

Satipaṭṭhāna (71) Living in Awareness with *Satipaṭṭhāna*

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Gil Fronsdal

We come to the final talk of now over seventy talks on the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. It is a practice of mindfulness by which we are cultivating and developing a heightened capacity for awareness (I like the language of “lucid awareness” or “clear awareness”), that is available and present for us as we go through our lives.

In this text, there are thirteen exercises that we have gone through bit by bit. The relationship between the exercises and the awareness being developed is similar to the idea of running. If someone says: “I run, I am running,” it does not tell you much of what that is about. They may be running for exercise. They may be running to catch the bus. They may be running from the police. Just saying “I’m running” does not say much.

If they tell you that running is their training program, then you get a clearer sense of what is meant by running. It is an exercise. It is a protocol they are following. They are probably doing sprints, long distances, exercising, strengthening, and all the kinds of things you might do if you are training to run a race.

There are a lot of things you do, but what you are learning is to develop your capacity for running until the running becomes effortless. It can feel effortless at some point if you are really in the flow of running even though a lot of energy is being expended. You can feel like you are abiding in the running. It is like you are being carried along by it, whereas at the beginning of training it was hard – you had to apply yourself and there was resistance to it.

It is the same thing – the thirteen exercises are training in awareness. They involve other kinds of training exercises we do and other areas of practicing. A lot of that training has to do with knowing – recognition of what is there. As that recognition grows, awareness develops. That awareness can stay with you for a while. Sometimes it might stay for a few seconds. Sometimes it might stay for a few minutes, a few hours, or longer. For a while, you really feel like awareness is ever-present or

continuously present for a period of time. That awareness makes a world of difference.

You might still have all kinds of inner challenges. You might have fear, desire, anger, and attachments of all kinds. The art of awareness is that now we have a separate place to abide. It is like your whole house is dirty, but the living room is clean. From the living room, you can see all the other rooms, but you are not disturbed by it because you have learned that you can clean the living room. There is no need to dirty the living room by being upset by what is in the other rooms. With time you will go there, clean them up, and take care of it. You know how to do it now.

We have this awareness and a kind of relaxed feeling about our shortcomings. It does not mean we indulge, celebrate, or just barrel ahead with them. It does mean we do not criticize ourselves, get upset, or feel burdened by our shortcomings. Of course, we have shortcomings. Of course, there are desires and attachments. That is what we are working with, training and developing a capacity for awareness.

As awareness gets stronger, at some point, it becomes clear that it is the best alternative, the better place to be. Being aware of everything tends to shift everything towards health in a skillful, healthy way. It makes room

for healthy mind states, motivations, and wisdom to occur. When awareness begins to be present in an open, relaxed way, we know how to be aware of what is happening.

At some point, doing *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, awareness becomes so clear that it is like an “Aha” moment. “Oh, now I know what this practice is about. Now I know something about freedom. Now I know about not getting caught in anything including my shortcomings. I don’t have to be drowned by them or upset with them. It is just, that’s what the mind is doing. And now I know there is a place of freedom, a place of open awareness, a place of lucid awareness.” It really makes an impression, maybe for the first time. “Wow. This is fantastic.” That is a confirmation of the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*.

All of this practice brought this about – a clear, lucid awareness, a freedom of awareness. That is what *satipaṭṭhāna* practice is about, to cultivate and develop a strong sense of awareness. After that clarity, the tendency is for a person to be more ethical. There is no guarantee, but the field of awareness is so wholesome, it lets us see and feel the impact of our inner and external behavior. We can feel how we are diminished by unethical behavior, and how we are enhanced by ethical behavior. There is a tendency to start being more and

more interested in being ethical and not causing harm in the world – eventually no harm at all.

Once this kind of clarity, this “Aha” moment happens (“Now I know what the practice is about. Now I know something about it”), the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* does not change. It is the same practice. We do the same thing, again and again, although now there is a reference point for it. This clarity of awareness becomes easier to do. We can fall back into awareness more clearly. Some qualities or characteristics of lucid awareness might be with us all the time, even though it is not always there strongly.

The practice develops and, at some point, the experience of “Aha” and freedom of awareness come to full maturation. In this tradition, we talk about full awakening, full enlightenment. I have never met anyone that I know who has had full awakening. I have been around a lot of wonderful Buddhist teachers. I know that full awakening is a possibility. That is a direction we can go. Once we have had enough practice and enough, “Aha. This works. This is what it’s about,” we have a clearer sense – it is just other rooms in the house and it is possible to clean it all out. Someone can do that for themselves – no doubt about it, but it is a big task.

Whether there are people in the modern world you can meet who have done that is an open question. It is hard to know. But it does not matter so much for oneself because one knows – this is the direction to go; there is no other thing to do.

The Buddha said that once you become fully awakened, the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* is the same. For the Buddha, a person who is fully awakened continues to practice *satipaṭṭhāna*. Maybe it is not so much an exercise anymore, but rather a way of being. Exactly the same instructions are given for people who are fully awakened. Whether you are new to the practice and are developing the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*, or whether you know what the practice is about (which is when a person begins to be called a trainee – sometimes it is referred to as stream entry), it is the same practice. If you become fully awakened, it is the same practice.

Jack Kornfield has a book titled, “After the Ecstasy, the Laundry.” What I am teaching here today from the Buddha, the title of his book would be “Before Awakening, *Satipaṭṭhāna*, After Partial Awakening, *Satipaṭṭhāna*, After Full Awakening, *Satipaṭṭhāna*.” This is the practice for a lifetime. There is no end to it. Always we are doing it. It is not a burden. It does not feel like work. It just becomes more and more natural. It becomes who we are. It becomes trusting living in

awareness more than anything else, living and being present for experience.

The alternative, to not be aware, is clearly not as good, wonderful, or enjoyable, and not as helpful for the world. If we know something about freedom from attachments and clinging, then we know what is possible for other people, what their potential is, and then we can somehow support that.

If you follow the path to freedom from clinging to lucid awareness, you are being supported fully. That is the most wonderful thing you can do for yourself. You become a model, an exemplar, and you become someone who can recognize and support that possibility for other people. Other people too can attain more freedom in a deep way, rather than having to accommodate suffering, put up with suffering, assuage suffering with compassion and self-care (which is a wonderful thing to do, but to be limited by that is to be limited). Everybody has the potential to open up into this world of freedom, to have full awareness. It is a game changer, but it does not change *satipaṭṭhāna* – *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, the training of it before awakening and after awakening. After *satipaṭṭhāna*, more *satipaṭṭhāna*.

Thank you for this. I hope that the joy of awareness, the joy of mindfulness, becomes your joy and that it is contagious. Thank you for being part of this series. I look forward to being together again.