

# *Satipaṭṭhāna* (57) Mindfulness as Effortless Awareness

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## **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

awareness, breathing, effortless, abiding, mind, feeling, effort, factors, mindfulness, arise, effortlessly, momentum, begins, work, exercise, *sati*, establishing, hand

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This is the beginning of the week on the second to the last exercise in the Buddha's discourse on establishing awareness. The exercise is the Seven Factors of Awakening. There is nothing in this exercise that talks about making these factors arise. It is more about recognizing they are there and then maintaining them.

The seven are mindfulness, investigation, effort, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. Sometimes these are considered to be the crown jewel of Buddhist practice because they come when practice begins to mature and develop. There starts to be an inner momentum or naturalness of the qualities of the practice

living in us, coming forth, and flowing through us in a certain way.

This is not an easy thing to experience for beginners. Sometimes it takes a long time of practice for these things to begin to awaken. As they awaken and are present, they support us. Remember, this is the second to the last exercise. It is the twelfth of thirteen exercises in this discourse.

I like to understand that the other exercises provide the foundation – building momentum, developing, and learning how to be mindful in the body, feelings, and mind. As that learning happens, and as the muscle of attention, being in the present moment, becomes stronger, then we find for ourselves that these things begin to arise.

The first one that arises – or the first one that is talked about – is *sati*, mindfulness itself. As I said, the text does not say to now practice mindfulness or now apply yourself more to being mindful. It says to notice that there is mindfulness there. So the question is, what is mindfulness here?

I prefer to translate the word *sati* as “awareness.” What we are doing is establishing awareness. We are abiding in it. We are dwelling in it. We are not “doing” awareness. Nowhere in the Buddha’s teachings does

the Buddha say to do awareness. Awareness itself is not a verb, something that we actively do. Awareness is something that we establish or allow for, something we abide in. That is in the very beginning of the text if you remember. It talks about abiding, observing the four foundations. There is this idea of abiding in something, knowing it is there in a very simple way.

In the guided meditation I talked about the effortless quality of attention. There is certainly attention that can take effort. Sometimes that is useful to apply.

Sometimes there is a kind of effort that is effortless. If you are just minding your own business and suddenly a loud bird nearby whistles, the first hearing of that bird appears without any effort on your part.

I am sitting outside, and just as I was saying this, I felt cold going through my thighs. That cold feeling was effortless. It appeared – the knowing of it. It was just there. It called attention to itself and my mind knew it. I was pretty equanimous and content to be here, and it was not a problem to just know it.

As practice deepens and matures, begin appreciating that there will be times when we can tune into this effortless quality of attention. It might take some gentle effort to let go enough to allow that to be there. With time it becomes the backdrop. It becomes a foundation. It becomes the support for how we go through our lives.

This is because there is a constant awareness of present moment experience as we live it. We do not get lost in our thoughts. We do not get lost in conversations. We do not get lost in the work we are doing. We can do it wholeheartedly. There is a sense, a feeling, a knowing, that seems almost effortless. “Oh. I’m here. This is where I’m present.” It is almost like being present for a feeling of presence. Some people might say “ever-present presence” or “ever-present awareness, attention.”

Why this is useful, as awareness develops, is that it is an awareness that does not automatically come with attachment, with greed or clinging, ill will, aversion, or pushing things away. Things are just allowed to be there without us being for or against them. We do not have to accept them. We do not have to condone them. We do not have to criticize them. Awareness, in and of itself, is not involved in being for or against. It is not involved with needing to accept or reject. It is just there with the experience.

To practice acceptance is an extra step. Allowing things to appear in the mind effortlessly might be evaluated or thought of as a kind of acceptance practice, but there is no acceptance being done. It is just things arise in awareness and here we are.

To do that with breathing at the same time is part of the art of this. It is possible to do. If I can within the format of this video, I would like to try to show you something.

This finger of mine (raises left forefinger) is my breathing – breathing in and breathing out (finger moving back and forth) – and my other hand (raises hand with fingertips and thumb joined together in a point) is my mind. One way of being aware of the breathing is focusing on the breathing, really being there with it, and the mind really closes down, focuses, and it gets kind of tight. It bears down (right hand points right into left forefinger). It focuses on the breathing. All together this way. Now, that is fine. It can be done. It is possible to get very focused and concentrated this way. That is kind of nice.

Another way is not to make any effort in the mind like that. Keep the mind relaxed, open, soft, and available (opens right hand, fingers upward). When I do that, I start feeling the wind on the palm of my hand – I'm sitting outside – the back of my hand, the cold in different places. It is kind of nice.

Then, gently, I bring these two together. This is the breathing. The open hand is the awareness. And I bring them together so that the breathing (the left finger) and the softest part of the hand – the most sensitive part of the hand (right palm) – are in touch with each other.

Now I am intimately feeling the breathing. The world around me begins to fall away, disappear, recede, because the breathing becomes the only thing I am aware of.

The breathing is known effortlessly. The coming and going, the rhythm, of the different sensations are known effortlessly. There might be a tendency to want to do something again – like to stay there and not lose it. The mind begins to tighten up again and hold on. But the idea here, when you come to this part of the Seven Factors of Awakening, is for *sati* – awareness, to be less and less work, and more and more resting and abiding in awareness. Then, in that abiding, let things be known effortlessly.

If there is any work at this stage of practice, it is to remember to do this. It is not easy to be this way – there has to be some momentum in the mind – do not try to do it if it is not easy. Rather be very content, even to go back to the very beginning of *Satipaṭṭhāna*. Go back to the simplicity of practicing breath meditation.

The first four steps of this whole enterprise of *Satipaṭṭhāna* are to really experience, know your breathing, and recognize the experiences of breathing. That takes a little bit more effort. Then, as you know that, know and recognize your whole body. Then, relax your body. That is how it begins. You can always go

back to do that. That is a fantastic practice in its own right. And it leads to where we are going here, with the Seven Factors of Awakening.

If you are not there yet in the Seven Factors, do not worry about it. It is not important for you then. As the momentum builds, you will see that there will be a kind of effortless awareness arising that can hold things peacefully, openly, and clearly. This is a gift. This is one of the great gifts of practice. It sets the stage for the other Seven Factors of Awakening.

Tomorrow, I will talk about investigation. That sounds like a lot of work, but it is also meant to have an effortless quality to it. How that will work is what we will talk about. Thank you.