

Tuesday sit with instructions

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A common way, a common enough way, to describe meditation, mindfulness meditation, is that of dipping into the stream, dipping into the lake, leaving the arid, dry world of thoughts, stories, discursive thinking. Not to reject it, but not to continue kind of getting dried up by it, or disconnected by it, pulled away from yourself almost, unless you think you are your thoughts. And to dip in here into your direct experience, so that your natural attentional capacities can operate, can be appreciated. So you can discover how you're aware, how attention works for you.

We have different attentional faculties. It's probably a very long list that this amazing evolutionary process that led up to being *Homo sapiens* produced all these different ways for the senses to work, that we take in information or experiences and know what's happening here and now. In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the predominant attentional faculty is awareness itself: establishing awareness in the present. The next most common is to know, to know, to know that you know what's happening. Another one is to feel, to experience with your body, to sense. Another one is to observe, which is a way of perceiving without interfering.

Kind of settling back in an easy chair and just to watch without getting involved. To observe, and related to knowing, is not just knowing, but knowing clearly and in detail, knowing the purpose, knowing what's needed, knowing what you need to respond to. Knowing that you need a fork for your salad and a spoon for your soup—very simple knowing, clear knowing, clear comprehension of what's needed, what's going on. And the two that begin the *Satipaṭṭhāna* are knowing and feeling.

Knowing just enough about the breathing, so there's a thread connecting you to your breathing. A thread of interest, a thread of appreciation, a thread of wonder. Breathing in and breathing out. A thread of gentle recognition. The breathing is like this now.

The word that I associate with is knowing, the knowing mind that knows what's happening almost without effort, almost like you're allowing or discovering what the mind itself will know if you have it open to the experience of breathing. Almost like you're asking the mind, "What do you know here?" As opposed to you being the doer of the knowing. The word there, the concept that I associate with this knowing, is clarity. To provide some clarity of mind, how is breathing known? Where is it known in the body?

What's the quality of the knowing itself? Is it simple, or does it come along with baggage, tension, any kind? How simple can knowing be, without expectation or plans, ideas of what should be? That kind of knowing that has no future and no past. It's enough just to know it as it is now.

And then there's feeling: the body breathing, to sense the body breathing. How does the body experience breathing? Knowing is a little more of the mind. Sensing is more phenomena of the body. For some people, knowing is the center of mindfulness practice. For some people, it's sensing, feeling.

Knowing sometimes is a very brief moment. Sensing is longer. Maybe you surf on time on top of the sensations of breathing. Ride along with them for a few moments, from one sensation to the next, watching how they morph from one sensation of breathing to the next sensation of breathing. With knowing, you can invite the mind to show you what it knows, like you invite a friend to speak and you listen.

With sensing in the body, it's more like the body is inviting you: to feel this, be here, allow this to be sensed here now. Where is it in relationship to breathing? That there might be an invitation: come, come feel. This is the place that's inviting you. And if you find yourself thinking, it's okay.

Maybe you don't have to negotiate, fix, let go, even let go. Instead, feel what's underneath your thinking. Feel more deeply into yourself. Dip down in, leaving those thoughts up in the sky, up in the clouds. But feel your way deeper, to sense your body, your body breathing.

And see if you can avoid being concerned in any kind of way with how much your mind wanders off in thought. It's okay, but be more interested, more concerned with how often you can use the opportunity to dip back into your body, come back to know, to sense. The direct experience here, with your breathing, with your body. As you know the breathing, as you know what's happening in the body, no need to change anything there. But maybe it's good to relax the knowing, simple knowing, letting go of extra baggage that gets in the way of the clarity of knowing.

Dipping into the sensations of breathing, maybe without asserting yourself onto your body, but rather sensitive to how the body invites you to feel itself here, feel it here. Sometimes the invitation is to feel the breathing in a very particular spot. Sometimes it's to open up and feel the widest way in which breathing is experienced in the body. Oh. Yeah.

To dip into the body, to know and sense what's there, as present-moment experience, the stream, the flow of the present, as known by the body. And when it feels like the most natural thing in the world, because the body invites it, you can relax the body, introduce calm to your body by recognizing where it is calm already. And if there's any feeling of calm within, let that support you to discover calm, knowing calmly, knowing in a simple, relaxed, ongoing way where you stay connected, stay dipped in. And if there's some calm anywhere at all, to the smallest degree within your body, mind, can that support you? A calm sensing, a calm cruising along in this flow of sensations, of breathing, of body.

Oh. Yeah.

So, as experienced practitioners, hopefully you know how to care for yourself on retreat. Hopefully, you know when your mind is dull, whether it's a sign that you need a nap, or if your mind is dull and it's a sign that you need to put a little bit more energy into the practice, a little more effort. Maybe sit up straight, open your eyes, brighten the mind. If you're using mental noting, or if you haven't been using mental noting, try using it a little bit. It might give you a little energy. Or if you do use it, maybe there's a gently more emphatic way to do it. It just kind of wakes you up a little bit.

And then, if you're too activated, maybe you know what to do then. You're allowed to relax. So this beginning of *satipaṭṭhāna*, establishing mindfulness, establishing awareness in the present. Some people find that the word “establishing” is a little bit odd, but in order to allow awareness to be present, that's what it requires. Allow, allow it to show itself. Allow it to be there, as opposed to gear up and bear down and get busy.

There's a way in which the whole attentional field that we have is always on. And if you allow yourself to discover what that is at any given time, what is it to be aware now? Can you allow the awareness, the attentional capacities you have, to show themselves to you? Attentional capacities that we have are always about the present moment. And the three that are emphasized in the beginning of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* are knowing, *jānāti*, feeling or sensing, and then the third one that I'd like to put into the field of attentional capacities is calming, relaxing.

It can be something that we do intentionally, or allow if it seems appropriate. But more pro-

found is to realize that the whole psychophysical system can kind of present you with sensations that are kind of like, “Here, relax this. Soften here. Let this soften. Let this relax.” And as we get more sensitive to the present, more sensitive to breathing, the whole breath body, the whole body itself, from time to time, it's very interesting. You might recognize, “Oh, here, come here. Bring your attention here.” Rather than you driving the show, something in your inner life will invite you, calling you, “Come here, be with this.”

And sometimes it might be something that reveals to you, “Here, this is where there's tension. This is where there's contraction.” And if you feel deeply into it, don't do anything initially. You might feel that there is, in that tension, a call, a desire for the tension itself to release, to relax. It doesn't have to be you wanting to relax because it's uncomfortable. It's right there in the nature of the tension. And then, rather than doing the relaxing, you kind of allow it to relax.

So we're very much still in the beginning stages of the retreat. So be sure to give yourself ample time to get set, for your whole mind and body to keep settling and settling, or arriving. No need to be concerned about the mind wandering off in thought, being agitated, or having surprising emotions that pull you away. It's all part of this beginning process. It's all okay.

And see if you can know simply, just know; feel simply, just feel. That's where the focus for you to relax is. Relax the knowing, relax the sensing, and stay. But stay close to where that can be as you get up from the hall, as you walk down the steps, take the elevator, put on your shoes, open a door, close a door, have tea, sipping the tea.

So one of the interesting discoveries to be made is very personal. Is, for this time, this hour, this day, this lifetime, are you more oriented to sensing sensations, or are you more interested in knowing, knowing what the sensations are? Both are allowed. Both are wonderful. Both have their own ecology and way of operating. And both are operating at the same time.

You can know that you know, but generally we don't sense that we know. We can feel that we're sensing, and separate from that, we can know what we're sensing. In both sensing, feeling, and knowing, recognizing, it can be a way of just staying close to the present, staying close to keeping awareness in the present, here and now.