

Wednesday sit with instructions

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To be aware involves different capacities of attention at different times. Different ones come into play. As I speak, your capacity for listening, for hearing, is probably active, alive. And awareness is partly through the medium of your ears, of hearing. Sometimes in practicing, the medium through which awareness comes alive is knowing, recognizing what's happening. Sometimes that knowing can be silent, or even wordless.

There's so much knowing that happens at some deep level. It's fascinating to watch how there can be some kind of knowing before there's thoughts about it. Sometimes the attention, the awareness, the medium, is primarily experienced through sensing the physical feeling, physical experience of what's happening. I love the expression that mindfulness of the body is the body's mindfulness. Awareness of the body is the body's awareness, more than being in the control tower. Sometimes the vehicle for attention is through the mind's eye. It's more a sense of observing what's happening.

At different times, different ones of these doors to awareness are operating. And some people specialize one more than the others. Some people, the knowing faculty is strong. Some people will use it very intentionally to have gentle, peaceful, mental notes, little labeling of the experience. It can be done in such a way that it offers more intimacy with experience, offers more freedom by the means, the way in which the Buddha said. Some people are more the feeling type, the more sensing type.

And for the beginning of practice, the Buddha emphasized these two, knowing and sensing. And in particular, he talked about sensing the whole body. To maybe make this whole idea of sensing and knowing richer, more onward-leading, it's helpful if the way we know has no weight to it. In and of itself, knowing has no weight. With no weight, a simple act of knowing has no tension, no pressure. It might even feel that it's very light, both in terms of weight, and also in terms of luminosity.

And this is generally the case when the knowing is close to being natural, but only close. There can be a gentle intentionality, a gentle commitment, dedication, devotion. And sensing, that sensing of our experience through the body, the sensations that we sense can have no boundaries to them, no clear, defined boundaries. They're diffuse. Sensations melt into the surroundings. Sensations of the body can occur in a wider field of vitality, aliveness, of a wider feeling of flow or energy, vibration.

Perhaps sometimes experience as a kind of inner warmth. So there too, the sensations can arise and exist without any mental tension, pressure, where the sensation is allowed to be itself, so that the body can experience the sensation in and of itself as it is, without a past, without a future. Just the sensation. And these two modes can be involved in a mutually supportive way as you attend to breathing, as you accompany your breathing. And there might even be a gentle going back and forth. Sometimes knowing something about the breathing, sometimes feeling something about the breathing, sometimes surfing on the sensation of breathing, the waves of breathing in and then washing out, riding along.

Sometimes the breathing offering a gentle massage from the inside out, massaging the tensions of the body, touching, allowing you to feel the places where there's holding in the body without it being a problem. Sometimes massaging the tensions of the mind of the control tower, gently softening, gently quieting the control tower. And finally, being careful with what you have faith in, to what you have confidence and conviction about. Implicitly, maybe not consciously, we can discover that our real faith and confidence is in the thinking mind, the planning mind, the problem-solving mind, the critical mind, the problem-finding mind, the mind that goes into the future, into the past. The stronger those are, something inside has a lot of faith in it. If you can, place your faith in knowing, feeling, sensing your body, your breathing.

Be careful where your faith goes. The greatest benefits, the greatest freedom is found when your faith stays with the continuity of simple knowing, simple sensing, trusting mindfulness, trusting mindful accompaniment of each breath, one breath at a time. Thank you. Is there a way to entrust the body, trust the breathing, so that you can entrust awareness, attention, to accompany every breath without pressure, without weight, but with a way that is entering into the weightless body, entering into the weightlessness of knowing, entering into the boundaryless of sensing? Might there be a way of gently staying with your breathing, knowing and sensing, so that if there is suffering, you know, it can also be known, lightly, simply? It too can be accompanied.

It can accompany breathing. Somehow the attention to breathing allows the awareness of

suffering to be light and soft, honest, without being pulled into its orbit, its gravitational force. How? Trusting mindfulness, trusting awareness, more than entrusting yourself to your suffering. Knowing suffering without it being a problem, without it being a problem to be solved. Just something to dissolve in the weightlessness, the spaciousness of awareness.

At times when these two, knowing and sensing, are available to you, they're kind of always going on whether you're paying attention to it or not. They're natural functionings of our attention. And it can be interesting to have a very relaxed flow of going back and forth between the two, or to recognize the alternation, not necessarily equal, you know, back and forth. Sometimes we do one, stay with one more than the other, but that there's a kind of play back and forth when you're doing walking meditation. Are you more in the sensing, more in the knowing? Then can you track a little bit how you move back and forth between them?

And to do that calmly, a calm continuity of attention to the interplay of knowing and sensing. And sometimes there's something that makes it difficult to be present for walking or for sitting, for breathing. And then see if the knowing and sensing can take in that experience, to know it without tension. What is the simplest possible knowing you can do? Maybe even where there's a sense of freedom in the knowing, peace in the knowing, and to sense the thing. So if you're thinking a lot, to know thinking, to know the sensations of thinking.

And to have that play back and forth of sometimes knowing, sometimes sensing, and to begin considering where you put your faith. Maybe not you, but what does your mind put its faith in? What does your mind trust? Because if you spend a lot of time in fantasy, something must trust it. If you put a lot of time in striving, something must trust or have faith in striving. If you spend a lot of time referring what's happening back to me, myself, and mine, into your sense of self, your idea of who you are, how great you are, how not great you are, something in you has a lot of faith or trust in the whole self-enterprise.

If you walk across the community hall to get tea or go outside, you might not put your trust or faith in anything, and your mind wanders off randomly, thinking that it might be very interesting to read the manager's announcements again. What you do with your faith, what you have faith in, what you trust, what you have confidence in, is invaluable when that is healthy, when that is beneficial. And one of the greatest things to have confidence in here at the retreat is the practice you're doing. And to stay close at it, stay close to it, stay close to whatever faith, confidence, conviction, trust you have. And maybe there's a way of walking across the community hall that you walk at the speed of your faith, or this, which maybe is the same, is the speed of knowing and sensing.

So the other things the mind has faith in are not invested in, not reinforced. Your faith in the practice is invaluable. Trust it. Stay close to it as a way of staying close to yourself. I would like to believe that trusting the practice is the same, or eventually will be the same, as trusting yourself, having faith in yourself.