

# *Satipaṭṭhāna* (67) Abiding in Effortless Awareness

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## **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

effortless, awareness, *samādhi*, concentration, abide, undistractedness, river, current, non-clinging, final knowledge, seven years, non-return, awakening, rebirth, freedom

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We are coming to the end of many weeks of teachings on the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the title of which I like to translate as the “Four Ways of Establishing Awareness” – the “Establishments for Awareness.” The emphasis of what we are trying to do here is not so much about understanding these areas of our lives (although that is certainly a part of it), but about establishing and abiding in awareness.

That awareness involves clarity and being able to remain in the present moment. The ability to remain centered in the present moment is often associated with concentration – to be concentrated and focused here and now. Often with concentration, many people

assume that it is a kind of laser focus or a tightening of focus onto something. The way that I understand *samādhi* here is that it is an undistractedness in the present moment – our whole being starts getting gathered together to be aware here and now without distractions.

To do this well comes at the end of a long period of doing *satipaṭṭhāna* practice. Some people might get the hang of it quickly. For some people, it might take years and years. You will see in a moment, it might take them seven years to develop it to some degree.

One of the nice qualities that happens as we get some sense of the naturalness or effortlessness of awareness, or the way we can practice letting go of the distractions from awareness, is we can then abide in awareness. Awareness is not something we do. It is something we allow for, something that we stay in.

It is like staying in the current of a river while floating down the river. If it looks like you are going to veer out of the current into an eddy, you make a small adjustment to come back, and then the river carries you. At some point, the effort becomes not an effort to be aware, but the effort to avoid being distracted or caught in something – “Come back. Be here. Come here.”

At some point there starts to be a recognition that in this awareness, in and of itself, there is a kind of freedom. There is an absence of attachment, clinging, fear, anger, hostility. Even desires are absent in this awareness. Even healthy desires. We can still have them. All these things still exist. But we start taking up residency in awareness. We do not have residency in our anger or residency in our fear. Those things can still exist to some degree, but we are not prioritizing them. We are not giving them undue attention and importance. They can be there and we can take care of them wisely, but we realize that we are not those. We are not identified with them. If we want to identify with anything, we identify with this awareness that we can't *do*. It just is there.

More importantly, we start seeing how awareness is free of clinging. Knowing this exists, that this possibility is there, is a fantastic knowing. "Oh. It is possible to be free of attachments. Amazing! I get a glimmer of it. I have a hint of it. But wow, it's possible to be free of jealousy, judgmentalism, cynicism, craving, avariciousness, all kinds of things that are absent in this place. And it's possible to live in the world effectively, established and abiding in this place." To know that is to know something really important.

Now I would like to read the last part of the text we have been doing all these weeks. It is kind of the conclusion to it all. The Buddha says:

*Practitioners, if anyone should develop these four foundations for awareness in such a way for seven years, one of two fruits (results) could be expected for that person: either final knowledge here and now, or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return.*

If a person does this practice for seven years, they can expect one of two results. One of them is final knowledge here and now – in this lifetime here, to attain final awakening. Here, it is called “final knowledge.” It is not knowledge about the cosmos, the inner workings of the mind, or the details of physics. “Final knowledge” is a knowledge that the mind is without clinging. “Wow!” You really know: “This mind here has no clinging in it. Amazing.”

What I tried to point you to today is that we can get early hints of this possibility. We know it is possible, as we develop awareness, as we find ourselves more and more aware. Do not confuse it with having clinging. It is a part of you that is free of clinging. It is a part of you that is free of fear. It is found in the awareness itself.

The text says that after seven years, either you will have full awakening – final knowledge here and now – or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return. Non-return

means that when you die (in the common Buddhist idea of rebirth), you will not return as a human being, but you will do the final work – final liberation, final letting go – in this liminal space somewhere beyond your death.

The usual interpretation of this is that for seven years this is the primary occupation a person is involved in, doing this practice. Classically someone who could do this would be a monastic who could really give their life over to it. That seems pretty phenomenal.

The Buddha goes on to say:

*Let alone seven years, if anyone should develop these four foundations for awareness in such a way for six years, they will have one of these two fruits, or for five years, or for four years, for three years, for two years, for one year, one of two fruits should be expected: either final knowledge here and now, or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return. Let alone one year, if anyone should develop these four foundations for awareness in such a way for seven months, for six months, for five months, for four months, for three months, for two months, for one month, for half a month, one of two fruits can be expected: either final knowledge here and now, or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return. Let alone for half a month, if anyone should develop these four foundations for awareness in such a way for seven days, one of two fruits can be expected:*

*either final knowledge here and now, or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return.*

It seems pretty phenomenal to do this inner work in seven days. Among the billions of people existing on the planet, there are probably people who are prepared – who have a certain kind of capacity or potential – that maybe they can drop into a deep state and find their way all the way to the end. For most of us, it is not possible to attain final knowledge at this kind of speed.

It is possible to have knowledge of this. Recognize that it becomes part of us. It is not complete. It is not the final knowledge, but we are well on the way. We have had an experience. We know the possibility of non-clinging and have confidence in it. We know it is valuable. One of the most valuable things a human being can do with this lifetime is to discover this place within – this place or this possibility. I do not know if it is within. Once you are in awareness, there is no inside and outside. A place where there is freedom from suffering.

Then our compassion for the world knows how fully it is possible to support people to become free of suffering. To have compassion for people who suffer and to provide them with bandaids is great if there is a wound. I never want to not offer bandaids that are needed. I celebrate the people who do. *And* to really know how

thoroughly people can be freed of their suffering is to have this knowledge – experiential knowledge inside ourselves – of this possibility. Then we can be a beacon. Then we can support people to their full potential of becoming free of suffering. That is the very goal of compassion.

The text goes on little bit more, and then we will stop for the day.

*It was with reference to this that it was said: “This is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the way for realization of Nibbāna, namely, the four foundations for awareness.”*

*This is what the Buddha said. The practitioners were satisfied and delighted in the Buddha’s words.*

That is the end of the text. In the next four days, we will finish up this whole text and sutta. Thank you for today. During this day of your life, maybe you can try to have a heightened attentiveness to when awareness operates without you directing it, without you making it happen, awareness in which your ordinary self is not the agent for the awareness. You are just aware in a natural way. Thank you, and I will see you tomorrow.