

# *Satipaṭṭhāna* (9) The Clear Seeing of Mindfulness

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## **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

unfold, dynamic process, observe, observing, *anupassati*, watch, river, ocean, listen, breeze, rain, non-interfering, know, feel, relax, body, doing, refrain, deepening, unfolding, movement, journey, no duality, watching, hearing, insight, onward leading

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Continuing the theme of *satipaṭṭhāna*, I want to repeat what I said at the beginning of the meditation because it is so important. I might say it differently. The practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* is not static. It involves an onward leading journey. I like the metaphor of deepening – deepening into our practice and ourselves. It involves unfolding.

For example, you may be tense in your body, running around doing a lot. When you finally have a chance to sit down, you might discover that your body begins to unwind, relax, and open up. That is a process of unfolding and deepening, which is part of this journey.

We are dynamic processes, which can unfold in all kinds of ways. We can move toward greater tension and strain, which we can feel in our eyes. Sometimes we can see when people are so caught up in something that their eyes are fixated. When they are afraid, we see it in their eyes. This dynamic process can also unfold in beautiful ways. It can unfold into greater peace, relaxation, and openness. *Satipaṭṭhāna* is very much part of this dynamic process of life.

That is sometimes misunderstood when the practice is described in certain ways, such as: “Just be aware. Simply accept things as they are and be aware. Don’t try to change things.” In a way, this is good advice. But even if you are not trying to change anything, if you practice this, you will change. You cannot help but change. Things open up in the dynamic process of *satipaṭṭhāna*.

The journey for each of the thirteen exercises of *satipaṭṭhāna* begins with a statement. In the beginning, it says:

*And how does one observe the body in terms of the body?*

Then the text describes the exercise of breathing. One knows the breathing, knows its qualities and characteristics. One experiences or feels the breathing deeply. One experiences the body. One begins feeling

the full body as one breathes. Then one relaxes the body. So the instructions are to know, to feel, and to relax.

When we settle, gather together, become unified, and are present with the breathing, we are not distracted and fragmented in the mind. We are really here, settled on the breathing. Then the practice opens up to the ability to just observe. Sooner or later, it comes to that.

But we can start feeling that part of the tension is from too much *doing* in meditation – trying too hard to know, get concentrated, or even relax. At some point, we are relaxed and settled enough that it is just a matter of settling back and observing our experience.

Once we go through that process, the text says *this* is how one observes the body in the body – the body in terms of the body. Now we understand better the meaning of the expression “to observe the body.” The text literally says “the body in the body.” But the grammatical form (the locative) “in” also means “in terms of” the body. So one observes the body just in terms of the body.

It is not in terms of someone else’s body, like someone has better hair than I do. We know our hair for what it is, independent of anybody else, without judgments or comparisons. We know our body in and of itself on its

own terms. We are not comparing our body to how it was in the past or will be in the future. We are not comparing it to ideals of the body, what is fashionable, or body types. Just the simplicity of the body. To experience, to observe, the body in terms of the body.

Observing, which is *anupassati* in Pali, is a type of emphatic seeing. It is the ability to see clearly, to be an observer, to watch. Some people prefer not to talk much about it because it can create a sense of separation, a dualism between experiencing and being the watcher. That can be true if we are not deeply settled in the practice. It is why we have to go through the steps of knowing, feeling, and relaxing deeply.

Then there is no duality in seeing because, in a sense, there is no watcher. There is just observing. Observing is cool, relaxed, and open. There is no interference or judgment, no wanting or not wanting. It is the ability to step back and watch.

The reference point that I often use for this is the experience of relaxed watching, like watching the waves of the ocean or the flowing current of a river. Some people can be mesmerized just watching – it's very relaxing. Concerns of the day fall away. The mind relaxes around everything, just watching the waves, the current, or a fire burning. Some people can watch like this for a long time.

If an emphasis on seeing is a problem for you, another reference point is hearing. Relaxed observing can be like listening to a creek flowing, rain falling, or a gentle breeze in the trees. Lying there, you listen, and the wider world falls away. It is just you and the experience. After a while, it is not even you. You are not thinking about yourself. It is just the experience.

The first time I experienced this palpably was when I was seventeen. I was riding in the backseat of a car. Going for long trips and looking out the window, something inside me became very peaceful and quiet. It was as if time stopped and, in a wonderful way, there were almost no thoughts. Then I would “come to” when my friend, who was driving, said something. I realized that I had been so deeply relaxed, just watching the scenery go by.

I do not know if these examples inspire some reference point you might have for this kind of observing. Observing – the mind’s ability to perceive – is a state in which we allow things to be. We are not trying to fix, judge, or be with things. It is when we are really well established that we have access to observing. At least, that is how it works for me.

Some people access observing much sooner than I did when I started practicing. Right away they find that it is

liberating to settle back, just watch, and observe. For others, it is only when the practice is really settled and concentrated that it makes sense to back off and just observe. Sooner or later, the idea is to have an attitude of non-interfering, not trying to do something or attain anything. Just settle back and observe.

Now, this is part of the dynamic process of the practice. It is not that we settle back to observe and that is the end of the story – and it's somewhat boring. Rather, we settle back to observe, and that begins to open up a new way of practicing and being. That new way is described in what is called the refrain. After each of the exercises, there is a refrain, which is repeated.

There are many different ways of practicing mindfulness. They all funnel into a particular set of insights, the deeper insights of insight meditation. The so-called refrain is a description of what happens when all the different streams of mindfulness come into the depth of practice, and they all share the insight part of mindfulness.

On Monday, we will start talking about the refrain – the insight part, how this is onward leading once we can observe experience.

Lastly, I will say that there is no need to follow along with what I am talking about in your meditation. Partly,

the guided meditations are to give a hint or sense of what is possible. The teachings are also intended to open up the map and the terrain of mindfulness so that as you continue practicing, when the time is right, you will recognize what is happening and will know how to go forward. It is asking a lot of you to follow along with all these steps, as if it were easy – 1-2-3 – and you can just develop the practice in this way. But I do hope it is helpful.

Thank you very much.