

Satipaṭṭhāna (16) Awareness of Posture Reveals

January 25, 2022

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

second exercise, knowing, simple, chaos, standing, simplicity, complicated, walking, refuge, desire, mindfulness, complexity, freedom, lying down

Gil Fronsdal

We are starting the discussion of the second exercise of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. It simply states:

When walking, one knows one is walking. When standing, one knows one is standing. Sitting, one knows one is sitting. Lying down, one knows one is lying down. Whatever way the body is positioned, one knows that.

It is easy to skim over this because most people can master something like this quickly – knowing they are standing when they are standing. They are then ready to go to something else. But to center oneself in the knowing has all kinds of benefits.

Today I will focus on how this “knowing” can be a reference point for when we do not want to be there. We simply see where the momentum and impulses are – where the life force is going for us. This may not always be healthy for us, or skillfully express our freedom.

For example, standing in the market in line for the cashier, one centers oneself, “Standing, I know I am standing.” Know this not only with words, but know how it feels – as an embodied knowing. Just stand and breathe with that. Be with the standing. It could just be for a few seconds. Then you might notice a strong pull, desire, or impulse to read the front covers of the magazines that are there. Or maybe your strong impulse is to look and see what other people are buying, and comment on it in your mind. Maybe you notice how impatient you are. You may actually be crowding the person in front of you a little bit because you are eager to get on with checking out.

Without the reference point of a simple, “I know I am standing,” we do not see that we can just stand. We want to do more – to be engaged. These are impulses. But to just walk and know you are walking – and that is all you are doing. It might highlight that you are walking in a hurry. You are leaning forward, or you are tense. It might highlight how you are walking, or the fact that you hardly notice your surroundings, or notice yourself

walking because you are in some kind of reverie, preoccupation, or anxiety.

None of these things are wrong. They do take us away from the simplicity of what we are doing in the moment. The path of mindfulness is to know this moment – to be mindful of it. Really know: “Oh, there is a desire to look at the magazine covers. There is a desire to move forward. I am impatient.” Know that with your simplest, clearest, freest knowing. That becomes one of the premier reference points – simple knowing. Can we allow ourselves the calm, simple knowing of what is happening? Or is the mind racing ahead, wanting to do things, wanting to pick things up, wanting to get involved? It cannot just stay centered and settled.

Standing in line in a market is not the end of the world. Just stand there, breathe, and be present. You can feel how there is a lack of freedom in how we are crowding the other person, looking at the cashier, trying to calculate how quickly they will be done. It is probably not going to change anything. But you can see the way you have been caught. This kind of concern has us in its grip.

Walking is the same – we can see the complexity of it. The beautiful art of this is that no matter how complicated the mind’s preoccupation is, or how

complicated the situation is, we always have the capacity to know just this in a simple way.

One of my labels or ways of knowing covers all situations, no matter how complicated. I just tell myself, “Knowing chaos.” This moment – I know that it’s chaotic. I do not know the details of the chaos necessarily, or understand all of it. I am not trying to evaluate, study, or fix it. Just, “Oh, chaos.” Knowing that keeps it really simple.

There are times when knowing chaos frees me so I can take it in and perceive it more fully as chaos. I start seeing some of the details – almost naturally, without losing that simplicity. I notice that the chaos was primarily physical agitation in my body. Now it is simply knowing physical agitation. As I am with that in a simple way, at some point, it becomes clear that there is anxiety, and the anxiety is this.

It begins to be more specific – but not because I am investigating, questioning, and wondering what is happening. I am relying on the simplicity of knowing for things to become clear. If we have simple knowing, and just allow ourselves to be with what is happening, then clarity begins to appear on its own.

The simple knowing becomes a refuge. It is a reference point for freedom. At its simplest, knowing happens in a

very free way. Knowing is independent of what is known. If I see the magazine covers on the rack at the market, I can recognize some exotic title of an article and just know it. “Look at that – there is a title.” Instead of being horrified, fascinated, eager to get involved, or judging, “How could they?” I can notice, “Oh, I have lost myself in the complexity, feelings, desires, and drives I have.” This is not freedom.

When knowing is freedom, it is a reference point. The teachings –

When walking, know you are walking. Standing, know you are standing. Sitting, know you are sitting. Lying down, know you are lying down

– can function in this way. Simple knowing helps bring more mindfulness. It brings more attention to what is going on for us, beyond the simplicity of just standing and walking.

If nothing more is going on – if it is easy to stay close to walking when walking, sitting when sitting, standing when standing, and lying down when lying down – then just enjoy yourself. Sit there and breathe. Be there breathing, walking, and feeling – connected to the experience. This is a fantastic pleasure.

If you make it more complicated, know it. This is the case. Perhaps, with that knowing is also some wisdom. You realize: “I do not have to spend my time looking at

the covers of magazines, when I have something better to do. I can just stand here, breathe, and be present.” Or you may realize: “Maybe I should get a magazine. A friend of mine is ill. I know my friend likes that particular kind of magazine. It is a nature magazine. Maybe I will buy it for my friend.” That is a little more complicated, but it comes from a very different place.

At the very end of the *Satipaṭṭhāna* refrain it says:

One is mindful that there is a body just to the extent necessary for knowledge and lucid, clear awareness.

Here again, we have this very simple statement, “There is a body.” The text of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* goes from that refrain to the second exercise, where it remains that simple.

Practice opens up as we develop the simplicity of practice. We become aware of a bit more complexity. Hopefully, we are learning to be aware of more and more complexity, more richness of the moment – and know it in this simple way. The simple way may not always be so cognitive. It might not be a label or a word, like “chaos” or “sound.” It might be a quieter knowing, closer to just experiencing.

I think those are my words for today. I am enjoying going through the *Satipaṭṭhāna* slowly, step by step. We will continue.

Take refuge in your knowing. Experiment and explore what it is like to be simple – the simplicity of being with whatever is happening and of knowing whatever is happening. See what shows itself. See what clarity comes.

The reason to experiment with this and explore it over the next day or two is that our mindfulness can get a bit too complicated or involved. Keep the ability to have a refuge in knowing. Keep it simple. Always come back to the simplest knowing. The simplest awareness of knowing is such a powerful support as we go through the entire *Satipaṭṭhāna*. So, thank you very much.