

## Thursday sit with instructions

**Gil Fronsdal**

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So this path being described, this journey through the *Upanisa Sutta*, begins with suffering in all its many, many flavors and textures. And it isn't that we leave suffering behind as we move along, but rather, as we move through the different features, landmarks of the Sutta, the relationship to suffering changes. We begin holding suffering in new ways. We see it in new ways. If it's held with faith, it can be held with a warmth, a sense of possibility, a sense that there's an open field of growth and unfolding and letting go, that the whole world is not just suffering for us.

It can be, suffering can be seen sometimes with appreciation, not of suffering, but of the path of practice that holds it. It can be seen sometimes with a certain delight, the foibles of our mind, the strange things we do. Not because it's to be celebrated, but because we see it so clearly, we don't kind of believe some of these things anymore. And rather than being upset by it, it's like sometimes delightful that we have a way of seeing it so clearly. Occasionally it's even amusing.

And one of the ways we see suffering differently, when there's full-blown suffering, we're lost in suffering, it seems like it's the whole world. So all of us, as we become quieter and see more clearly, we see that suffering is not the whole world. Suffering is actually very partial, that we're actually leaving out a lot of who we are when we suffer, even though it's deep and wide. There's much more here, and that as we move into faith, that there's a kind of expanding of a state of confidence, state of trust, a state of faith that something new is possible. That's more like a state that begins expanding through us. The confidence, confident state through all of who we are.

We slowly start to appreciate that there is a whole here that we're moving into. Suffering can be considered unwholesome because it's not part of the whole. Faith, appreciation, delight,

contentment, these are moving into whole, a wholeness. And slowly we begin appreciating that practice can be a little bit like forest bathing.

Go walk in a beautiful forest setting with bright sunlight and sparkling rain-inspired greenery. And something in all our senses takes in the healing qualities of being in the forest, the peace-making qualities, the inspiring nature. Maybe almost like it gets absorbed in our pores and bones. It's not one specific thing, the atmosphere of the forest, the quality of the atmosphere, the light.

So as we settle more and become quieter, what becomes available is the inner kind of false feeling of wholeness or subtleness, the deeper connection to self that highlights. A lot of suffering keeps us in our thoughts, in our stories, keeps us in the reactive mind, which is just partial. It's part of the whole. And over time, slowly, the suffering might be just exactly as it always has been. But now it's held by the whole. It doesn't have to be seen as the whole. It doesn't have to be taken as everything.

And slowly, there's a way in which the sensing part of practice, sensing, feeling through the body, is not just feeling the so-called just the physical body, but it's feeling something that's deep, deep, wholesome, kind of inner, deep, inner place of home, contentment that welcomes us to be there. Come, come here. Come here. This is what's been waiting for you when you're not distracted by all the suffering, not caught in the thought, the stories, the past and futures. Here there's a delightful, inspiring way of being that has a lot of space to hold the suffering, so the suffering can be felt more carefully, as just suffering, as present moment experience of suffering sensations, sensations of tightness, contraction, agitation, sensations of sadness and despair, sensations of anger and hurt.

Maybe there's some intimation or intuition of what it's like to hold the suffering with what doesn't suffer deep inside. And if breathing is your companion, and you, a companion of your breathing, what if your breathing is forest bathing through the forest of your body? That the sensations of breathing are surrounded by a wholeness of the body as a whole, spaciousness of the body, a clear space, as if there's a bright light, as if there's a state around the atmosphere, around the sensations of breathing, of goodwill, warmth, peace, gentleness, and for the sensations of breathing to gently touch the atmosphere around breathing in your body.

And you settling into the breathing, settling into the body breathing, as if breathing in and breathing out are like steps walking through the forest. Stay there with every step of breathing, so there's a continuity of influence of your wider body on breathing and breathing on you. Staying with the steps of breathing one breath after the other. So you hear in the present

more and more, rather than wandering off in your thoughts. So there's less attention available to feed thinking, less interest in the thoughts. Attention and interest is with the journey of the breath, the journey of forest bathing, where the destination is not the point. The point is to bathe here, in what is deeper than suffering.

Remembering to connect your breathing more fully than you're connecting to thinking. As if breathing is connected to this deeper place, wholeness, states of goodness where knowing the sensations of breathing is knowing that has no weight, no pressure. As if knowing floats and sensing the sensations, as if sensations have no sharp boundaries. They're diffuse with their surroundings, where sensations have no fixed essence or core. Sensations are morphing and changing with whatever is not suffering here and now, to hold whatever suffering there is, even if it's very, very modest, slightest feeling of tension, contraction, stress.

It could be that the suffering is held by the silence and stillness around you. Suffering might be held by the warmth of your faith, trust, by your appreciation or contentment, or by the stillness and spaciousness within. And in this way, not to make suffering a project, something to fix, to react to, but just one more thing that's allowed to be in the wider field of what is not suffering. Taking a backward step to see if you can gaze upon what is deeper in you, the deeper places of holding, clinging, resisting, and hold it gently with knowing that has no weight, sensing that has no boundaries.

Part of what's being conveyed with the idea of forest bathing is a kind of open receptivity through all our senses, maybe through the whole body. So there's a movement towards a wholeness of all of who we are that is usually not experienced if we're caught in our thoughts, caught in our suffering thoughts. A more classic analogy like this is actually like bathing in a wonderful pool or sea. When I was a child, I spent a lot of time in the sea, and I would, over and over again, I would dip underneath the surface of the sea and keep my eyes open and just feel the peace and the quiet, wherever long I can hold my breath.

And then I would surface with my head, and it was a different world above the water, kind of a beach with people on the beach and cars driving by and things. And then I'd go dip underneath again, where it was peaceful and quiet. And some people experience deepening, settling in meditation, like you're dipping down under the surface and then surfacing. So I don't know, these analogies don't always work for people, but it's all part of this potential we have to hold suffering with what doesn't suffer, to know suffering with the knowing that doesn't suffer, to feel suffering with the sensing that doesn't suffer, and so that there can be this deepening of a connection to suffering where suffering is not so frightening or challenging, but rather it opens to a greater faith, a deeper embodied appreciation.

So each of you are here to discover how the right way to practice is for you. But it is a point in the retreat where you might consider the value of how you can give yourself over to the retreat a little bit more fully or a lot more fully. There might be places in the retreat where you're more likely to leave the retreat. Some people it's when they go to their room. Some people it's in the dining room getting tea. Some people it's how they wander around outside. That can be very connecting, and it could also be a place to kind of leave this wonderful journey behind.

If it feels right for you, stay close. Stay close to your practice. Stay close to your awareness bubble. Stay close to where you're available, to forest bathe, no matter where you go. Because part of the forest is your embodied sense of being that you can take with you everywhere.