

Satipatthana and Profound Samadhi - Day 1 Talk 2

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Aleix Ruiz-Falqués

Thank you, Francisco. Hello, everyone. As Francisco has introduced me, there are a few known faces already, familiar faces, but otherwise, I think we've never met before, at least in this life. So I'm actually, it is a bit humbling to be here because I'm not so sure about what my contribution might be.

But basically, if I understood Francisco well, and we had similar interactions previously, the idea is to offer you just a few strokes, or a few ideas, about the etymology or the origin of some concepts that we are going to use, or that meditators generally use in meditation practice, on the basis of translations. And since we are talking about knowledge, there are, of course, different layers of knowledge. One deeper layer of knowledge comes when we read Buddhist texts in the original language or languages. In this case, the underlying language or the original language of these scriptures is *Pāli*. And what I will try to do is just offer a few glimpses on what the *Pāli* words behind the English words actually mean, or how they are connected to knowledge and experience.

I'm going to share a few slides, but for those who prefer to have the slides with themselves, I'm just sharing the slideshow on the chat. It's just a few pages, but if you want to keep it. There's no copyright with the Buddhist word. It's free of use. These are ancient words. It's not just my words. I will just try to convey what they mean.

So the first idea, and this is something that Francisco has already explained, and I think many of you have already experienced, is about knowing. And the fact that knowing is not something given, right? It can mean different things in the same way that when we talk about a color, it can mean different things. There are different shades or different tones of knowledge. So one of the important contributions of Buddhism in the history of religion or philosophy or meditation is basically to highlight the complexity of knowledge.

In other words, what does it mean to know something? What does it mean to know? Is it to experience something? Does it mean that we see something? Do we touch? Do we remember something? Do we pay attention? Do we know something if we don't pay attention to it? What does it mean to know?

Are there degrees in knowledge? As we usually say in conventional language, we can say, I know this very well. But is it possible to know something but not so well? Does that really count as knowledge? These are all questions that Buddhist texts pose and propose.

So one of the important words in *Pāli* regarding knowledge is the verb *pajānāti* that you see here. Hello. Sorry. *Pajānāti*. This is the *Pāli* word for knowing, or the verb "to know." Yeah. You see this one

in the famous instructions. Breathing in long, one knows: I'm breathing in long. Breathing out long, one knows: I'm breathing out long.

So, of course, when we read this in *Pāli*, it seems quite self-evident, right? We see “knows” and we think that we know what “knows” means, right? At least I generally think so. But what does it mean to know in this case? This is the question.

Of course, as a caveat or as a disclaimer, I will say that simply knowing the grammar of the underlying language or the original language doesn't guarantee a perfect understanding. Of course, there's always some degree of interpretation. But sometimes it helps, especially through connections.

For instance, in this case, if we read the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse in *Pāli*, you see that the verb is *pajānāti*. If you search *pajānāti* in a *Pāli* dictionary, it will say “to know,” and sometimes “to understand.” The word *pajānāti*, or the verb, is made of two parts. It's like in English, “prognosis” is made of two parts.

One is what we call a preverb that gives a kind of, it modifies the meaning of a verbal root or a concept. And the main word in English would be “gnosis,” or in Greek, that means knowledge. So the equivalent of *pajānāti* is to have prognosis.

What that means is that in *Pāli*, we have a preverb *pa*. In Sanskrit, that is *pra*. And the root *ñā*, here, what's more important is the root. Because *ñā*, or in Sanskrit *jñā*, as many of you probably know, it means “to know” generically. But the verb “to know” generically is found occasionally, but not that often. What we generally find is the verb “to know” modified with a preverb.

So in this case it's knowing *pa* or *pra*, that means forward or directly. Actually, many times, as I said, the word *pajānāti* is translated as “to understand.” But basically, it is to know something in advance or directly. It has different shades of meaning.

And one word that is connected to the verb *pajānāti* is *paññā*, as you can see here below. So this is something that will rarely be seen in translations. Because when we find the noun *paññā*, we translate it generally as “wisdom,” right? So one develops *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*. Like morality, concentration, and wisdom.

So the word that we use for wisdom in *Pāli* is *paññā*, and it comes exactly from the same root, the same verbal root, as *pajānāti*, knowing here. So, of course, *paññā* means wisdom or understanding. When we say, “breathing in long, one knows,” that means one understands, one realizes, etc. There are many possibilities in translating this, but I just wanted to highlight that the verb “to know” here is connected to the word that we generally use for wisdom. So maybe if you want to interpret it, it would be like knowing in a wise manner, or something like this.

Then we have a similar verb that is connected to knowledge or experience, or knowing something through direct experience, in the passage: breathing in, I sense the whole body; one trains. Breathing out, I sense the whole body. So what is the word for sensing in *Pāli*? Is this a verb that is common or not? How is it connected to other verbs of knowledge or experience?

So in this case, again, if we break it up into parts, if we want to look into the etymology of the verb, it's a long one. This one is *patisamvedeti*. *Patisamvedeti* that we may translate as “to sense,” “to feel,” “to experience,” and there are other options. If we break it down, it has two preverbs, like two modifiers of the main root, and then the root. And then the root here, the verbal root, is *vid*, that means knowing in the sense of experiencing something.

So actually translating *patisamvedeti* as “to sense” is quite correct. It's not just knowing. It's sensing it, experiencing it. And the two preverbs, they modify, or tweak, or enhance the meaning of the root by adding the *pati*, that means again something or directly, and the *saṃ*, that means completely. So if we would try to produce a kind of very literal translation of *patisamvedeti*, it would be directly and completely experiencing an object or something. Of course, that would make the translation a bit clumsy. So “sensing” makes it more elegant. That's a little bit what it means.

The root *vid*, again, maybe we are not used to seeing it in text, or even in English text about Buddhism or meditation. But one word that you may have seen in *Pāli* or in Sanskrit is *vijjā* in *Pāli*, or *vidyā* in Sanskrit. That, again, we translate as—oh, sorry, here my Spanish slipped. That is *saibiduría* is wisdom. *Conocimiento* is knowledge. So again it would be wisdom and knowledge, and that's *vidyā*.

But note that *paññā*, we translate it as wisdom. *Vijjā* is also translated as wisdom, but these are two different roots. Here, *vid*. And *vid*, if you think that it may have something to do with “video” or “visual” in English, you are actually correct. Because the Latin verb, and then the English word “video,” something that one sees, is connected to this root. It's seeing something. It has another shade of meaning.

The *vid* is knowing. And sometimes it is used in the sense of encountering, finding something, finding out. I think in English you can also say “to find.” You will find out. You will know. You'll know through your own experience. This is the meaning of *vid*.

So if we compare the two verbs that mean “to know,” basically, or “to understand,” *pajānāti* or just *jānāti*, with all its different modifications. This *jānāti* can be combined with *pa*, and then we have *pajānāti*, that means to know, to understand. It may be combined with *vi* instead of *pa*, and we have *vijānāti*, *viññāṇa*, that we translate as consciousness. That is one of the five aggregates.

It may be built with *saṃ*, *saṃjānāti*, literally “to know completely.” That produces the noun *saññā*. That is another one we translate as perception. That's another one of the—So you can combine the root with different preverbs. You'll get different shades. But the root here is *jānāti*, to know.

And intellectuals or scholars, they will say that the main action or the main function of this verb is ontological. It points to what is, what exists. It has to do with knowing something as something that exists. Whereas the special function or meaning of *vedeti*, or *vid*, the root *vid*, with all its different variations, would be knowing as experiencing. I.e., it has a phenomenological function, meaning that it's knowing what appears to us, what manifests.

So these two verbs are general. Sometimes they can be exchanged. They are synonyms, but they have specific origins. And so if you are wondering this, knowing as *jānāti* means knowing what is. It's ontological. *Vedeti* is experiencing, finding out, is what is more phenomenological. In meditation, this one perhaps is a bit more important, at least through the process, and the first one would be important at the end.

Then there is another concept that is calm and tranquility. Sometimes it's called tranquility or tranquilizing in some translations, but here it is translated as calming. And even though maybe in common English that is not directly connected to knowledge, in the yogic traditions, especially in the Buddhist tradition, it is very much part of the process of knowing things. In the same way as, well, just following the ancient metaphor, in the same way as knowing that something exists, so to verify that something is there.

For instance, we need the fog or the clouds to disappear. We need the water to become still. So if the water is not calm and still, it's impossible to know what's beneath and what's in the depths. The clearer, the stiller the water will be, the clearer it will be our knowledge about what's inside. So that's an old metaphor, but it works throughout the literature and you always find it.

And when you see the calming, in this case, the calming of the bodily construct. Breathing in, I calm the bodily construct. One trains. Breathing out, I calm the bodily construct. That is also part of this process of knowledge understood broadly.

The word in *Pāli* is *passambhati*. That means to calm down. But as I said, it is connected to becoming still, or to be away. I think becoming still is important here. Yeah.

There are many ways in which we can understand becoming calm. Especially in the modern world. We are all stressed out, and just relax, calm down, have a beer, have something to relax. That's not exactly this calming down. It may include that, but it's about stilling the mind so that it becomes clear, and it can shine on its own.

That's why in some dictionaries you will see that the verb *passambh*, or *passambhati*, it has to do also with serenity, and with trust, confidence, faith. There are many words in *Pāli* that connect clarity, or something that is translucent, with faith and confidence. Because it's only when something is clear and you can see through that you can trust it.

So the devotees that are faithful, and they have faith in the Buddha, they have *pasāda*. That means they have clarity. They see it clearly. Therefore, they have trust.

And finally, another term that Francisco has already mentioned is clear comprehension. Sometimes you will see the couplet mindfulness and clear comprehension. Or someone is mindful and clearly comprehending, with all its variations in English. In our text, you'll see: when going forward and coming back, one acts with clear comprehension.

So the word in *Pāli* here is a compound. It contains two words that are very, very important. The first

one is *sati*, that you already know in the English translation: mindfulness. But of course, as you can imagine, it has other possibilities. It may simply mean mental presence. If you wish, awareness. If you wish, attention.

I remember going on a high road in Burma, in Myanmar. And when there is a speed limit, it says *sati*, speed limit, I don't know, 60 miles. It's *sati*. It means like pay attention, be aware, be mindful, be careful. It also means memory.

We don't have time here to go into the how, what's the connection between mental presence and memory. But I think you can kind of guess it. Because remembering, recalling something, basically bringing back to the mental presence of something. So that's *sati*.

And it's always combined with *sampajañña*. In this case, *sampajañña* is a word that you already know at this moment. If you were there, if you had *sati* in the previous lives, I think you will remember that one part of this word is *pajānāti*. *Pajañña* comes from *pa-ñā*. You can see that the word *pa-ñā*, or wisdom, and *pajānāti*, to know or to understand, is already in the compound.

And it has another preverb, that is *saṃ*. As you've seen before, it generally gives the idea of completeness, or perfectly, or completely. So the *satisampajañña* is mindfulness, or awareness, and an understanding that is whole or complete. But they go together. It's a concept.

In *Pāli*, you can form compounds, as in English. But maybe English is not that prone to compound making. In German, as you know, there are many words that are compounds. This is a concept that is compounded with *sati* and *sampajañña*. Here is clear comprehension. That is a nice way to translate the compound as one single concept.

And I think another felicitous part of the translation is the word "clear." Because as you've seen before, the clarity is very much part of all the ideas about knowledge in *Pāli*. And therefore in the *Satipaṭṭhāna*. So these are the slides. I think this is for later. We'll have some other slides later. I hope this is useful.

You let me know if you have questions. I'm here for you. And if something wasn't clear, I can also answer through the chat. And I hope I didn't take much time, Francisco. But thank you very much. We'll see, we'll have another round later. Thank you.

Francisco Morillo Gable

Thank you, Aleix. Folks, before Aleix goes, we're going to see him in a little while. I wondered if you have some questions about this before when he speaks again. We'll be moving on to a whole series of other points and terms. Yes, Mark. Aleix, are you available, Aleix?

Questioner

Good morning. Absolutely. A pleasure. Thank both of you. Aleix, that was great. So I just wanted to ask about *pajānāti* and *saññā*. And are those, how closely are those things connected? I mean, is *pajānāti saññā*? I mean, is it recognition? Is that really what this is pointing to?

Aleix Ruiz-Falqués

Yeah, this is a good question. I don't think I can answer the question satisfactorily. In the specific language of Buddhism, as you know, *saññā* is sometimes translated as perception. Nowadays, some colleagues prefer apperception. I'm not that good in English, so I can't see really the difference, but there is a difference, because apperception indicates or suggests identification.

But basically, in the day-to-day life, the *saññā*, as one part of what we mean life or being a person, there's a part of us that is *saññā*. That means recognizing things, identifying things. When you see a door and you know it's a door, actually this part of knowledge comes. It's part of your knowledge in the sense that you first, you see the door and you have some sense data. And then at some point you say, okay, this is a door. You recognize it as something. So this is *saññā*.

Paññā technically would be knowing something without direct experience. So generally the idea of wisdom, something that you know without the need of having a specific experience. In the case of meditation, as I said before, it generally, for instance, in the dry *vipassanā*, or in the dry insight, that's generally the goal. We develop *paññā* so that, of course, we already have some *paññā*. Even animals have *paññā*, but our goal is to perfect this *paññā*.

And the difference in the Buddhist language would be that. So *saññā* is like—even words are, for instance, also called *saññā*. And *paññā* is something a little bit higher. So they are both connected to knowledge, to the idea of knowledge, but they indicate different aspects of it. Because it's such a complex topic, I didn't want to go too deep into it and show all the different words that contain the word, only the root *ñā*.

But I think it is clear here also with *viññā*, *viññāṇa*, that we translate as consciousness or awareness. That's also part of the experience. So how are they different? This is, I think, this is an important question. To us, I mean, we don't need to go into very deep intellectual rabbit holes, but it's just to reflect on what knowledge means. What does it mean to know something? Yeah. Thank you.

Francisco Morillo Gable

Fortunately, those rabbit holes, Aleix, are always connected to really fruitful ends because these terms are always things that we can feel and sense and practice and experience. *Saññā*, by the way, Mark, you're already looking ahead to the connections, the tying, the opening up that we're going to be doing toward the liberation door of the signlessness. Because what we do in the *Satipaṭṭhāna*, what we do in *vipassanā*, is essentially a complete refinement of perception. And that's what we see manifested and fully expressed in that final door of liberation, which I'll be saying more about. So thank you for your question.

Thank you, Aleix. We'll see you in a little while again when you're available.