

Saturday Dharma talk

Gil Fronsdal

September 19, 2026

Keywords: Buddha, four foundations of mindfulness, *Satipaṭṭhāna*, *sati*, *vihāra*, *viharati*, *dharmas*, hindrances, *samādhi*, ancestral homeland

It's very nice for those of you online. I want to say it's very nice to have the tablet here and be able to go through and see all of you here and feel your presence and participation in the retreat. So thank you very much for being here and being up here on the stage with me.

So the Buddha was kind of a storyteller, telling metaphors, kind of telling stories. He tells this one, or uses what is more of an analogy. It seems that there were a certain species of monkeys in India, where he lived. They were somewhere up in the Himalayas, maybe in the foothills, maybe a little above the foothills, and living in the forest there.

And the Buddha said that they're safe in their forest abode. But if they come down from the mountains onto the plains of India, down where there are more people, there are hunters, and there they're not safe; they'll be hunted. But if they go in the other direction and go up high, or up into the Himalayas where it's quite cliffy and steep and there are no branches to hold onto and stuff, apparently maybe monkeys are not good mountain climbers. They're tree climbers, maybe, and it's dangerous for them up there too. But their safe place is to be in what the Buddha called their ancestral homeland, in that particular range of the mountain where hunters can't find them and they don't have to worry about the tall cliffs and peaks of the Himalayas.

And then this is an analogy for us. And for us, the four foundations of mindfulness are considered to be our ancestral homeland. And if we stay close to them, or stay with them, then we're safe. But if we leave them, then we lose that safety.

And I don't know what the plains are. Maybe that's when our mind wanders off into the world, worldly concerns. That's very easy to get caught. There's hunters out there waiting for you. I mean, literally, there are. You don't have to go very far to find advertisers, where people are there hunting for you to click and to buy and such things.

But even sitting on the retreat, if your mind wanders off into the wider world here, it's so easy to get pulled into all kinds of places that you'd maybe rather not. You get trapped. You get caught in that world. And maybe that's not the place where you're going to really be safe.

And I don't know what the other direction means, up high, up in the peaks. Maybe there's ways of getting so enraptured in great ecstasy and all that, and getting attached, that you'll probably fall off. There's nothing holding you there, and you'll crash. But there's this middle zone where you're safe, and that's the four foundations of mindfulness.

And then the four foundations of mindfulness are also considered to be equivalent to our homeland, our ancestral homeland, and where we can be at home with ourselves. And we saw also earlier in the retreat the idea that the four foundations of mindfulness are our refuge. If we're going to make ourselves a refuge for ourselves, we have to do something. And what do we have to do? We have to stay close to the four foundations of mindfulness.

And the way that that's described, one puts aside greed and distress for the world, and abides, observing the body in terms of itself, the body in the body, in the middle. But we do it in a particular way: with enthusiasm. Some English translations have ardency, with clear comprehension, and with *sati*, with awareness.

And so, what we're being asked to do here, offered to do, is to stay home. And how are you homey when you're home? How do you kind of settle into yourself and be happy to be home and comfortable and walk around in your pajamas? I don't know what the equivalent is in meditating, but the important idea is to stay close to what's already here, not to make something else happen here.

And here it says abiding, observing. Observing is not a way to fix and change anything. Observing is a way to deeply allow things to be there, just really take them in. Adults need to be heard, and kids need to be observed, seen. Maybe we still have that deep existential need to see, but to be the person who sees, and to see ourselves.

And what I want to emphasize today is the word abides. What abides? So this word “abide” is *viharati*. Some of you know the word when it's used as *vihāra*. *Vihāra* usually just means a dwelling, but it's often used in India for a meditation center, a monastic, a monastery, sometimes an ashram or something.

Sometimes they are called a *vihāra*, and so that's my association with the word. I don't know in India what other associations they have. But for me, it's kind of a delightfully sacred word. It's these wonderful refuge places, refuge places of peace, places of practice.

In a sense, IRC is a *vihāra*, and so the word *viharati* can mean to live or to dwell. Many suttas

begin with saying the Buddha was *viharati* in some place. He was living in some place. He was dwelling in some place, abiding in some place, and not just in a particular building, but in a place where he was settled or abiding, resting himself at being.

And so this word is then applied to meditation practice. That here in meditation we abide, we dwell. This is the home. This is the place that the real meditation center is not IRC, but it's in you, where you live, you abide in. And so can we find the refuge here? Can we find the abiding here? Can we find the safety that's here?

And even though there are all these exercises and all these teachings in *Satipaṭṭhāna*, in the end, it's very simple. One abides observing the body in and of itself. One abides observing feeling tones in and of themselves. One abides observing the mind in and of itself. One abides observing the *dhammas*, these mental processes, in and of themselves.

And this “in and of themselves,” or literally it says the body in the body, or feeling in the feeling—the locative, the word to mean “in”—can mean in regard to the body, in reference to the body. And it's usually interpreted to mean we don't come along with a lot of baggage, a lot of associations and beliefs and attitudes about the body. We're not looking at the body from the point of view of what advertisers show, or the news headlines that show the latest dress that some actress is wearing, and that's what we're comparing ourselves to.

It's not other people's bodies; it's our own body. And so we're allowed to just live in our body. And there's a very different world to live in if we dwell in our body than if we dwell in a mind that's left the body, left the safety of it, and is living in the world that gets easily caught with comparisons and beliefs and attitudes and hostilities and wars and desires, all in relationship to the body.

But to experience the body as the body experiences itself. To experience feeling tones as they kind of experience themselves, so the mind is experienced, as opposed to through the lens of what we want, the desires, what we hope for, what we think is supposed to happen, what shouldn't be happening. Without the filter of all these subtle, very subtle background beliefs we might have, like, “Mine,” like, “If it's happening to me, it's not the real thing,” or, “The grass is greener elsewhere.”

The other people in the meditation center retreat, they got it. Whatever it is, they have it, but I'm the one who doesn't have it. But I don't know what it is. But that doesn't matter. I don't have it, and that's not good.

But that has to come closer, kind of an intimacy. We lose intimacy with ourselves with those kinds of ruminations and thoughts. And to be able to kind of settle, come closer, come here,

be here. And sometimes I use, or sometimes I often say in my meditation, the word “here,” “here,” just, just here.

That's simple. A reminder to be here. And when I do use that word for my meditation, I say it as a way of kind of just opening up and to feel what's here from the inside out. What is here? Here. What's here? And just be here.

So to abide in the body. So this word abiding is used a lot in the suttas. And maybe as kind of a guided meditation, I want to read a list of things the Buddha talks about that you can abide in. So these are options. From time to time, this might be available.

So as I read this, you might take in, maybe with your imagination, how it would feel in your body if this was the case, how it would feel in your heart or your mind. If you could abide in these ways, what would it feel like for you? That's the guided meditation part.

Abiding in safety. Abiding in fearlessness. Abiding in happiness. Abiding in gladness. Abiding, pervading the world with loving-kindness. Abiding in compassion. Abiding free from sensual desires. Abiding in a mind free from the hindrances. Abiding in equanimity. Abiding in happiness.

Without moving the body or uttering a word, abiding, filling the world with a mind like space. Abiding, observing change. Abiding in stillness. Devoted to a pleasant abiding here and now. Abiding in the four foundations of mindfulness. Abiding in the *Dhamma*. Abiding in the experience of bliss.

Abiding in care for all beings. Abiding in emptiness. Abiding in peaceful liberations. Abiding in the supreme goal. And the last one to leave you with. It's only three words. The first and the third are the ones to really take in. How they feel, how they sense in your body. What it would be like. What might it be like to really be centered in them: abiding in contentment.

Elsewhere, the Buddha talks about abiding in *sati*, abiding in awareness. And this word abiding is closer to the modern English idea of being rather than doing. Just, just being in yourself, being here at rest. I so strongly associate abiding with resting. Something in us rests in what's here.

And the four foundations of mindfulness mean these four integral ways that make you up. The body is always here. It's not like you're importing something. It's the body you have. To trust it, to settle in it, to relax into it, to allow yourself to be it, to abide in the body.

Feelings, feeling tones—you always have them. They come and they go. And there's a certain

deep sense of ability to not be contentious, to not be for and against feeling tones, but rather to have some way of being at rest in the middle of them, to abide in the middle.

I've had intense pain a number of times in my life, and the thing that I find, meditation-wise, that helps me the most is that sometimes the best thing to do is to go to bed and pull the cover over me and go into a fetal position. And from that position, I'll bring my attention right to the center of where it's most painful, and abide, rest there, and then it's all good. But if my mind wanders off in thought, if I leave the ancestral homeland, then it becomes way too painful again. Then I can't manage. But then I go back into the middle of it, and something about abiding there.

And sometimes I have not had the ability to go to bed in this wonderful cozy way. There was once, I remember many years ago, that I had to drive. But as long as I could just stay in the middle of the pain, with a certain part of my attention resting there where it was most intense, then I could pay attention to everything I needed to do to drive. But if my mind wandered off, you know, into anything at all, whatever it was, whatever it might have been, then the pain would come back so intensely, and then it was dangerous for me to drive. So I had to kind of stay right there.

Anyway, with feeling tone, to abide in the middle of it. To rest in it. And we have many mind states. Some of them are not so pleasant. What's it like to abide or rest in the middle of them? Do we have to be at war? Do we have to have preferences? Is it possible to find a place of rest in the middle of them?

Is there such a place? Or do we always have to change, or hold on, or improve, do something with it? And then we start seeing the mental activities. So, like the hindrances, after all, the Buddha says abandon them. That's nice. But what if you can't? Can you abide in them? Can you find a place of rest in the middle of it?

Maybe without rest, just like it was safe for me to drive if I was right in the middle of pain, maybe the world is safe from you if you rest in the middle of your hindrance. You won't do something dangerous. So to abide, to dwell, to rest in, to have the very way that you live, or animate and be, a place of rest deep inside.

And does that make a different reference point for doing this practice? To rest in such a way that you know your breathing. You know the feelings. You know your mind state. To rest, abide in such a way that it feels natural to feel and sense what's happening.

To learn to abide and to learn to settle, find the center, and rest there, whatever it might be. And maybe it could be the deep mind. Maybe that has a center. And what is it like to abide

there, to rest there, without trying to do anything beyond the resting, beyond the being?

So in this long list of things to abide in, I read all of these as kind of good states. And the effect of abiding is not a neutral thing to do. But finding some way to abide, just abiding itself, but particularly if they're healthy states, they are very useful conditioning forces on us. I don't know if it's the best expression, but for some of us, it's a re-parenting.

We hear, feel all this goodness of it, and we take it in. And abiding means you're registering it and being with it and feeling it. And we have powerful conditioning that makes our life difficult, but we can be reconditioned. To abide in these states also provides a very different perspective, a lens through which to see ourselves and see the world, see others.

If we abide in some peaceful state, abide in compassion, abide in the four foundations of mindfulness, we're probably not then abiding in hatred. We're probably not then abiding in suspicion and fear. And so we see the world differently. We see ourselves differently.

And this kind of abiding then supports not feeding, not reinforcing, unwholesome, unuseful, unskillful activities of the mind that we're spinning off in or caught in. We have something else to do, which is almost doing nothing compared to the doing of unskillful things, repeating the same thoughts over and over again, or being caught in fear, or caught in anger, or caught in desires.

Or abiding also contributes to how our body-mind can begin to rest. Kind of the wider being can rest, to feel, "Oh, here it's safe now. I can finally relax." And so there's a natural capacity that the mind and body have for coming into harmony. And so to just rest in ourselves in a deep way gives the opportunity for everything else to come, gather, and come together and rest with you and find their balance, find their harmony together, how they work together.

And I think it's one of the phenomenal things that happens in this practice: that as we open our awareness wider to sense and feel all the four foundations of mindfulness, this vast array of intelligence that exists in our body, that's mostly unconscious, begins to gather and work together much better than you could ever figure it out with your conscious mind.

It's rather unfortunate how much we invest in our conscious mind to figure everything out and solve everything. The conscious mind is the controller. The conscious mind is the doer that's going to make everything good, that's going to figure everything out. Abiding is a state of trust, and that trust that things can settle and come together.

And I kind of like to believe that the different forms of neural processing we have begin to work together. They talk to each other, communicate, and coordinate, and come into kind of

a harmony. And that's what goes on when we enter into *samādhi*. *Samādhi* is this harmony, that things come into harmony.

And to do this, to have this trust, to be able to abide, trust and take in some of the goodness that's here, is deeply healing psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, maybe even physically at times.

So the reason to introduce this word “abiding” now, after we've gone through the different exercises in *Satipaṭṭhāna*, is because those exercises are meant to create the ability to abide in this way. The way it goes is, you know, the four foundations of mindfulness are the way to peace, the way to freedom. And what are they? In short, it's abiding, observing the body in the body, abiding, observing feeling tones, mind, *dhammas*.

And then the Buddha asks a rhetorical question. He says, “Well, how do you abide in the body, in terms of the body, in regard to the body?” And then that's the prompt that he uses to describe all those exercises.

So for the body, there's being with the breathing and postures and the activities of what you do, being present for those, starting to become simpler, and feel the parts of the body in a simple way, and the elements, the sensations of the body, and kind of begin coming home here and start feeling it more fully and simply. But the goal of doing that is to abide, abide in the body, abide in each of these states.

So that's why to wait to introduce this to the end. It may be, to some degree, there's a way in which you're quieter and have a heightened sensitivity, heightened capacity to feel and sense, so that you can better abide here and now, abide in awareness.

And abiding is something that you can't be in a hurry to do. Abiding takes time. I am very fond of this idea of living in time. Partly, I like it because of the musical associations: people play in time with each other. So we live in time with reality.

In time means that we're inside of time. The only place to be inside of time is in the present. We haven't gotten to the future yet. It's always ahead. In the past, well, that's where you maybe were once, if you're present enough.

But if you want to be in, you know, time is something to live in, and if you want to live in time, it has to be now. And you give time, you give space to abide, to rest here. So I read all these things to abide in, and that could set up the expectation that you should have something good to abide in.

But it might also just be good, in and of itself, to abide in whatever you got. Meaning, what-

ever you got, rest in the middle of it. Don't fight it. Don't try to get out of it. Don't try to do anything with it. Maybe just find a way to rest in the middle of it, and that way know it in a new way.

Maybe the resting is the medicine. Abiding is the medicine for whatever is going on. And the better you can abide, you're safe because you're not going to go out where the hunters are. You're not going to end up climbing amazingly creative ruminations that have high peaks and cliffs. You just stay here, stay here.

So I use the word "here." There are some people who use the two words, "Stay here." Just stay here. Stay here with us. And that's all. Stay here with us and see what happens.