioned.

So go to Inessa's meeting room.

And try to get there a couple of minutes early at least so we can start online as there's one after the other after the other.

So thank you and have a wonderful day of practice.