

Knowing and Follow Up

Gil Fronsdal

July 15, 2026

Keywords: mindfulness, knowing, meditation, in-breath, out-breath, aversion, equanimity, breath meditation, chaos, present moment

So I think I'll continue a little bit the theme from the comments from earlier in the morning that came up in one of the meetings that I just had with people, that the simplest way of understanding what mindfulness is is that it's the simplest moment of knowing something about the present moment. It's so simple, the act of knowing, that it's easy to dismiss it, to think that there's something better, something more. There's supposed to be something special happen. There's supposed to be some special thing you're doing. But it's the most ordinary kind of knowing that you can have.

And different people know in different ways. Some people might be non-verbal knowing. There's just a knowing, and there were no words behind it. There are some people for whom there's a verbal knowing. It could be very simple.

Just right now, I recognize that I'm slightly cool in my arms and in my body. And so, first there's a non-verbal knowing of it for me. But I don't really know it yet. But then my mind says, "cold." And then I kind of have acknowledged it in some way.

And those happen kind of almost without me trying to do it. It's just there, and I recognize there's a knowing. And then I can say, well, maybe I should know this better, because maybe it's too cold here, and I'm responsible for the room. So then there's a choice. Okay, let me know this better, register it better.

Or it could be that I say, Gail, don't get distracted from the talk by the issues here in the room, the temperature. So just carry on and don't talk about it. Don't think about it. Don't focus on it. So there's all this stuff goes on, but I just kind of watch.

And so sometimes the simplest moment of knowing is just watching, just kind of being present. Just knowing is just being present as it shows itself, what's going on. But it's meant

to be simple and easy. Sometimes an act of knowing is done intentionally. Sometimes it's just the nature of the experience that we know. But it's a simple act of knowing.

And I like to suggest to people that, they say, what are you supposed to know, they ask. And I like to say, you know what's obvious. That's all. Whatever is obvious in the moment, whatever is coming your way at this moment, know that.

So as I say that, and my eyes wandered around for a moment, there's a lot of things I knew for the moment, just looking around, but I noticed the wonderful kids' tree over there with all the yellow and red and purple and colors. There was a little bit more acute, for a moment, knowing of that. I didn't have to stop for it, but it was there. And then there's other things going on I know. It's all just, I don't have to do anything about it. I don't have to make a big deal of it. But there's a lot of knowing.

But if I'm going to sit and meditate, what's the most obvious thing to know with my eyes closed? It might be the sensations on my belly. Oh, my belly feels a little activated, a little alive. Okay. So what's obvious about that?

Oh, it's mostly on the front of my belly. What's obvious about that? Well, it's in the upper half of my belly. What's obvious about that? And it isn't like I'm asking those questions, but I'm just kind of riding along with what's obvious. As I do that, it starts getting more precise or more refined, but I'm not looking to refine it. I just happen to be staying with my belly for a while.

Right now, there was a front door that opened, so then the obvious was the creaking of the door. So just what's obvious. And so you don't have to make anything of it or do anything with it. Just what's here now.

But then there's one more piece to this obvious. And this is what I was trying to say earlier this morning, that in recognizing what's obvious, and it doesn't have to be necessarily some very particular thing, there are times when our life is maybe everything's out of control. It's chaos. And so the obvious thing would be, it's chaos.

You don't have to be nothing precise. Chaos is like, for me personally, has been in my practice, the biggest label knowing that holds everything inside of it sometimes is the word chaos. It's just chaos. That's all it is. I don't have to go digging and be more precise. It's just chaos.

Another very broad knowing is knowing that I don't know. Chaos. Something's happening here. I don't know what it is. Just don't know. And that's the obvious.

And then, you know, chaos, not knowing, or just the breathing, in-breath. What's important

next is not so much the knowing, but what follows the knowing. What goes on right after that knowing?

In a conversation sometimes, it's important to listen as you're listening to someone else speaking. But there's also the art of listening to the silence when they stop speaking. Rather than rushing with your reply, rushing, you've been building up your attention because you have important things to say, and won't they just stop talking? And then they stop talking, and that's one way to do it.

Another way to do it, where you're really listening well to your friend, is that they stop speaking and you're still listening. You're listening, do they have more to say? You're listening. What else is happening here? You're listening to see if you have something useful to say in reply. To listen to the silence after the speech is finished is part of the practice.

So, if you say chaos, then listen. Be aware. Be open. What happens now? What shows itself now? What happens to you? Just make room.

And I love the idea that in my mind the metaphor, the image, or the sense I have of what I'm doing with this is in fact like what I'm doing with my arms right now. Lifting my arms up and spreading them out wide as if I'm just being accepting and receptive to what's happening. Just show me what's next. Here, I'm here.

So to know, an act of knowing, and then not to fill the next moment with more thoughts, ideas, stories, but almost like you give space, time, stillness, openness to see what reality wants to bring now. So I'm sitting meditating, and I feel an ache, a pain in my knee. So the act of knowing could be very simple, very ordinary. The most obvious thing is I have knee pain, so I know knee pain.

And then I might, if it continues, want to know a little bit more intentionally. It might become more of a practice. Let me just really know the obvious about the pain. I feel the tightness, the fire, the stinging, the stabbing. You might feel it. Oh, stabbing. And then I make room.

It isn't that, it's not like a checklist approach to mindfulness. As soon as you saw a stabbing, you could go on to the next thing. You know, done that, nothing more. It's more like you've kind of just begun a journey. The knowing is just the beginning of something, and now you're just there to notice what comes next.

Because stabbing, okay, more stabbing. Stabbing, oh, there's more than just stabbing there. I can feel that there's some heat. Heat, stabbing, I don't like it. I thought I was equanimous. But who would have guessed that I'm having aversion to the stabbing? Okay, now I need to know that. Aversion.

And then, oh no, I shouldn't be aversive. I'm supposed to be a meditation teacher. I'm supposed to be the better. Oh, this is embarrassing. I can't admit it to everyone. You know, that's not making space.

No, aversion. Let's give it what's... Now that I've recognized that, what happens? Maybe it just vanishes. Okay, maybe it's not that strong. It only becomes strong if I get embarrassed and upset and recognize it and it's a problem to be aversive. But if I just notice aversion, maybe it just dissolves.

What's obvious now? Now I'm breathing. What happened to the pain? It doesn't matter. Now I'm back with the breath. What's obvious now? Oh, now we're back to the pain.

But the important thing I'm trying to convey here is the simplicity of knowing, that it's very, very simple. It might be so ordinary that you don't think you're practicing. But if it's knowing what's happening in the present moment, it's enough. And then can you create, think of the act of knowing as an invitation to be available for the next act of knowing, which might be intentional. You might make a choice to know something better, or it might be just being available.

As you know something, what happens? You might then know that thing better. It might show itself more clearly. It might be that your whole inner system changes the subject. It might reveal something else. So this idea of knowing and then being available in a relaxed, easygoing way. Knowing and hearing.

And that whole dynamic like this, for breath meditation, if that's what you're doing in meditation, can all be around just breathing. Okay, knowing what's obvious about the breath and being available to see, now that I know I'm breathing in, what happens? What's that like, to give that space, that stillness, that openness, to allow each thing that occurs, each thing that's known, to be like that flower in the alcove's flower that's been, okay, this is the thing that's known. Let it be there by itself for a moment. And then it becomes the out-breath.

Who would have guessed? Out-breath becomes the in-breath. Wow. Or other things might evolve and change as you do it. So with that, we'll do the cleaning that we're going to do today.