
Samādhī

Transcripts from a series of short dharma talks
January - April 2025

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Samadhi (1) Introduction

2025-01-06

So, hello on this first Monday of 2025, and Happy New Year to all of you, and welcome to this new series that I'll be doing, entitled *Samādhi*. In the last few years I've been doing a long series, some of them 50, 60 sessions long, on different basic meditation practices that our Buddhism offers. I've done it in *ānāpānasati*, Mindfulness of Breathing, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. So this year I'm going to do a whole series on the basic instructions and practice of *samādhi*.

The word *samādhi* is generally translated into English as concentration. It's not uncommon for people to not be very satisfied calling it concentration because it limits it too much and narrows the scope of what *samādhi* is. Also, sometimes it suggests a kind of laser focus and a kind of intensity that's a little bit intense to really stay focused and one-pointedly focused. Whereas *samādhi* is not a particular way of focusing the mind; it's a whole state of being. It's a whole qualitative state of being.

If you felt deeply at peace, the peace wouldn't be a particular activity of the mind. It would be something that would be integrated into your whole sense of being—your body, your heart, your mind. So in the same way, *samādhi* is something that's integrated and complete and whole and all about who we are. It's a state, and to call it kind of a laser focus of the mind actually interferes with the relaxing and opening to this general whole state. So today it's a little bit to make some introductory remarks about *samādhi* and this series we're doing, and then we'll just continue.

One of the introductory remarks to say is that *samādhi* is a very important state for deepening Buddhist practice. It's very important for mindfulness practice, that the depths of mindfulness practice, the full potential of it, actually requires a degree of *samādhi*. The way that I understand the teachings of the Buddha, mindfulness practice and *samādhi* practice—*sati* and *samādhi* practice—are practiced and integrated together as being not really two distinct practices, but they come along. Sometimes we might emphasize more the *samādhi* aspects of the mind, sometimes more the attentional aspects of the mind, of mindfulness. But they're both going together and they need each other.

They're both accompanying each other. Maybe not if there's a best analogy, but the left and right foot when you're walking. Sometimes you step with the left foot, sometimes with the

right foot, and you need them both in order to walk. I've had an injury in my foot, and it was very hard to walk with one of my legs. So it was like I could bring the injured leg up to where my uninjured leg was, but the stepping forward always happened with the uninjured leg. It was very awkward and slow to walk that way.

But to walk in a fully integrated, easeful way was to be able to go back and forth between the two. So both are needed. Both use the other in *samādhi* and mindfulness. I don't want to set up a sharp dichotomy or distinction between them. But for this series, it's going to be focusing on the *samādhi* mostly. A lot of mindfulness will be needed in order to engage in the *samādhi* activities that we'll be exploring.

As we go through this, the plan is to do this very gradually in very, very small steps. Some of you are already fairly familiar with meditation practice, with concentration practice. I'm hoping that if that's the case, that the slow steps we make, putting down the real simple elements that add up to the whole, it will be informative to some of you who maybe never really tracked this so carefully, what it took to enter into *samādhi*. You understand much better the dynamics, the different elements and pieces that come into play. Some people have minds that can naturally drop into deep *samādhi*.

Some people have minds that are more oriented towards mindfulness and never really kind of appreciate. Both of them, if it's easy, one or the other, might not appreciate some of the different dynamics in the mind and the heart that come into play that maybe you take for granted. So to go through this very slowly. Those of you who are new to all this, the slow, slow, steady pace of little drops of pieces of instructions at a time maybe will allow you to follow and go along. At some point as we do this, you might not follow the instructions, but maybe then you use your imagination to get a sense, a feel for what I'm talking about so that you have a general sense of what's going on. At some point in the future, this will become relevant for you.

So the word *samādhi* is literally—the etymology of it in Sanskrit and Pāli means more a collecting, a gathering together, a settling together. There are words that are variations of *samādhi* that specifically mean collecting. Sometimes collecting firewood to make a fire—you're collecting that. Sometimes these related words, just grammatical variations, can also mean to settle, to steady. So there's a settling, a steadiness of the mind, a gathering of the mind.

The idea of gathering is probably one of the most important aspects of *samādhi*, that it's not an exclusion as it is an inclusion. There's a feeling that all of who we are is now included, but

not in a way that's fragmented, not in a way that's going off in different directions, but rather it's gathering together to work together and be coordinated, doing the same for the same purpose, the same intention. Everything's here and present. But it's a huge process to settle in, to steady in, to gather in everything. Part of the reason it's a big project is that it goes so much against the grain of how minds often work.

Even in the time of the Buddha, it was hard for people to develop *samādhi* because their minds was—he used the word monkey mind. The idea of a monkey mind is that it's like a monkey that's swinging from the trees, that as soon as it grabs one branch, it's already reaching for the next branch. So the mind, as soon as it's one place, it's reaching for the next place. Even in the time of the Buddha, that was true. I imagine it's even more true now in the last 20 years with the advent of these smartphones and screens that we're on, tablets, that have in some ways unsettled the mind, that have activated the mind.

So it's always searching, always surfing the web. It's always the next thing, the next thing. As many people have pointed out, the modern mind has lost its capacity, has lost its span of attention. The attention span has decreased. You get bored more. There's more like an impulse, like, what's next? What else is there?

Rather than settled on one thing and just doing that one thing, it's like, what's next, next, next? Now there's been all kinds of studies and research done on the economics of attention, the attention economy. There are people who are paid a lot of money to plan and organize and create content that will get you to click, get you to look, get you to move on, to keep your attention, to have you return, to look again. What's happening? What's happening? I've noticed, and myself, I'm sure some of you as well, have this issue that there's an idle moment, and to grab for the phone to see, is there an email, is there a news or something? We're constantly being stimulated by what's on a screen.

The idea of sitting and doing nothing and being quiet, which I think human beings had a much greater capacity to do outside of these modern technological worlds that many of us live in, is becoming an unavailable state. So *samādhi* is a return to a deep natural state of wholeness, of settledness, of open attention, which is not being driven by a thirst for more, thirst for content, thirst for experiences, thirst for search for serotonin rush or dopamine rush or something that you get, get, get, discover, discover, discover, want, want, want. I like to think of it as a process of being turned inside out. It's a challenge to turn the stream, the flow of the mind from wanting and attention going and moving and being outwardly directed or directed towards fantasy and thoughts and anxieties, to turn it around and inside out almost

to settle deeply into ourselves and to discover that we get turned inside out and there's a whole new way to live in the world. A way where the mind's anxiety, the mind's reactivity, the mind's overactivity is completely settled and quiet.

The source of our life arises from some deeper place of peace and well-being and wholeness within. The mind is now a vehicle of support, a channel for this deep, settled peace and happiness that we're capable of, rather than the mind being what drives us. So maybe the analogy could be, rather than having what's on our smartphone screen be where we live, we actually live settled in a very deep, steady way in our inner life, in our hearts, in our bellies, in our mind here. That's what drives, that's where the engine, that's where the source of vitality comes from. That's where we find our peace and well-being.

To make the transition from a scattered, activated, agitated, fragmented mind to a mind that's steadied, stable, gathered and whole, can be a slow process and sometimes a very challenging process. But it's a really worthwhile process. So we'll go through this and maybe discover. You'll discover something more about what I like to call the natural state, a healthy state that many of us have lost track with, that is invaluable for living a wise life. So this will be the focus: *samādhi*, the gathering together, the healing of the fragmented self into the whole self for the purpose of a deep peace.

So thank you. And tomorrow I'll be back at IMC and I'm happy to be with you on this beginning of the year.

Samadhi (2) Discovering Awareness

2025-01-07

So, welcome to the second talk on *samādhi*. This will probably be a longer series. It is such an important topic in Buddhism, in Buddhist practice, *samādhi* or concentration. And it's part of the key foundation stones, cornerstones for Buddhist practice. Mindfulness is another one. Ethics, being ethical is a third one.

And kindness and generosity, or maybe the fourth. But it's tremendously valuable, and it can lead to a lot of stress and a lot of confusion. I certainly have tried to develop concentration in meditation and ended up with a headache because of the way in which I was trying to develop *samādhi*. It was too willful. It was too forceful. It was with a lot of tension and with a lot of expectation and a lot of degree of conceit.

I'm the one who's going to get concentrated. So I think of *samādhi* as an art and sometimes as an art that we develop or craft that we develop over time. Sometimes I think of it as grace, that when *samādhi* arises, it's like a gift that's been given. And I don't necessarily feel responsible for developing *samādhi*, but I have to put the conditions into place.

So one of the ways of understanding the unification of all of who we are as part of *samādhi* practice, and why it's so important to discover all the different aspects of who we are, to do so without any judgments, without any criticisms, without any reactivity to it, but just to discover is to think of ourselves, all the parts of who we are, as the new members of a soccer team or new members of a dance team. And not everyone is completely skilled in dancing or playing soccer. And the team doesn't know each other. And so at first, as they practice, it's awkward and difficult, and even the coach doesn't understand the different skills and abilities and how to give people different parts and how those different players of the team can work together. And so, of course, that's the way it is in the beginning.

Of course it's awkward. Of course it takes time to discover the skills, the abilities, how to be inclusive and how to put all the different pieces together. So in the beginning, the coach who's involved is discovering the players. And then as we discover them, we learn how to begin bringing them together, to work together, to support each other, to have the same purpose, and to be a team that is unified.

So the desperate parts of ourselves, we want to first discover what they are, understand what they are, and then we want to start understanding how to bring them together, so that the

unification doesn't have any stress in it, doesn't have any unwholesome qualities to it, that it actually feels like a welcoming coming together, a delightful coming together, and kind of coming into a kind of fullness or a holistic vitality or aliveness. So we begin with the discovery process, and we discover a lot of things. We discover how distracted we are, how little concentration we have. We discover that we have expectations of wanting it to be different. We have judgments about what's happening. If only this wasn't happening, then I could get concentrated.

And so there's pushing away certain things or judging certain things. We might have a lot of conceit involved, that maybe you've been very successful in doing various things in your life, and you think that meditation should be the same. You just apply yourself, you learn the steps, meditation by the numbers, and you can just do it. And that conceit sometimes of being the doer, the successful person, gets in the way. And the important thing here is just discover the whole thing without judging it, getting ready for the real performance, the real game later. But for now, just kind of getting used to each other and seeing what's there.

And one of the things to discover is the different ways in which awareness operates. Because *samādhi* is a unification of not only of all of who we are, but all the different ways in which we can be aware, attentive. And so there's three in particular that are useful for *samādhi* and for mindfulness as well. There is our ability to know what is happening. So that's a cognitive function of the mind, recognizing. And it's not judging or having commentary, not that kind of knowing, but the simplest possible knowing there's a sound.

We don't hear a big bang like I just did and begin thinking, oh, was that an accident? Was that someone hammering? What was someone doing banging this early in the morning? And so my mind races off. It's just like, oh, sound, bang. That simple.

And so the simple act of knowing, knowing the in-breath, knowing the out-breath, knowing, oh, there's thinking happening, and keeping it very, very simple. And so that's one way, the cognitive functioning of recognition, of knowing. The second kind of awareness is somatic. It's how we can feel and sense things through our body. So you might know there's an inhale, but you can feel the expansion of the chest. You can feel the movement of the chest.

You can feel the smoothness or the choppiness of the way the inhaled moves out. But that can be felt from the inside out. I like to say, as many of you know, to notice how the body experiences breathing, how the body experiences itself. So how does the body experience the breathing? So this experiential aspect of it, which is somatic and sensory, is another piece, another way in which we're aware.

A third way emphasized by the Buddha, that in his teaching, at least usually waits until people are pretty settled in meditation, and that is to observe. And this is to simply see, watch, observe what's happening without necessarily having to know what it is, without interfering with it, because when you see something, you don't interfere with what you see. That comes a different way. And we're not necessarily directly feeling it. Feeling and sensing, experiencing, can have a wonderful intimacy. But observing can have a much more peaceful, much more equanimous. It's not aloof. It can be very important. But there's a quieting of all kinds of activities, including the activity of sensing and feeling.

So there's knowing, feeling, and watching and observing. There's also hearing and tasting and smelling. There's proprioception. There's all these different ways in which we can experience the inner life through the different nerve endings that we have. And it's useful to recognize what is our strength as part of the team, the soccer team, the dance troupe. What is our strength? Are we the person who's more easier with the somatic experiencing? Are we the one who's more, has greater ease with recognition and knowing? And that's how we anchor ourselves in the present. Or are we more like we kind of settle back and observe and that's our strength.

And then there's the ways in which attention can be very open, taking in everything as it arises and occurs. And sometimes attention is very centered somewhere, so that it's not so large, maybe chaotic and confusing that so much is going on at once. We're just kind of narrowing the attention to one little place. So like if you're in a crowded restaurant, sometimes it's really nice to open the awareness, the hearing, and just take in all the amazing sounds of people eating and clanking their spoon against the plates. And that can be very relaxing and spacious. Or it can be confusing and it can be agitating, just like too much input.

And for some people, they prefer to just kind of just be with their own plate, their own food, and let their attention be centered there. And it can be very relaxing and quieting to just have this intimacy with your own food and everything else falls away. So how is it for you? What kind of awareness is useful for you? Is an important part of this discovery process of bringing together the team *samādhi*, the dance troupe, the *samādhi* dance troupe.

And so this principle of discovery and knowing yourself is invaluable for the preparation for, you know, moving into *samādhi* itself. And so I've said a lot today, but you might want to, as you go through the day today, notice, discover how you're aware. And some people are very aware through the lens of their thinking, their bias, their preconceived ideas. And that's not quite the kind of attention the Buddha focused on, but it's important to see that, that

you're doing that. And then, as you know anything at all about yourself, the core experiment of today is, can you know it lightly? Can you know it without judgment?

Can you know it without tension and pressure? And how light, how soft, how uncontracted, how untight can you simply know, simply feel, simply observe what's happening with you? So, in the slow way that we're going to go into *samādhī*, this is the second step of how we're going to move into it. And so thank you very much and I look forward to continuing tomorrow.

Samadhi (3) The Temple of Samadhi

2025-01-08

So, hello and welcome to this third talk on a series, a long series now. It's going to be on *samādhi*. And this first five days of it is really setting the stage, its introduction to the topic and entering into it. And today in particular, I want to emphasize that *samādhi* is something that I believe is appropriate to enter with humility, with care, with reverence, with respect. Too many times I have, and people I know have, attempted to get concentrated without humility or reverence or care, with a kind of forcefulness, a kind of expectation, I'm going to do this, and I can do it. I'm going to really kind of bear down and laser focus and just stay focused.

And it is possible to get somewhat concentrated that way, maybe sometimes very concentrated in a certain kind of way with that kind of attitude. But I don't think that that's the useful attitude to have. And useful for what purpose? In the Dharma, in Buddhism, *samādhi* is the precondition. It's often considered the precondition for the rising of liberating insight. And that if, and liberating insight is not just an understanding that we appropriate for the purposes of the self, but it's liberating insight from the appropriation of self, from the attachments to self and doing things for the self.

It's allowing ourselves to step beyond the limitations that we create for ourselves when we orient ourselves around me, myself, and mine. And that is pretty special. It can feel like grace. It can feel like something transpersonal. Sometimes people even use the word transcendent, a word that I don't care too much for. But for some people, it's the only thing that can represent something that seems to take them out of their usual understanding of self.

And so *samādhi*. And in my studies of Indian religions, it seems that there are some of the religions in India or yoga traditions in India that use the word *samādhi* the way Buddhists would use the word *nibbāna*. That *samādhi* is sometimes a word for the ultimate experience that these yogic traditions will emphasize. And in Buddhism, that's usually not the case. But it does point to this kind of very special feeling of what *samādhi* is. And so I like to think of it as *samādhi* sometimes, as a temple, a sacred temple that I enter into.

And maybe some of you don't care for that kind of metaphor. Sometimes I've thought about it as a sacred grove of trees. I've been in places in nature where I just felt like everything got quiet and peaceful and clear. And this is something inside shifts and changes in my whole demeanor because of the place. And it calls a certain kind of clarity of attention, like now I'm

really here. And I'm here with a kind of reverence.

And sometimes there's a wonderful feeling of being quite small because of the great majesty of the natural things, the natural world that's in that place. But it's entering a sacred temple. And the reason why I think this is useful when we think about *samādhi* is that when we sit down specifically to practice *samādhi*, it's helpful to reorient yourself, to spend a little bit of time preparing yourself, similar to how you prepare yourself if you were going into some kind of sacred location. And if a temple is a thing that works for you, sometimes you go to these places, you might put on clean clothes. You might clean yourself, take a shower and show up clean. You might, you know, some places you go in and you bow as you enter the temple or you touch a sacred object or you, you know, do something that kind of marks the transition going in.

Sometimes you would, you know, you really feel like you're outside in the busy hustle and bustle of the world, but inside you get quiet. Now you're ready to, for something that's not exactly you, something beyond you or bigger than you, that is found in the quiet, in the care, in the reverence. And rather than objectifying that, like, you know, this is some sacred place where a sacred being or something lives, I kind of prefer to see it that it's the very shift in the subjective nature of our experience that then allows us to feel or sense something that doesn't feel like it's part and parcel of the usual way we think of ourselves. Usual attitudes, orientations, judgments, feelings we have. So it might not be so easy to make this kind of shift in orientation, but I think it's helpful to realize when we practice *samādhi* that we are involved in a process of shifting and changing our subjective experience.

And so to the degree to which that can be a choice, to the degree to which we could prepare ourselves for that or care for that and support that. So we have kind of like a, we start the process to live a busy life, run around and do a lot of things and check a lot of websites and check all your texts and emails and social media just because you're not going to be on it for 30 minutes, 45 minutes of meditation. And you sit down and the momentum of all that greedy attention, doing things, wanting things with attention follows you. Or any attitude you have. And so to have a transition to practice *samādhi*, where we're leaving all that behind long enough that we allow for a settling, allow the whole system to become calmer or more settled, more ready to feel the deep, maybe sacred dimensions of subjective experience.

So this is very different than just sitting down and being determined, I'm going to get concentrated. There is a kind of humbleness or humility where we're preparing ourselves almost like to receive a gift. We're preparing ourselves, you know, it's almost like *samādhi* willing,

samādhi will come. We're kind of shifting something about how we are to become a vehicle, become a vessel, I guess is the word, a vessel in which to receive something that bubbles up from deep inside, something that spreads, or something that appears. Maybe there's no clear sense of whether it's inside or outside, but now we're really here to be open, to be available, to be receptive, to be a vessel for something.

So to give you some sense of this, how the Buddha presents it, for him, just as *samādhi* is a condition for liberating insight, well-being, happiness, is a condition for *samādhi*. So he's already focusing on a shift in subjective experience that's needed in order to open up to this world of *samādhi*. And so when you sit down to meditate what can you do that supports that transition? Can you give yourself more time in preparation to sit, not just rush from what you did to just sit down, but maybe always come to meditation five minutes early whenever you meditate? Maybe go into it slowly, maybe do some stretching, some settling, maybe do a little bit of walking meditation.

Maybe quietly have a cup of tea and let things settle. And then maybe sit down and just kind of be before you start to even close your eyes. Maybe look around and look at the walls, look at the floor, look at the objects where you are, look out the window, to kind of begin really feeling connected to here and now, this place, so that the momentum of the mind being concerned about other places and other times begins to fade away. And so we begin to gather ourselves to here and now, be here, to prepare ourselves for a new subjective way of being. So, still doing these introductory remarks about *samādhi*, I want to review that the first day I talked about discovery, that we really want to see and understand how we are.

And the more we can discover about how the mind, body, heart is, the more material we have for the unification, the gathering together, process we have. And then discovery involves attention. An important part of *samādhi* is to find a form of attention that has a lightness to it, that's not forceful, that's not contracted or restraining, very light, transparent, translucent, just open. And it's easy then for the mind to wander off into thoughts and get distracted. But then if we start now today to appreciate that we're entering into, we're shifting ourselves, we're entering into a new mode here.

And that preparation, that new mode, now can maybe be a vessel to hold that light attention that is going to be the gathering point or the support for a deeper, a deepening into a dimension of our life, which we often don't experience in everyday life. A dimension of our life that is healing. *Samādhi* can be quite healing. A dimension of our life which can feel sacred, and a dimension of our life that can give us a tremendous amount of wisdom and understanding.

And so with that, one more thing I'd like to suggest as we go through these weeks around *samādhi* is as we settle into it, I would encourage you to consider a time, a time where you're going to start meditating a little bit more each day than you do.

Maybe add a second meditation. And to sit twice a day at least, maybe 15 to 45 minutes. And because *samādhi* builds on a familiarity, a connectivity, builds on the residue that's left behind each time we're practicing meditation that helps it to build over time. So if that works for you.

So thank you for today and look forward to being here with you again tomorrow.

Samadhi (4) Being Deliberate

2025-01-09

So, hello and welcome to this fourth talk on *samādhi*. As follows, this is still part of the introduction to this topic of *samādhi*. More will be revealed slowly as we go along. It began with the emphasis on discovery. This is why mindfulness is invaluable: to really know oneself as well as possible, to know all the parts of oneself, so that when the work of *samādhi* begins, all that begins to be gathered together in a certain kind of way in which the inner life gets organized or oriented.

To create the attentional space, the attentional context for this gathering together, it's helpful to have a form of attention to what's happening in the present that has a lightness to it, or openness to it, or non-straining, non-forcefulness, at the same time as not being casual or lackadaisical. Yesterday, the emphasis was that *samādhi* is really a stepping away from life as it's ordinarily lived—ordinary concerns, thoughts, and activities, and even feelings—not to push anything away, but as deliberately stepping away, as, you know, as going into a shower to clean oneself, or going to the bathroom, or going to your bedroom to sleep at night. There are probably all kinds of activities where you go and you're really putting things aside. Maybe a nicer reference point for this was still very fond memories of visiting my son's preschool. We could visit any time we wanted to. It was a very wonderful, special place.

Somehow, being there when all the children were napping, that's a time when you don't want to wake up a little preschool kid. Entering into the space was to put aside everything else, to just be there quietly. It was a very clear way to be—somehow, now we're in a different place. So *samādhi* as being, entering, willingness to enter into kind of a different realm almost, and we'll talk more about this as we go along.

Today, I want to make the emphasis that if the focus is going to be on *samādhi*, it's really helpful—it's as helpful when we do mindfulness, but even more central—to sit down and do so, to meditate in a deliberate way. To be deliberate, purposeful, intentional, like now this is what I'm doing. It's all too easy to bring with us our life, our concerns, our preoccupation, the habits, the momentums of our mind, and be a little bit too casual, lackadaisical, and just kind of sit down in a casual way or a habitual way. We sit down and we're just continuing to roll along in how we're thinking and how we're feeling from before. Not to push anything away or deny any of it, but this deliberateness of now I'm going to do something different.

This is a time for this sacred space, that now is a time for this, to really be centered here. If you feel like you're abandoning your world, yourself, you know, what's going on, understand that the purpose for *samādhi* is not for its own sake, for the pleasures of *samādhi*. The purpose is, in fact, to be able to see things clearly. So it's an approach to shift the orientation of where the mind, the concerns are, temporarily, to create the conditions in the mind, the heart, the body, to be able to then later see the world more clearly.

This is different than how sometimes mindfulness is taught. Mindfulness is taught that everything is practice, everything is something to be mindful of. There's not a turning away or deliberateness and saying, now this is the time to do, just be centered in the breathing, for example. *Samādhi* is a kind of gathering inward to a particular kind of focal point or center around which we gather ourselves. Whereas mindfulness sometimes is taught as don't do that, but rather stay completely open and just know, be aware of whatever arises in your experience. This is also a very effective way of practicing, though sometimes it leads to just letting our mind roll along like it usually does.

I've known people whose idea of mindfulness is letting things be and just being aware of it, to just let their thinking think what it wants to do and just kind of casually kind of just follow along. That's not really mindfulness. If we're just kind of letting the train of associated thoughts just kind of think what it wants to think, mindfulness is not stopping that, but it's stepping away to no longer participate in that, to see it so clearly that some kind of participation and fueling of it stops. Some part of our mind becomes quiet. So mindfulness is much more of an open awareness usually. *Samādhi* is more of a centered awareness where it's a different orientation.

We'll talk more about this, but these two don't have to be opposed. They actually can be partners with each other. That's how I like to teach mindfulness, that it's partnered with *samādhi*. But for now, for these weeks, we're focusing more on just *samādhi* by itself, and the integration with mindfulness will come. For this purpose, when it's *samādhi*, understand it's not letting the mind continue as it usually is. It's really choosing to step into a different approach, a different way—it's a deliberateness.

It begins by how in meditation you enter into your meditation posture. Think of that posture as almost like a ritual of deliberateness, of purposefulness, of now I'm going to do this. Almost as a transition to go from one space to another. There are playtimes in our world where we mark the transition from one situation to another. Sometimes in certain situations there's a minute of silence to prepare people for what's coming. So this deliberateness: here I am.

As you practice meditation, you might experiment with, for you, what is a good way to bring a quality of deliberateness, purposefulness, intentionality to your meditation when you sit down. Discover how to do that so it's not a strain, it's not a stress, it's not an expectation that things now have to be different and you have to, you know, hold things at bay. Rather, a settling, a rootedness here and now. Now it's time to do this. Now is not the time to compose shopping lists, or not the time to review the conversations from yesterday. Now this is the time to do this.

Part of *samādhi* involves a clarity of purpose. The simplest way of saying that maybe is a clarity that now I'm going to center myself, root myself on something that's going to be at the center of everything. Rather than having to give—now there's a laser focus on something—it's a centering on or settling on, for example, the breathing. That's the reference point we'll use for these weeks on *samādhi*. Some people, it's another thing they center themselves on. It's loving-kindness. Loving-kindness is understood to be a *samādhi* practice. Sometimes it's a mantra. So there's a variety of things, but for now it's breathing.

This idea of centering yourself on the breath, rather than focusing on the breath, is offered as a way to appreciate that we're gathering together. We're not creating a separation with a mind that's looking and zeroing in and focusing. We're not excluding things. We're not, but we're going into having something be at the center of all things. At that center, we settle into it more and more. We relax into it. We open into it. We allow it to fill us. Everything else either gathers together to support that, or it simply falls away temporarily because it's not really needed in this centered way of living in the course of meditation.

This approach to living a deliberate life and how we are present for things, how we're rooted here and now, you might want to experiment with that through your daily life as well. There might be all kinds of situations where you just end up doing it casually as you go through the day. But what would it be like to do the things you do with a gentle, clear deliberateness? Now I'm doing this. I'm giving myself, centering myself on this. If you're washing dishes or filling the dishwasher, just center yourself and do that fully, not casually.

Cooking in the kitchen, cleaning the house, walking from your car in a parking lot to wherever you're going—store or work or something—is to do that in a deliberate way. So you're rooted here in the walking. So what happens? How is your life different if you insert an intentionality, a purposefulness, a deliberateness to really do what you're already doing, but to really do it and not to do it as if it's not really what your life is about that moment? What you're really about is the proliferation of thoughts and concerns in the mind. So may you live, may you

benefit, may you find a freedom in living deliberately. Thank you.

Samadhi (5) In The Context Of Compassion

2025-01-10

Thank you. This is the fifth talk, introductory talk, to the topic of *samādhi*. And this experience, the dedication, the practice of *samādhi* lies at the heart of Buddhist meditation practice. And it's integral to both the development of deep concentration and to the development of mindfulness itself, *vipassanā* itself. Mindfulness and *vipassanā* are not the same thing. Mindfulness is a practice, and *vipassanā* is a consequence of that practice.

The word *vipassanā* refers to the deep insights, liberating insights that can come when the practice of mindfulness is co-joined, is united with a strong, stable, steady, focused, still attention, when it's combined with *samādhi*. So, in the way the Buddha taught *samādhi*, there's always preparation for it. There's not a direct frontal assault on *samādhi*. And not a few people, maybe highly idealistic, will learn about meditation, learn about *samādhi*, and say, by golly, I'm going to do this.

There's a story of a fable of a very capable young man who was successful at school, successful in sports, successful in many different areas of life, very capable, who for some reason decides to address his suffering by going to a monastery to practice. He asks the abbot or abbess, you know, explains to the abbess, you know, I'm quite dedicated, I learn quickly, I'm skilled in many things, and I can really apply myself. I have a dedication, I have discipline, and if I come to the monastery to live here to practice, how long will it take to become enlightened? And the abbess says, well, probably 10 years. And that seems pretty long for him. And he says, no, you don't understand. I can really give myself wholeheartedly to it and apply all of myself to this and really do it full time. And how long will it take if all my capacities are engaged? And she said, oh, in that case, it'll take 20 years.

So to have the wrong attitude of willfulness with *samādhi*, which is not uncommon for people, is not the preparation that's needed. And so this week has been about some of the things that we can do to prepare ourselves. And they're all kind of set together, and they kind of support each other, these five qualities. And so they don't necessarily have to be in order. But the first that we gave was discovery. That this is why mindfulness is so helpful. That it's so invaluable, necessary for *samādhi* to know yourself well.

I've known people who've practiced concentration. Maybe sometimes not even practicing it. I've known people as young children who've had very, very difficult lives, maybe with a

lot of suffering, maybe a lot of violence. And only the relief they could find was by somehow separating themselves, detaching, disassociating themselves from their ordinary life, their ordinary mind, and had the ability to go into very deep states of concentration. And it gave them safety. It gave them a place to go that was away from all the challenges of their ordinary daily life, sometimes at home.

But they had never really opened up to really experience and be associated with themselves, be connected and healed what was there. And these kind of people who have this deep, quick ability to concentrate, it is often a sign that they don't know themselves very well. And for *samādhi*, not just concentration, *samādhi* to really be effective, the idea is that it needs to include everything. And so discovering who we are, knowing who we are, and as we practice, new things will appear about ourselves, and to welcome that and say, oh, this too needs to be included. This too needs to be known.

The second thing I talked about was the very awareness, the attention that discovers and is present for things, is to experiment so that attention, there's no strain in it. There's no forcefulness in it or willfulness to it. That there has a lightness to it. That there's a feeling that attention is open, maybe receptive, maybe accepting, maybe available and non-contentious, that there's a light touch. And of course that light touch, lightness of attention, makes it easier for thoughts to hijack attention and the mind to wander away.

And so the art of meditation practice is how to have a deliberateness and attention and intentness for being attentive without having strain. And that takes a while to learn. And one of the ways to learn it is to understand that we are, when we're doing *samādhi* practice, we are not consciously bringing all of our life with us. Even though we want to include all of who we are in it, there's a *samādhi* practice is to enter into a sacred space, a special time where you might go into a sacred place in nature, a place, a grove of trees where things are really peaceful and still, meaningful. It feels like you can really relax and be whole and feel like you belong now to the world. There's a quiet and peacefulness. And you've left the world behind. But in that peacefulness, all of you can be there that's still there.

And so you can feel yourself and know yourself in a deeper and fuller way than if you bring with you all your preoccupations, concerns, desires, fears into *samādhi*. So to have this light touch that doesn't wander off into thought, there has to be an appreciation that this is a distinct time and place. And to be here in a different kind of sacred environment that is meditation. And to be somewhat deliberate about that. So some people will bow, some people will light a candle, light incense. Some people will put on a shawl, meditation shawl, or some

people have robes. Some people close the door or lower the light or do something. Or some people like to meditate outdoors and go someplace outdoors under a tree. Do something that's intentional that feels like now I'm going into a different time and place.

It's very valuable to go meditate in the same place every day. So the association with the place has to do with meditation. So that deliberateness, that association, that familiarity kicks in when you're there. And then today, to have compassion, care, love. And the whole family of caregiving emotions that we have is a palette that we can choose from. Some people experience love in different ways. Some people, compassion is what's close at hand. Some people, it's friendliness and kindness. Some people, it's a very simple feeling of care that maybe wouldn't be called love, but has a gentleness and a tenderness to it or a warmth to it. Some people, it is just a feeling of warmth, loving warmth.

All of them, what they have in common is care, is appreciation, is a valuing and a respect for the objects of that love, that care. And in *samādhi* practice, that can be for ourselves. And to sit and create an atmosphere and part of the intentionality, deliberateness of entering into the world of *samādhi* that supports the lightness of awareness is to somehow infuse or connect that lightness of attention with something that's tender and soft and warm that feels like maybe dropping into a warm bath or on a cold day sitting in front of a warm fire with a blanket over you. Something that kind of, and there might be other examples rather than mine, that helps you feel like this is a special time for care, for love, for warmth.

So that when we're practicing *samādhi*, there's not a lot of greed and force. There's not a lot of disappointment and discouragement that it's not going well, like we're not getting concentrated. To get concentrated with *samādhi* can happen without concentrating in the normal kind of way. There can be a settling into a center rather than focusing on a central point. And sometimes the movement towards *samādhi* is best approached kind of from the sides or from the back and not this frontal kind of this is what I'm going to do now and be determined. Some people that works for very well. But what I'm trying to emphasize this week is to deliberately and if this idea works for you, ritualistically, like a ritual with a ritual to create the conditions to focus on putting them into place.

And for today the last one is to have compassion as part of it and that can be the overall motivation for *samādhi* practice. That *samādhi* practice as I've been saying is not for its own sake but really the purpose the Buddha offered *samādhi* is so that we can see things as they are clearly with care, with love, with compassion, so we can become free of our suffering, so that we can enter the world, live this world, free of suffering, free of clinging, free of distress,

free of anxiety. We can live stable, strong, settled, peaceful, with a clarity of purpose, that we can meet the suffering of the world. We can live a meaningful life.

So the purpose of *samādhi* points back to how useful it is to prepare for *samādhi*. If the purpose of *samādhi* is to be free of suffering and to awaken a care for the world, then the preparation for it is to begin with care, to begin with compassion as a context for doing this practice. So thank you very much, and we'll continue this for a number of weeks that I'm here. And so next week I'll be back and we'll continue. Thank you.

Samadhi (6) Recognizing Limitation of Desires and Aversions

2025-01-13

So, hello on this Monday morning, where we begin the second week on the theme of *samādhi*. And last week was more the preparation for it, and this week is still preparation. Sometimes I think of the Buddhist practice, meditation practice especially, as being kind of a pyramid where the preparation for meditation, or this beginning meditation, is creating the very thick foundation for the pyramid. The pyramid represents how much time we spend on different things in meditation. We spend most of the time on setting the foundation. And so in a sense, we're all beginners.

We spend a lot of time with beginning practice. And then as we settle in, and the mindfulness gets stronger and the concentration gets more unified, then we kind of slowly go at higher levels of the pyramid until we maybe occasionally get to near the top. But that's where we spend very little time. Because if you spend too much time on the top of the pyramid, it's a little bit like turning the pyramid upside down and have it standing at the point, and it's not going to be stable then. It's going to want to come fall, and then it'll create a new foundation once there's a wide base again.

So in the teachings of the Buddha, the preparation for *samādhi*, the proximate preparation for it, is to settle the hindrances. These are five states of mind that inhibit or block or hinder the settling and the unification of the whole self into this present moment. Somehow learning to settle these or not be caught in the hindrances so they hinder, is a big part of being able to go into *samādhi*. The five hindrances, I want to just be very simple. I've taught them before. Some of you know them well.

I want to just give a simple label for them. The first hindrance is to be hindered by desires. The second is to be hindered by aversion. The third is to be hindered by a sinking amount of energy, just kind of like a fading, like a draining away of energy or freezing of it. The fourth is to be over-activated with too much energy in something. The fifth is to be confused.

So I'll talk more about these, but for today I want to focus on these first two. Because to have a better appreciation about why the hindrances interfere with *samādhi*, you have to appreciate and be able to recognize how each of these hindrances generally puts us into the world of our thinking. This is particular with desire and aversion. There's something that we

want. There's something we don't want. We want to get away from or push away.

So there has to be a cognitive concern of the mind, a story, an idea, thoughts, an imagination. Sitting and meditating with the eyes closed, we're imagining somehow what it is we want. So we've gone up into the head, into our thoughts, ideas, imaginations, images that we create, that we're swimming in and caught in when there's a strong desire or strong aversion. Also as we get pulled into strong desire and strong aversion, there's not just the cognitive part of it, but there's also a motivational side. We get pulled into the motivation behind it. There can also be an emotional side to it that sweeps us into the emotionality or the authority, the sense of urgency or power, strength of the desire, of the aversion.

This being pulled into this world, that little complex of things associated with desire and aversion, then it limits the wholeness of attention. It limits how we can be what we're aware of. Caught in a strong desire, and we can hardly notice anything else around us but the object of our desire. Caught in strong hatred, and we notice nothing really except for the object of our hatred. So the attention is now radically limited. The Buddha talked about this, that greed and aversion is a limitation.

We put ourselves under severe limitations the stronger those are. One of the ways to feel those limitations is that we're no longer in touch with the wholeness of who we are. We're not really aware of the greater capacities for feeling, for emotions, for sensations, for embodiment, when we're caught in the grip of these strong things. So it's possible to feel, when we get caught in the grip of desire or aversion, how it maybe for some of us pulls us into our head, pulls us into our thoughts. It maybe creates an activated energy in the body that now focuses the energy of the body, the activation of the body in a particular area at the expense of really feeling settled or complete or in the fullness of the body. What we're looking for in *samādhi* is a capacity to settle into the whole body, to settle down, be rooted and grounded here.

The hindrances are the very thing that gets us ungrounded. They can be very compelling, and they can be very even desirous to have them because of the strength of motivation, the sense of energy and aliveness and authority they have, they almost can give a life meaning and purpose that can feel really good to have. Like, now I know what to do is to hate these people or this thing. But it's at a tremendous expense of alienation from oneself, being more and more disconnected to who we are. *Samādhi* is to be connected. *Samādhi* is to be the opposite of alienated from ourselves, but to be deeply connected at home here in ourselves.

So, rather than being at war with the hindrances and feel like they're bad to have, a good

preparation for *samādhi* is to remember everything is to be included, everything has a place. Rather than being caught in that desire and aversion, see it clearly and recognize the effect it has on you. Recognize how it limits you, how it alienates you from parts of yourself. Recognize how it puts you into a very narrow domain of awareness, of cognition, of concern, and so much is being left out. You kind of have blinders on almost. As you see the limitations of this, that is the beginning of opening up to something wider.

Then you might be easier to make room for a settling, to feel that settling place. As we breathe, maybe breathe with the hindrances, but breathe from that subtle place. Let the subtle place receive the energy, the activation, the tension of desire and aversion. Remember that the process of *samādhi*, especially in the beginning, has a lot to do with the settling. And the settling point. Each of you will have a different settling point, grounding point, place of rooted within, in the center of your body perhaps, and whatever that might be for you.

In Zen, you're taught to meditate with your hands, one hand on top of the other, the thumbs touching like this. Sometimes the instructions is not to put your mind in your *hara*, in your belly, but let your heart rest in the curve of your hands, the palm of your hands. That becomes a settling point. For some people, it's the sitting bones against their cushion, the contact point. Some people, it's something deep in the belly. Some people, it's in the area of the solar plexus or maybe in the heart. Some people, it's the whole body is the grounding place.

But when you feel settled, when something goes, ah, you relax. You've been busy and activated and preoccupied, maybe tense or something. Then finally you can stop and something releases and lets go. Where does that, is there some place? The deeper place of subtleness might feel a little bit amorphous, might not be as so clear as the clarity of the shoulders relaxing. But see if you can start finding a place inside that is the gathering place, the settling place.

Be careful with it. Don't focus on it directly. Don't zero in on it, laser focus on it. Almost like, have more like a peripheral attention to it. A gentle, soft attention to it. As if that is what allows it to kind of smile. Allows it to grow. Allows it to feel safe.

So, practicing with the hindrances is an invaluable part of this foundation, the foundational part of the pyramid that we're building. If you have, maybe you might have occasionally today, some of the hindrances of desire and aversion, don't see them exactly as unfortunate and be aversive to them. See them as, oh, this is an opportunity now to practice with the foundational elements of *samādhi*. As I've said, one of the key things to do is to notice how these hindrances now for today aversion and desire, how they limit you, how they narrow the

focus, the attention, that's where attention can go, how they contract you, how they keep you caught, and how so much more of who you are, all your capacities as a human being, many of them are left out now and left behind. So is your way in which you're aware of your environment.

It's very significant to see the effect of the hindrances and know them well. This is what's going to help the whole complex of the hindrances to settle and to return, so you can return to the settled point, the settling place, the grounding place within. So today, please notice when you get caught, and the language is caught, in desire and aversion, and notice how it limits you. If you just do that in the course of the day, you're doing really well, and it really supports this laying down the foundation for where we're going in this course on *samādhī*.

So thank you very much, and I look forward to tomorrow with you. Thank you.

Samadhi (7) Studying The Quality Of The Mind

2025-01-14

So, hello and welcome to this, now the seventh talk on the *Samādhi* series. A lot of our success in being able to cultivate *samādhi*, the unified state of being, has a lot to do with how well we know ourselves. If we know ourselves well, entering into these states of concentration and absorption doesn't have to be an act of will. It doesn't have to be something that we force ourselves into or strain to enter into. Rather, it's a profound settling in. It's a profound kind of entering into a new mode of being.

But it really requires understanding ourselves well. One of the things to understand is what happens to our mind, our thinking mind, when we get distracted or pulled into obsessive thinking. I began this week with a discussion about the first two hindrances, desire and aversion. Today I'll continue with that, with the third and fourth hindrances, which are usually called sloth and torpor as the third, and restlessness and remorse, or restlessness and agitation, worry, as the fourth. What all these hindrances have in common, and partly why they're so hindering for us, is they involve mental preoccupation. They involve thinking which maybe borders on being obsessive, that we get pulled into the world of rumination, daydreaming, commentary, and story making.

In the strength of this thinking, we get absorbed in the content of the thought and we don't see, we don't even see what's happening, we don't even know we're thinking. One of the consequences is that we're thinking about things which are not that wholesome or healthy for us to be thinking. There are certainly healthy ways of having desire and thinking about what we want, but as a hindrance there's an obsessive quality. Often times we're thinking in ways and with attitudes that are not healthy, that are full of maybe greed or strain or conceit or aversion or hatred. It's the power of these unwholesome ways that gives strength to our preoccupation to be lost in thought or keep getting pulled into it. Even if we're not lost in it, we know we're doing it, they're compulsive and we can't quite know how to stop them, and it can be quite discouraging.

The force of these kinds of thinking is very significant because they have a conditioning effect. There's a feedback loop when we're thinking in ways that are unwholesome. That creates more unwholesomeness within us. It makes us feel kind of lousy or not so good. This is particularly true with the third and fourth hindrances. The third is anything that kind of drains us, that depletes us, so the energy is not there in a full way.

Sometimes there's a numbing effect that goes on by how we think or what we're concerned with. Sometimes there's a shutting down. Sometimes there's a freezing, like a flight or freeze. There's a freezing because things are so difficult for us. Sometimes there's a profound discouragement or a shutting down, going to sleep because we're resisting something or overwhelmed. Those can come with some kind of attitudes or thinking or beliefs that are operating maybe even subliminally, that we're pulled into and we don't even realize how much they've affected us.

With agitation and remorse and worry, regrets, there too, there is something we're thinking about. We're thinking about something that agitates us. We're energized. We're activated in a way that it doesn't really feel pleasant. It feels like agitation, restless. So we're thinking about something. Or remorse or regrets or worry. All have to do with things we're thinking about. So the thinking mind is activated.

So in both of these third and fourth hindrances, it's certainly possible to feel the effect that being in those hindrances have on the body. But more important for this, what I'm going to talk about today, is the effect it has on the mind, the effect it has on being aware. When we're caught in thoughts, there's usually physical sensations. If you think a lot, there are physical sensations that come along with the thinking. There can be a location for thinking that is contracted or tight or has pressure. There is a narrowing of attention to a small domain of the mind.

There is tightness, there is maybe, maybe I said pressure, and maybe some people have reported when they get caught in the world that it's almost like the light went out, things got dark, and when they wake up, it's like the light comes back on. So what effect does it have on the mind? What does it have to have on the awareness? Can you feel how there's a compulsion in it? Maybe even a sense that we're wearing blinders and we only see what we're concerned with. We don't see the bigger picture. We don't see the fullness, the wholeness of what's going on.

It's like if we have aversion with someone else, we don't see their goodness. If we are discouraged by something, then we shut down, we get depleted, then we don't feel that we don't have the wherewithal to see where is the choice, where is the inspiration, where can we make a difference in a way that does make it better, even if we can't get what we want or something is limiting us dramatically. We don't have to be defined by it. So how is it affecting the mind? The reason why this is important for *samādhi* is that *samādhi* is a healing of the mind, so it's not fragmented, so it's not limited.

We're not caught in a small little domain. The hindrances have a way of limiting the mind, narrowing the mind, blocking the mind, not allowing the fullness of the mind to be there. For *samādhi* to occur, the mind gets reorganized so it's not fragmented or it's not narrow, it's not limited. So first we have to see the effect that our thinking, the hindrances have on the mind to appreciate how limited it has become, how fragmented it's become, how small it's become or contracted it's become or maybe a sense of weight and heaviness that feels like a burden on the mind. It might be discouraging to feel these qualities of the mind that can be there when we're caught in the hindrances or caught in thought.

But what we're doing here is discovering how the mind is like so that the ways in which awareness can support us to heal it, to knit it back together again, to bring us back into the wholeness of the mind, where all the capacities of the mind can work in a kind of homeostasis or work together for the same purpose. So part of the task for *samādhi* is become a mind whisperer, to become someone who begins to sense and feel and know and recognize the quality of the mind, not just what you're thinking about. In fact, what you're thinking about might be important, but for you, what's more important is the quality of the mind, is the aliveness of the mind, the goodness of the mind. With sloth and torpor, the quality of the mind kind of becomes deflated. With agitation and worry, the quality of the mind gets agitated and gets over-activated. Both of them are not so useful for us.

But if we can see that, and know how the mind has shifted under the force of these two states, that's the beginning of being able to open up or to allow something to settle. The settling of the mind, or the calming of the mind, or the opening of the mind, or the expanding of the mind. Over time, for meditators, there's all this rich world of the mind that we begin to sense and feel that's so much greater than what we are thinking about. We begin to appreciate that there's more. The mind is bigger, awareness is bigger than any of the particular things we're focusing on. So if we're agitated, chances are there's something, it might be subconscious, something that worries us or concerns us or we're troubled by.

Can we feel that sense of agitation, the troubling of the mind? Can we care for it? Can we hold it in the simple rhythm of breathing? A lot of what *samādhi* is about, and mindfulness itself, is not about fixing things. It's not about judging things, but rather it's about healing things, settling things. In meditation, we don't solve anything. We dissolve our problems. Problems are not solved, they're dissolved in the larger scope of intelligence that is not even personal when the mind is full and the mind is unified and whole.

So the part that I'm hoping that you'll understand from this talk the most is the value of be-

coming familiar with the quality of your mind, the characteristics of your mind, in different situations that you're in, during different mental activities. In particular, how some mental activities, some forms of thinking, some forms of wanting and not wanting, some forms of discouragement, and some forms of worry, that they create a particular kind of mind that is much more limited. The full capacity of the mind is not really available. To start feeling and sensing what this is like in preparation for how *samādhi* will help this to settle, help this to quiet, to calm, and the mind becomes whole or unified.

So to the degree to which you might understand what I've said today, I'd encourage you during this next period until the next 24 hours when you're awake, that you might take time through the day, maybe even put a timer on that goes off every 15 minutes or 30 minutes or something. Then to remind you, what's the quality of the mind? How is the thinking I'm involved in, the activity I'm doing, how has this affected the quality of the mind? In what way has the mind now become limited and narrow and tight? Is it possible to open it again? So, thank you very much.

And as I've said now a few times, we're going to go through, we're laying down a slow foundation for *samādhi*. We're going to go over these weeks into some of the deeper states of *samādhi*. But it's really important to lay the foundation for it in a slow, maybe systematic way, so that you're getting more and more familiar with the territory. So may you study your mind today. Thank you.

Samādhi (8) Learning From Tension

2025-01-15

So, hello and welcome to this Wednesday morning talk, third talk of the week, and the eighth talk of this series on *samādhi*, which will go on for some time. In laying down the foundations for *samādhi* and effective *samādhi*, what needs to be in place first. I'm emphasizing how we divide ourselves, limit ourselves, lose the sense of our wholeness, the fullness of all of our capacities. Sometimes if we really want something that our eyes, if it's something we want, we might be focusing only on what we can see. If we want some particular object, we don't see anything else. We're just kind of focusing on what is that thing that we want.

And so the full capacity of hearing and smelling and sensing and taking in the wider world is limited by the strength of desire. Now, of course, there's nothing inherently wrong with that. From time to time it's helpful and important to do that, to be kind of focused. But we get stuck that way. And people get stuck for a lifetime. Sometimes strong desires, strong aversions, strong fears, strong pulling away, closing up, closing our hearts, avoiding what's really difficult in us, difficult unresolved emotions, staying in our head and our thoughts, staying focused on others rather than ourselves, or staying so focused on ourselves that we're not aware for others.

This kind of partial attention, being selecting a piece of the whole to be caught in or to separate from, is what gets in the way of a healthy *samādhi*. And a healthy *samādhi* is a state of being that's going to open up to all of who we are. In a sense, *samādhi* is what knits together, heals it all, so it could all be together in some kind of wider whole of attention. The Buddha uses a lot for *samādhi* metaphors, similes, having to do with water, and sometimes flowing water, sometimes very still water, sometimes a very clear pool of water. Especially lakes, pools of water. And something about being in *samādhi* can feel like different forms of lakes.

Lakes with a nice current in it. Lakes that are very still. Lakes that are very clear. And what all these lakes have in common is there's no mud. There's no algae that covers it. There is no, nothing is frozen. There's no dams that are blocking anything. It's just a natural, there's a water, a natural basin just being there.

And so it's possible to go down to the lake and pull out a bucket of water and walk around and tell people, this is the lake. This is my lake. I'm having the lake. But the bucket of water is

just a bucket of water. And now we've left the lake behind, taking a piece of the whole. And so this movement towards dividing ourselves up, being separated from the whole, often comes along with tension.

Some kind of clinging, some kind of tightening in our muscles, in our hearts, in our minds. Some kind of closing down, some kind of contraction, constriction, some kind of craving. And then this movement of tightening that goes on one way or the other is something that we want to become aware of and aware of the unnecessary cost that comes with it. Now, temporary tightening, doing something that needs to be done, that has to be taken care of, of course is fine. It's when we get stuck in it that is the problem. And so when we sit down to meditate, that's the time where we try to set up situations where it's safe enough, simple enough, and nothing needs to happen much, that it's okay for the tensions and the tightening that are built to relax and to soften.

And to learn from that, it's profound to become aware of tensions. Because one way or the other, all that keeps us from being fully liberated, fully awakened, is something which is being held tight, something which is contracted, something which is tense, and something which is closed or blocked off. Again, in the body, in the heart, in the mind. And the progressive softening of that, relaxing of it, sometimes they use the word letting go, releasing, liberation. Liberation is a very glorified and powerful and impactful form of relaxing. And so to begin becoming wise about the distinction between relaxing on one hand and tightening on the other, that teaches us so much.

And we can question, is it necessary to stay tight? Is this situation necessary? Is there another way of being? So I've been a little bit going through the five hindrances these first few days, and the fifth hindrance is doubt or uncertainty. And we can have doubt about many different things. And to think that this word for doubt here in the hindrance is for any kind of doubt we might have, actually can limit us from the full potential of becoming free.

So for example, if I need gasoline for my car, and I see that up ahead and opposite side of the streets are two gas stations that I've been to both of them before. But I'm uncertain, which one do I go to? Well, look, they have both the same gas price today. But one of them has clean bathrooms. But the other one has good coffee. But one of them has a very clean, keep their machine and their nozzles really clean, so I feel comfortable grabbing it with my hand. But the other one has it kind of dirty but the dirty one the clean one I have to make it a little bit dangerous U-turn to go to and the other one I can just pull into quite easily but there's a lot of people and a little line of cars in the one that's easy to get to but the other one after all

this is a little bit dangerous to go to so what do I do? And so I'm kind of stuck and so I just stand in the intersection light turns green, it turns red, green again. I'm just sitting there in my car, kind of, what do I do? I'm uncertain. I have doubts. I'm filled with doubts.

That's not that kind of doubt we're talking about in the Dharma. In the same situation, there's no doubt about where to bring my attention. The attention should go in how I've now gotten tense, how I've gotten contracted and frozen in some kind of way. And that is where things are unwholesome. That's where life is becoming deadening. And to soften that, relax. Maybe it's not so important. Maybe the decision of where to go to gas, gasoline, maybe what I should do if I'm relaxed and open and don't allow myself to tense up around this, maybe I'll see when the light turns green that I go and if I need to kind of wonder what to do, let me just pull over in a parking spot.

And I have better things to do after all. I had a nice meditation this morning and still I'm feeling the resonance of that still in my body. And now I'm getting tense around this gas station question. I'm better off coming back into the calm of my meditation. Let me go to the park over there. I have a lot of time today. Let me just sit there for five minutes. Let me sit and just forget about the whole dilemma of gas stations, and let me kind of, I'm better off staying close to my relaxed state. I have no doubt, I have no uncertainty that this more relaxed, open, available state is a healthier place to be. I still don't know which gas station to go to, but now at least, it doesn't matter that much anymore, because what matters is that I've returned to a healthy way of being.

And so when we're talking about the hindrances of doubt, it's not necessarily, we can have thoughts about a lot of different things, but we have no doubt that it's useful to stay relaxed, not get frozen and caught. And what we want to do as we prepare to go into *samādhi*, we want to get ready by becoming connoisseurs, experts, on recognizing all the ways in which we unnecessarily get tense, unnecessarily tighten, and how we can do one of two things. Either relax the tension in the body, heart, and mind, or if we can't easily relax it, open up around it, soften around it, recognize it's happening, where the recognition is very different than being swept into the tension and the concerns and the preoccupation. And this beginning to kind of open up and relax and soften around tension and learning to see that distinction between all the variety of tension, which is every part of the suffering we're trying to overcome in Buddhism is always suffering that has some kind of tension in it, some kind of stress in it. And we want to really be able to see that and do that.

And as we begin seeing it, we'll slowly begin to learn how to open up more widely. And maybe

not so wide before we start doing the *samādhi* part of this course, but then we're prepared to receive the opening, to allow the opening into the whole lake of our being that *samādhi* is. We're not blocking it. We understand the dynamics. We understand how we're holding ourselves back. And we can maybe then allow it to soften and open up.

So for the next 24 hours, the next week, the next month, the next lifetime, make it the best study you can of your own experience of tension and relaxation. And make it a real study. You can journal about it. You can go for walks with friends and talk about the experience and what you're learning. Really kind of try to sensitize yourself so that this is something you're really focusing on. And as I said yesterday, you might want to put a timer on some kind of clock.

And maybe in some kind of reasonable interval, every 30 minutes maybe or something, it could be sooner, it could be longer, an alarm goes off to remind you to check in. Where am I tense? What tension am I holding here? So that you really keep it on the forefront, this exercise for the next while. It'll be invaluable when we eventually get to *samādhi*. So thank you very much. And as usual, I'm very much looking forward to continue tomorrow morning.

Samadhi (9) Recognizing Self-Made Limitations

2025-01-15

Hello to this Thursday talk and the ninth talk in the *Samādhī* series. In the last three talks, I kind of focused on the hindrances. One of the purposes of those talks was to help you see in yourself the ways in which you limit yourself through being caught in the hindrances. The hindrances involve some kind of thinking, some kind of projected concepts, ideas onto the world, onto others, onto ourselves. Some kind of being caught in preoccupation. And in doing so, we in some degree or other lose touch with ourselves.

Of course, people might not feel that or think that because they think they are their thinking. They are their aversion. They are their desire. And so there's no problem. They're really in touch with themselves. They know exactly what they want.

They know exactly what they don't want. They are their fear. And so, you know, that's who I am. But if we go deeper in, we can feel how these hindrances—being caught in the thoughts and the ideas of desire, aversion, fear, doubt, regrets—are a kind of limited world. We narrow the focus to those preoccupations. And the important thing to understand as we go into *samādhī* is that we become partial.

We become fragmented. We become divided. We become a limited part of the whole of who we are. And *samādhī* is a process of becoming whole. The classic language of that is unification, gathering together all the parts of ourselves so they can be working and connected in a harmonious way together. And so today and tomorrow, I want to talk a little bit about how the process of identification does the same thing.

And classically, that's the steps that Buddha takes to go into this deeper, deeper quality of being. He first talks about overcoming the hindrances. And when those have settled down enough, then the next stage is something even deeper that still involves some kind of concepts, ideas, projections, some kind of limiting ourselves. But now it's deeper, and sometimes we don't even see it as a kind of thinking, a concept. And that is the ways in which we identify ourselves, who we are. And there are different ways that we establish this is who I am, at least in the moment.

That we kind of have a, in doing so, we limit ourselves, we shortchange ourselves. We're not available to the whole and fullness of who we are. So you know this morning I brushed my teeth and um and if I had thought wow Gil you are like really skilled at brushing your teeth

you're like a really good uh toothbrusher and uh maybe the world has never seen someone so good at brushing teeth and and I just really know how to zero in on the different teeth, get them really clean. Boy, am I a good, and I'm, you know, this is so important that I'm going to have to come down to IMC this morning and really let all the people on YouTube know, like, this is like, that's really, it's an essential element of who I am, a toothbrusher, how good I am. And you really need to see that and understand that to appreciate who I am and to affirm and confirm my very being as a toothbrush-er.

Well, it's ridiculous, and I apologize to talk in such a silly way, but it's intentional to be focused on this simple identity of being a toothbrush-er. I kind of lose touch with a lot of things. I lose touch with maybe all of you. I lose touch with a sense of the world and the wider sense of who I am. I lose touch with the fact that at this moment, I'm not brushing my teeth. And I have more important things to do at this moment, to sit here with you and try to share the Dharma.

And to share it in a way that I feel connected to myself, to my body, to the very sensibility inside, the quality of inner life that I've learned through Dharma practice. And so that can be that in many ways. Some people get very identified with their physical appearance. And that becomes the way they limit themselves, who they are. And of course, if you ask them and say, are you your hair? They don't really say no. Of course not.

But functionally, people can be, that's how they define themselves, their sense of well-being and how they want to be seen by others can be through a physical appearance. Some people identify themselves very much by their comfort, how pleasant and unpleasant, how comfortable and uncomfortable things are. And it's a crime against humanity to be uncomfortable, and we have to fix it, because that's who we are. Some people very strongly identify with their values, their ideas, their concepts, their judgments that they have. And some people identify with their stories and their fantasies of the future, their stories of the past. And some people identify with this kind of quality of just M-ness or this quality of consciousness or cognition, the one who knows.

And in the early Buddhist tradition, each of those ways of identifying yourself has the risk of sacrificing the whole. And it's not necessary to be locked in and be defined only by this way and then live through that way. And, well, I don't want to convince you this way. The reason to talk about this is the degree to which you understand it. The idea is to learn to see and recognize in yourself how you're living in a truncated way. How you're, by being preoccupied or caught in some identity, that now you're left out a lot of who you are.

And that's the discovery process that prepares us for *samādhi*, to realize the limitations we put ourselves under. Because if we try to develop *samādhi* while we're in those limitations of identifying ourselves in a certain way, we actually stand in the way of *samādhi*. So, for example, if we identify ourselves as a poor meditator, and that just, even if there might be some truth to that in some kind of way, it doesn't matter. If we identify ourselves that way and stay living that identity, hold it on like a badge or hold it on like a coat, then we're limiting ourselves from this moment, the fullness of now. We don't need to live through the lens of being a bad meditator or a good meditator. We don't need to live moment by moment, all the time, through the lens of being a victim or being someone who's ill or someone who has certain challenges.

We want to respect everything about ourselves. Everything. So it's not like pushing any of this away. But the gift of *samādhi* is to learn that we don't have to limit ourselves by any of this. And so the task for today is not to break free of that, not to be different than who you are, but can you begin feeling your subjective experience in such a way that you can see that you're living in a partial view. A partial view of your direct experience.

Partial view of yourself in your direct experience. That you're prioritizing certain things over other things. That you think some things are more important. And of course, in the moment, there are things that are more important than other things. And so to be fluid and move between that, of course, that's the way to go. But to not carry something with us and keep ourselves limited and boxed in to one different mode.

The Buddha, he had an orientation to identify people by what they're doing in the moment. And that's enough. I'll end with a short sense story.

There were two Buddhist practitioners who are talking about their respective meditation teachers. And so the first one talked about all the miracles that their teacher could do. They could fly through the air, walk on water, see through walls, do all kinds of kind of disappear, reappear in different places, all kinds of amazing things, supernatural things. And then the other one who was a Zen student, the first one was not a Zen student, some other form of Buddhism, but the Zen student said, oh, well, my master, when she walks, she just walks. When she eats, she just eats. When she cleans, she just cleans. And the first one said, oh, you have a great master. Oh, and bow down deeply.

This idea of just being what you're doing and enter into that with your whole being. That is how you can be. Identify yourself in the moment. And if you're sweeping, you're the sweeper.

Be that fully, with the wholeness of who you are, not to limit yourself by past, future ideas, so that when I'm sitting here with you giving a Dharma talk, let me be here fully for this, unconcerned in this moment, what a great toothbrusher I am.

That would limit it. That was not relevant in this moment. So may you not limit yourself. And if you do, great. That's what you want to see happen because the task for the next 24 hours is to become an expert, really skilled, really attuned to noticing what it's like to be limiting yourself to the objectification, to the partiality, to a particular preoccupation which doesn't allow you to be fully here for what you're doing.

Learning that, don't overlook that. Don't feel like you have to be anywhere else. Don't feel like you have to be whole. The task here is to understand how you limit yourself. How you limit yourself maybe with identity. So, thank you very much. And continue tomorrow.

Samadhi (10) Easeful Thinking, Easeful Awareness

2025-01-17

Hello and welcome to this tenth talk on *samādhi*, putting down the foundations for what is needed to really have a useful form of concentration in meditation. So we're learning how our minds work, how our thoughts, our attention works, so that we can use it in a useful way. To not understand ourselves and try to get concentrated sometimes doesn't work. We override ourselves, or the concentration comes with a lot of tension and force.

And one of the things I've been emphasizing this week is that the ways in which our thinking, the ways in which desire and aversions, and the ways in which identity, how we identify ourselves, can be divisive in ourselves. How it can create divisions, fragmentations, how it contributes to not being fully in touch with ourselves. Sometimes even a disassociation or disconnection from ourselves. And because to try to develop *samādhi* while being disconnected is going to be much harder. It's through being connected. *Samādhi* is a gathering together.

It's a collectedness. Everything collected together. Collectedness of mind and body. And so we have to kind of understand how we do the opposite. And then to understand how to use the mind, how to use the attention, so that that attention doesn't further the division, the divide, that attention actually begins to heal it.

So to use attention like a laser focus in a fixed way, in a determined way, to blast through something or blast into concentration, that actually creates more separation. And so there's some kind of way of being relaxed and soft and welcoming, to have an attention that begins opening to the whole, not forcing ourselves into the present. So I want to use an analogy that maybe points to something important. That if I find myself maybe afraid, and the manifestation of that fear is that I hold my hands in tight fists. And I've just been doing that for so long. I never really open my hand.

If I'm going to pick something up, I have to hold my two fists together and grab it somehow. And so all I'm thinking about is, you know, all I know about my hand is it's fisted. And I start being concerned about, am I fisted in the proper way? You know, what's the right way to have a fist? Is my thumb supposed to be inside or outside? What do people think of my fist?

Do I have a nice, handsome fist? Or is this something that's embarrassing as a human being to have this kind of fist? Maybe I'm supposed to tighten up harder with a fist. Or maybe I'm

supposed to be a Buddhist, so a good Buddhist has a relaxed fist, a useful fist. All I know is fist. And then I come across some wise teacher who tells me, Gil, you might try relaxing your hand fully, pry your fingers apart and let your full hand relax.

And then I get disoriented. But, but, but, but I'm, I'm my fist. That's who I am. What am I going to do? There's no fist anymore. The fist disappeared. What did you do to my fist? And eventually I discover, oh, how nice it is. The absence of the fist is really nice. I haven't betrayed the fist by, by relaxing.

I've just stopped doing something unnecessary. And if I ever need to fist again, I can do it. I know how, but it's so nice not to have it. So in the same way, the ways in which we cling, the compulsions of the mind, the pressure and tightness and the force behind which we think, want, have aversion, it's possible to feel the sensations of that. And sometimes when people have a sense of I am, just M-ness, what they're identifying is that fistedness of the mind, the tightness in the center of our thinking.

And thinking does not have to have any pressure associated with it. Thinking does not have to have any tightness or thinking doesn't have to be fisted in any kind of way. But if that's what we're used to and that's what we think thinking is, it's inconceivable that we would relax that thinking muscle. And we feel like we have to go along with it. It's who I am, after all. And so the very act of identification, holding on tightly to identities, it isn't the identity that's necessarily the problem. It's how we hold on to it, the compulsion, the pressure behind it.

The thinking isn't necessarily the problem. It's the compulsion and pressure, the clinging, the force behind it. And so what we can start looking at is the underlying tension that's there in thinking and in identifying ourselves, having an identification with anything at all. And it's possible to loosen the fist, to relax. And something disappears. Just like the fist disappears, something disappears in the mind.

And if we think that what disappears is who we are, it can be disorienting. But what disappears is the tension, is the pressure. That same thing can exist with how people focus their attention in meditation. They associate meditation with having this, with the tension or the pressure that's in focusing, focusing on the breath. I know I'm focusing on the breath because there's a kind of a gathering and tightening in the mind that it's like a little strain of looking at my breathing or some part of my body.

And for some people, that strain is what keeps them present because otherwise the tendency of the mind to wander off is so strong. What we're trying to do here is to find some other way

of being present that does not involve force, does not involve any kind of strain. And so we have to let go of the strain and realize it's still possible to be focused. And we don't, you know, in a different way. And that's a light way, a soft way, an open way.

And so the dedication, the persistence is in staying open and relaxed, staying available and relaxed, staying intimate and relaxed. And so we work hard at being relaxed. We work hard at being at ease. And of course you can't work hard that way and strain. And the working hard is just kind of like a repetition, coming back, staying close to, in a gentle, kind, supportive way.

And so learning a whole different way of using attention, a whole different way of thinking, and a whole different way of maybe even taking some aspects of who we are and identifying this is who I am. And this applies also to how we identify other people. There can be force and compulsion identifying other people as being somehow wrong. You know, I'm right. That's an identification. And there can be a lot of strength behind that.

They're wrong. It's the force and the compulsion that something gets created that's not in the being right and wrong. It's the reification, the solidification, the separation, the prioritization of a certain way of being. Prioritization of a fistful mind. Where we lose something in that process. A fistful hand loses the open hand.

The fistful mind loses an open mind. A tense mind loses an easeful mind. And so to begin experimenting in daily life, in meditation, with seeing can you find a way to think, talk to yourself, have thoughts that are light, easeful, that are thoughts about staying present. Giving yourself gentle instructions. Not that you're going to do this forever, but if you're honest, you might find that sometimes that's the better alternative to how the mind's wandering off in different kinds of thoughts by itself, thoughts that maybe are not so useful.

And it's a beginning of training, preparing the mind, learning the mind how to be friendly, how to be easeful, how to be light, how to be a comforting mind, a mind that you want to stay close to by beginning to talk to yourself in nice ways, in gentle ways. It's not so much what you say to yourself but how you say it. And that can begin translating to having a form of present moment awareness that is compelling because it's not compulsive. It's compelling because it feels so nice. Of course I want to be present. Of course I want to have an open hand when it feels so nice to have it open.

Of course I want to open to the sensations of my body. Of course I want to open to the feelings I have. Not because the body and feelings are necessarily comfortable or nice, pleasant, but

it's so nice to have that awareness that's light and easeful and available. And so in a sense, if you want to identify yourself with something, don't identify yourself with anything that has pressure or tension in it. Identify with the awareness, the thinking, which has none, that's easeful and light, pleasant, and maybe friendly.

So I hope that what I'm saying makes enough sense for you to experiment with this and to be patient as we move slowly into this world of *samādhi*. Where we're going is, as I've said earlier, it's kind of like a sacred temple. And it's kind of amazing capacities of the mind that we should have a lot of respect for. The higher reaches of *samādhi* are astounding. But we want to really create a good foundation for it. And that's what I'm hoping we're doing.

And with the instructions for today, I offer you those for this weekend. That you find a nice, easeful way of thinking and find a way of meditation, a nice, easeful way of giving yourself instructions so that you can ease yourself into a nice, comfortable, relaxed awareness that is able to stay welcoming the present moment. Thank you.

Samadhi (11) Simplicity Through Counting Breaths

2025-01-20

So, welcome to this eleventh talk on *samādhi*. The main point I'd like to make is that there's almost an equivalence with *samādhi* and simplicity. *Samādhi* is simplicity. One of the things that we can do when we practice *samādhi* is to notice how we are not simple. That's important, very important to see. The complexity in which we live.

How we get pulled into thoughts and feelings, ideas, plans. And appreciate that this is what the mind does. It's not a crime. There's a homecoming that we can do. There's a way in which too much thought keeps us alienated, keeps us separate from ourselves, unless we think who we are is our thinking. But we are so much more than that, something deeper.

And so homecoming into the simplicity. The more simple we can be with the breathing, the more there's something marvelous that can begin to appear. Part of that marvelousness is that it can feel very settled, very sweet, very simple, just to be alive here with the breathing. It's almost like we're entering into the deep place of home so that we can turn ourselves inside out to allow some deep capacity for peace and subtleness to animate how we live our life.

There are many ways in which people develop *samādhi*, but one of the ancient techniques is counting, counting the breath. Of course, the breath isn't suitable as an object for everybody, so there are other ways of developing *samādhi*. In our tradition, one of the common alternative suggestions is to develop *samādhi* with saying the phrases of loving-kindness and just to find a way of saying that that's settling, that's simplifying, that gets us absorbed in the activity of offering goodwill. But the reference point I'll be doing is breathing, counting the breath. That'll also be the focus for this week.

You can certainly stop counting if you don't want to, but if you've never done much counting, or even if you have, there's something to be learned about spending a week doing it that might be invaluable. Not a few people, certainly me, have thought I was getting settled and concentrated, but really I was drifting off in thought. It was only when, in a very pleasant way perhaps, it was only when I started to count that I saw, oh, I'm more involved in my thoughts. I didn't realize how strong the pull of thoughts were. Because I only got to the count of one, or half a count, there have been times where I've intended to count and never got around to it because the thinking mind was so strong.

So if you can get to ten, then that's pretty good. If you can't get to ten, if you get to one only

and then you get pulled into thought, then you know thinking is really strong. If you get to seven, then maybe the thinking mind is not that strong. That's kind of nice to know. So you get to see something, what's going on with you.

The counting is also a way of including the thinking mind in the gathering, the unification, the bringing together of all of who we are into the simplicity of this moment with the breathing. Rather than having a thinking mind be idle—an idle mind gets in trouble—rather than the idle to think whatever it wants, you're actually giving the thinking mind something to do that is supportive of the effort being done. Sometimes the thinking mind is really happy to have a task, happy to be included, happy to be supportive of something that is so incredibly profound and useful as developing *samādhī*. It has a purpose. It has a meaning for the thinking mind. Sometimes that's what it wants. If you don't give it, then it goes off and looks for something else.

So to offer the thinking mind the simple thing to do that might just involve one syllable, the count of one, two, three. When I was taught doing this, I was taught to count to ten and then start over again. Or if you lost count, to start over again. The way I did it, how I understood it, was I only counted the exhale. I filled the exhale with a count. I've since then learned that it can be valuable to count both the inhale and the exhale.

What I'm offering today is that to keep it really simple, and that is to choose to count somewhere between one and three, and to count both the inhale and the exhale. I don't want to confuse you with too many options, but maybe you can land on one that just seems intuitively what's right for you, rather than kind of struggling around it. Some people find it helpful to give the same count for the inhale as the exhale. So one, one, two, two, three, three. Then start, since I'm going to keep it really simple here today, start over again then at one.

Some people find it helpful to just count the inhale one and the exhale gets two, and then three. When I've done this up to three, counting both the inhale and exhale gets part of the count, I find it really helpful to not count four. So breathe in one, breathe out two, breathe in three, and then let it be quiet in the mind. Just ride the exhale in the quiet mind, and then start again. One of the things that does, it stops the counting going on to automatic pilot. It also allows for some kind of quieter thing to stay there. So you're referencing quiet, settledness, for how you're going to say the count.

I've sometimes counted harshly and hard and staccato-like. The idea is to do it gently, softly, with just enough effort to count that it's just enough to have the mind make that thought.

Sometimes what I've done to make it really light for myself is to imagine I'm counting. Somehow this idea, this exercise of imagining I'm counting, it becomes almost like a wispy or silent. There's almost no effort going into it, no physical energy going into it, no strain, no pushing. It just kind of floats up.

But you don't want to make the count the primary thing you do. You want the primary thing to do is a kind of resting, settling, entering into the world or breathing. The count is a little bit like a pointer, like a reminder, you're, oh, stay there, stay there. The focus is not a laser focus on the breathing. Sometimes I've thought of it, there's all these metaphors for it. One metaphor that I've liked for myself is someone coming from behind, someone I trust and care for, and they gently put their hand on my back, just letting me know I'm there.

They're there with me, just a reminder, I'm here, I'm here to support you. So it's kind of that way. We approach the body breathing, and just gently the count is here. I'm here with you. I'm supporting you. I'm being here with you.

In doing so, the surface mind of a lot of agitated thoughts and concerns hopefully can understand it's okay, it's safe to become quiet. It's okay, you don't have to quiet, you don't have to actively get rid of that thinking mind. But as the energy of attention goes into breathing, into counting, something begins to soften and relax in the body and the mind that begins decreasing the tension or pressure that perpetuates agitated thinking. So that pressure quiets.

So to count your breathing, and I'll talk more about it this week, but this is kind of an introduction to this topic. What I'd like to suggest this week, that if you're able to in your life, if you have the capacity and hopefully the interest, that meditate a second time today. You've done it now with us here. Do it again. Maybe 20 minutes is enough.

In order to kind of continue the momentum of this kind of practice, I do talk a lot in the guided meditations because of trying to teach this here. Ideally, you then would practice it on your own so you can do this in silence and develop kind of a momentum behind it. So if you can manage to sit another 20 minutes each day, I think that will support this amazing process of *samādhi* that we're going to go through slowly. So thank you very, very much.

May your ability to be simple and present and attentive, may it enable you to enter the world with goodwill. May this practice support the spreading of goodwill wherever you go. Thank you.

Samadhi (12) Settling Through Counting

2025-01-21

Hello and welcome to this series on *samādhi* and slow *samādhi*, slowly moving into it. Today I want to mention that sometimes I think of *samādhi* as settling, as a settleness. *Samādhi* is subtleness. When we sit down to meditate, it's often good to start with the idea of discovery, to discover how we are. How are we right now? One of the questions you can ask is, given how I am, what is unsettled that maybe it would be good to settle.

Now, if what's unsettled is something, ideas about things in the world, something outside of ourselves, we maybe won't settle those things, the problems we have. But we could settle. What can be settled is the mind's agitation, the heart's activation around things that feel unsettled. This is where meditation comes into highlight for us, is how when we come back to notice where we're unsettled inside, then we can ask, now how do we settle this? There are many answers for different things.

One of them, when it's hard to stay focused on meditation, is when the mind wanders off a lot. One thing to become settled about is that that's happening and that we can fold the distracted mind into the meditation in this way. To think of it, that what we can do is offer a massage to the mind. There's a natural process, a cycle, of wandering off and returning, wandering off and beginning again. That cycle provides a massage that we don't know what's being softened and needed and relaxed, but to appreciate that there's a cycle that our job is the coming back. Our job is to wake up again, is to be connected here again.

We know we're going to wander off. But we relax and settle. This is a process so that as soon as we notice we've wandered off, we're relaxed and at ease and know, oh, good, come back, be here. Show up here again. We're kind of going along, going along. If we're counting the breath, the in-breath and the out-breath, you're less likely to wander off so much because you have a reference point, or you're more likely to notice if you wander off.

One of the values in counting is to notice when this massage is operating so you can be part of it more intimately, more closely. So count one for the inhale, and if you're counting two for the exhale, and you don't say two, you might be really drifting off. If you're able to say two for the exhale, you might then see that you're not really there. It's become mechanical, it's become automatic, because now you're drifting off in thought. That gives you the clue that I'm drifting, sooner than you would normally. Or if you don't catch it at all during the exhale,

you might catch it on the inhale. Oh, I drifted off in thought.

The one, saying one, is the settling word. One. Or two is a settling word. What I mean by that is you want to be able to, if you do the counting of the breath, to do it with a tone of voice, loudness, energy in the mind of saying the word, or imagining you're saying the word, in such a way that it just feels settling to say it. Like if someone comes to you who's really upset, maybe hurt, maybe angry, maybe something, that you would maybe change your voice to be available clearly, and you're the settling. It's okay. I'm here with you. It's okay now. So something can kind of begin to relax and settle.

At different times, as we discover what's going on for us, and in some ways meditation is a continual process of discovery, we discover what can be relaxed, what can be settled. Sometimes what's being settled is the body. Sometimes what's being settled is the musculature and activity of breathing itself. Maybe in the exhale, we're really settling and relaxing those muscles that get engaged when we breathe in. So that when we breathe in, there's maybe less extra muscles engaged in that process. There's an easeful process of breathing in and breathing out.

Maybe what could be settled would be the mind. Sometimes, counting the breath, we're there with the breathing, but since the words are a little bit mental activity, is to say the words so that there's a settling and expanding of the mind. Just that the mind opens up to be wider, bigger. The shape of the mind is arbitrary, but if we're caught up in thoughts, caught up in preoccupations, the mind gets tight and sometimes shriveled, sometimes constricted. But to say these words, one, so the mind expands. Two, so the mind expands. Then after a while, go back to just the breathing.

But to stay close to that rhythm of breathing through it all. The rhythm of breathing is the ultimate massage, the ultimate reference point for this process of settling, connecting, receiving the experience of the moment. Receiving the inhale, relaxing the exhale, settling. One of the interesting things about counting the breath, if you're doing it, and I recommend that you try it for a while for this week, is that the amount of energy or effort or strength of that inner voice that does the counting, you have to pay attention that as you get more settled and relaxed in meditation, you have to turn the dial in the mind so that you're saying one, two, the count, quieter. If you say it too quiet before you're ready, the mind can drift off too quickly. So you have to kind of adjust the volume in such a way that it keeps you present but helps you to settle without agitating you. But as you settle, you might have to turn the dial down to quiet even more.

So I want to repeat a little bit some of the choices you have for how to count. I apologize if offering you too many options makes it confusing. Different people find different things are useful. I find at different times, different ways of counting are good. Sometimes just counting one with either the exhale or the inhale, that's enough. I find it very nice sometimes to just count one for the inhale and two for the exhale.

Sometimes it's nice because it engages me a little bit more, is to count one for the inhale, two for the exhale, three for the next inhale, and then be quiet for the next exhale. We normally get to count four. Sometimes I can't help myself, but somehow in the back of the mind, you say the number four. But the idea is to kind of a little bit not do it so there's space for some real deeper connection, some space to allow some deeper relaxation and opening. I find it kind of delightful if I back my mind, still want to do the number four. I kind of appreciate how effortless it just arises by itself. The kind of not counting on the four is a protection from the counting getting automatic. It's kind of a refreshing to start again at one. So that's very, very simple.

Another way of doing it is to count to ten. So five inhales and five exhales, you get to ten, and then you start over. Another way is to only count the exhales or to count the same count for the inhale and the exhale, one, one, two, two. Probably I shouldn't be giving you so many options, but if one of them sparks your interest, keeps you engaged, you'll learn a lot about yourself by counting. You'll learn a lot about the forces of distraction. You'll learn a lot about how you're practicing, because sometimes the inner voice that does the counting provides the evidence that we're straining or we're hesitating or we're seeing it as a work, the whole meditation as a work, and we're kind of like, you know, it's kind of like a burden, kind of.

So we can see a little bit through that voice unnecessary attitudes and then see if through the voice you can change the attitude, change so it's simpler, easier, cleaner, how you're being here with the experience. So to count the breath. Tomorrow I'll give you a little bit more discussion about how this counting really supports this process of *samādhi* in a deeper and deeper way. May you continue with this for a while. Again, as I said yesterday, I really encourage you to, if you have the time, the inclination, to add a second meditation in the day so that you can practice this more on your own. So you bring that with you for the next day to a little bit more of a foundation or a little bit more of a momentum to go along with what we're going to do here over time. So thank you.

Samadhi (13) Steady With Breathing

2025-01-22

So, hello and welcome to this series on *samādhī*. On Monday I talked about *samādhī* as simplicity, yesterday as *samādhī* as settling, settledness, and today as steadiness, as steady attention to the present moment, as steady attention to the experience we're having that we're really settling on. This idea of steady attention is closely connected to the idea of continuity of attention, continuity in the present moment. The idea is to hang out with the breath so we get absorbed, so we get more engaged in it. Some people find this hard to do because they expect that somehow they'll find in the breathing something wonderful, like there's a key there or some pleasure there or something profound there to be found. If they keep looking at the breathing, the breathing is a solution.

The real kind of warmth and beauty and delight of *samādhī* is not found in the object that we pay attention to, but in the subjective experience of being intimate or connected or steadied, absorbed in the experience we're having. So we don't want to look for the solution in the experience of breathing, but something happens in the interactivity, the interaction between us and breathing, us and the object of concentration, in the way in which we attend to it. The steadiness, the subtleness, the simplicity, and the continuity of attention that is more continuous than the continuity of being lost in thought. And so to kind of stay and rest there. One of the things that can support this steadiness and continuity of attention is the wise use of our imagination.

Sometimes if we have the ability to imagine in a nice way, in our own way, that somehow, some form of imagination that brings us connected and inspired and kind of riding along with the breathing, it can be easier to have the continuity. So I'll offer you some examples. The idea is that you find, if you want to do this, you find an example that works for you. Something I did in my early years of practice was imagining that my in-breaths and out-breaths were like the slow, gentle movements of the wings of a large bird. Breathing in and out was the way the wings going up and down, and sometimes with the exhale if it all extended it was like I was gliding along in the wind. Then I would lift it up again and let them go down.

There was something about this for me, this imagery of being in the high, high sky and gently kind of the breathing being intimately connected to, you know, associated with the wings flapping, that got me kind of really engaged, the continuity, staying right there with it. Another thing that I've done is sometimes I've imagined—and I've told this story many times

before—but that it's a little bit, I used to, when I was a little kid, I loved going on a push scooter. The way that a push scooter would work is that I would, you know, with one foot, kick the ground to push the scooter forward. Then I would ride the momentum until momentum started to slow, and then I would gently push again. Ride, push. For the meditation on breathing, the inhale was like the push, and the exhale was riding the momentum.

It just felt so good to ride that momentum to the end of the exhale, and then I would gently push with the inhale. That imagery of doing it that way kind of harnessed my imagination to help me be present rather than the imagination taking me off to some other lands and time and things that were going on. Just like the counting is taking thinking and using it for the purpose of being present. So there can be the wise use of imagination that brings you into the present more rather than taking you away. The example I used in this last meditation, putting your gentle, safe hand on someone's back or feeling someone there for you, holding you. Maybe you're walking in an unsteady way in a place that's a little dangerous, and someone's just there letting you know they're there to catch you.

If you fall, they'll take care of you. Or something like that. So that might be nice, like just right there. It's related to an imagination I used also many years ago. When I was in college, I took a massage class, and the teacher taught us to, when you're massaging someone, never have your hand—always have one hand that's always connected to the person you're massaging. So there's no interruption to that, and there's no surprise of being touched again if you get some massage oil to use more of it for the massage.

So you always have that contact. I found that a nice imagery sometimes of being with the breath in meditation. Never lose contact. Stay there. But for some people, that's not the right image. Some people, the bird flying is not the right image.

Another image I've used—because I've been doing this for 50 years, so I've had a series of them—another one that I've enjoyed sometimes is thinking of the exhale as riding a slide, and I'm just kind of riding, going down like a little kid going on a slide, you know, just riding the slide. That kind of just kept me right there, and it kind of made it kind of fun, and then kind of, you know, like being on a slide. So you might have your own imagery that might work for you. I know some people have the image of breathing as being a big wheel, and that they just get the sense of this wheel turning helps them stay with the, like almost like the inhale is an exhale or the turning of the wheel. Just that simple one keeps them connected and involved. Some people, the imagination is not what's going to help them stay steady and continuous with the breathing.

There might be something interesting about the sensations of breathing or, more usefully, something pleasant about it, some pleasure that's to be found there. I've used, for example, I find generally exhale to me more pleasant than the inhale. Sometimes it's been the opposite. But to be sure to be there for whatever pleasantness or pleasure, satisfactory sensations are there in the cycle of breath. Then ride it. Feel it.

Sense it. Some people find that they can get absorbed in breathing because they begin really tuning into wherever there's some sense of pleasantness, pleasure in breathing. I've known some people who've adjusted their breathing just a little bit, just so it can be a little bit more pleasant, more enjoyable. Sometimes breathing a little bit slightly, bigger breath, sometimes relaxing the belly and softening somewhere in the body so some part of the cycle of breath is pleasant. So rather than imagination to help be present, it's the ability to tune in to something that's pleasant with the breathing and riding that pleasure, allowing oneself to feel the pleasure, taking it in.

All along, this idea of steadiness and continuity of attention with breathing should be done without any strain, without any expectation, without measuring how well we're doing. So that, of course, we're going to wander off. Of course, the continuity is going to not be continuous. So find a way to meditate so that the loss of touch with the breathing, the loss of staying connected and steady, is folded in as part of a healthy meditation. It's not a problem. Rather, just, of course, your mind's going to do that.

Then find a relaxed way to begin again, to come back again, to come back again. Here also I used imagination. I don't think at first it was a choice or something I thought about. It was just something, an image that arose as I was doing the practice. That was that I learned to become, at some point in this practice, I learned to have a friendly attitude towards my friend, to my breathing, to my thinking. I didn't set it up as a tension or as a problem.

But then if I found myself wandering off in thought, I wouldn't tense up. I wouldn't be critical. I wouldn't see it as a problem. The image I had was that there was a horse that had escaped the corral. The way to bring it back was to ride another horse and ride right, kind of ride up, right next to it. So being companions riding together and just go along with a horse that's escaped for a little while and then take a big arc around 180 degrees so that to come back to the corral, come back to where we're supposed to be.

So that imagery came up as I would notice I was thinking and I would kind of go along with it a little bit. I wasn't going to immediately tense up or do something about it. Just know I was thinking, be a company thinking a little bit, and then gently kind of have this idea of, okay,

come back. Let's go back. Let's make a big circle, not a jerk back, not, you know, just turn around 180 degrees and jerk back, but just gentle, long curve. How long would that take? Maybe it took two or three seconds to do that process.

Then when I came back to breathing that way, I was much more settled than I was before. I went, you know, at the beginning of wandering off in thought. It was, okay, here I am. Then, okay, let's have continuity. Let's be steady here. Let's be committed in a loving way or absorbed in just the simplicity of this. Simple, settled, and steady here.

So I hope these ideas give you something to find for yourself that supports you with this steadiness, continuity of attention. Then I thought that an announcement to make is that this Friday we would have a community meeting for 7 a.m. *sangha*, for those of you who can. I'll post a Zoom link on IMC's What's New and the IMC calendar. Also Friday I'll post it here on YouTube for the chat. So then at 7:45, we'll switch over to Zoom, and we can have some period of question and answers, some discussion. We'll do a breakout group, so those of you can all kind of meet a few of the people who are part of this online *sangha*. So thank you very much, and I look forward to being here again tomorrow morning.

Samadhi (14) Opening to Space

2025-01-23

So, hello and welcome to this next talk on *samādhi*. And one of the things to appreciate is *samādhi* is not a practice per se. It's a state. The practices we do of steadying the mind, focusing the mind, being attentive to breathing, letting go of thoughts—there's a lot of things we might be doing, but that's not the *samādhi*. That's the practice to enter into *samādhi*. And *samādhi* is a state.

It's actually a variety of different kinds of states—of mind, of heart, of body, of a wholeness that we can experience. And then it's important to appreciate that the practice, the instructions for meditation, can be state-specific. There's a strong orientation for people to use as their reference point: me, myself, and mine. How I am now. How this is benefiting me. How it's good for me.

If I like this or not, or if this works for me or not, and there's value in that to some degree. But we can get stuck in that kind of orientation as well. Meditation practice is meant to be something that helps kind of step out of that excessive self-orientation, self-referencing. And one way to do that is to appreciate that we have to, when we practice *samādhi*, practice meditation, we have to adjust our practice according to the state that we're in. And as we go through these teachings about *samādhi*, in a way, as we get further and further along, I'll be talking about things that probably are not immediately relevant for many of you, and it's appropriate for you if you're aware of yourself to practice in an earlier phase of the instructions here.

And often the right place to be is as a beginner, or you have your own practice of how to get settled and get started in meditation, you're welcome to go back and use that as well. Because we're often—it's kind of like a pyramid as we practice. We spend a lot of time creating the foundation. And even very experienced meditators start at the beginning, laying on the foundation. And then slowly, over time, the building of that pyramid maybe goes faster and faster, or quicker or something, but we don't spend a lot of time in the higher states of *samādhi*.

So just be aware that you have to adapt yourself to how I'm teaching here, but also to participate with your imagination. If it's not directly what you're experiencing, maybe it's evocative enough for you to imagine, in a sense, because what I'll be offering is the landmarks that will become available as we keep practicing. And you might be able to better see the landmarks

in the distance receiving these teachings. You're familiar with what's coming. You're ready to recognize what is useful to take in and where the path is, rather than just being in a big territory, not knowing, not seeing the path, and just kind of wandering around, even though it might be beautiful terrain. You're still maybe wandering, maybe wandering in circles.

So today, I was offering, opening up to something I think very important for the deepening of *samādhi*, or the expansion of *samādhi*, and that is spaciousness. And I'll try to explain this a little bit better: that we have an amazing capacity as human beings for spatial awareness. And I'm sure that there's a range of how much that capacity exists in different people. To some degree, it's a capacity that can be developed. And some people haven't spent much time developing it.

But it's possible, for example, to close one's eyes when we're in a room, and then with imagination, imagine the size of the room. Imagine the distance to the walls. Or if you're sitting outdoors, you can imagine—close your eyes—you can imagine how expansive the outdoors is. If you're sitting on top of a hill or a mountain and close your eyes, you can still remember something about how expansive the whole vista is in the mind. And so this idea of the mind has spatial awareness. We have a sense of what's to the left, to the right, maybe even behind us a little bit.

We can have a sense of distance between us and other people. Some of that is a deep functioning of the mind—if you're going to toss a bean bag to a friend, some calculation goes on deep in the mind of how strongly to throw that bean bag, how high to throw it, how fast, the angle, the direction. All this is incorporating a sense of the space and distance and things that goes into our spatial awareness. And so sometimes we can close our eyes and have a sense of some kind of spaciousness around us. In very deep meditation, sometimes people have the sense of infinite space, that the space that they're sitting in has no edges, has no limits, because edges are a concept the mind makes of this kind of thing, of space.

And so you can sit and be aware of, you know, with the eyes closed, imagining the room you're in, and there's a limit to that, to the walls. But if you're sitting on top of a mountain, the limit of it—there is no limit going upwards, out into space. And so that sense of limitlessness is sometimes breathtaking or inspiring. It just kind of opens something up wide. If we're in a claustrophobic space, it tends to support kind of a claustrophobic kind of preoccupation with ourselves, our thoughts, our concerns.

And so in sitting with meditation with the eyes closed, when we're settled enough, when we're still enough, when we're steady enough, simple enough, there might be a time when

we can start feeling the space, spaciousness in the mind, spaciousness in the body, a sense of kind of like there's a room for things. And because the mind is not filled with thinking, is not—because thinking and desires and aversion, according to the Buddha, is what creates the limitations and the smallness of the mind. And the mind becomes expansive, the mind of awareness, without those limitations of thoughts and concerns and preoccupations, desires and aversions.

So as we get more settled, to begin to become aware of the spaciousness that's here so that we're not riding, riding the breath, like latching on or kind of zeroing in in a tight laser focus, but rather the awareness itself starts becoming integrated or integral to that spaciousness. And the mind itself now, the awareness itself, feels as part of the spaciousness almost. And so as the breathing comes and goes, sensations of breathing come and go, it feels like they're coming and going within the atmosphere, the weather, the context of spaciousness.

And the kind of awareness, one way of understanding this kind of spacious awareness, it's not something you can fixate your mind on. If you look at the space in the room you're in—if you're in a room or outdoors—and try to really, you know, like stare down the space in the room, like really focus and really zero in at the heart of it, you're really going to let the space know that you see it, that kind of one point of focus that you would have maybe for someone you're angry with, you're just letting them know through your stare—it doesn't work with the space around you.

That it's almost like you're better off not trying to look at the space as a point for the central focus of the eyes. It's more like you relax. Some people, when they're looking at the space in any place at all, the natural tendency in the mind is to—the eyes roam. And in the roaming, the movement, gentle, soft moving, this is where we have some kind of inner sense with peripheral awareness, maybe, of the space in the room. So rather than having a central focus, we have this peripheral focus of awareness.

And like eyesight, there's a kind of central focus and the peripheral awareness. And the peripheral awareness is always there, but it's hard to focus on it in the way we can when we zero in on the central focus. So the same thing as we sit and meditate, kind of the center of attention could be the breathing. But at the same time, we're aware of this peripheral space around it. Both are going on at the same time. There's two different almost systems of awareness operating, and they both can be mutually supportive operating at the same time.

But in order to do this, the mind has to be quiet enough, still enough, settled enough. And that's the work of developing the settledness that allows the spaciousness to start to come.

The Buddha sometimes called this an expansive mind, *maha citta*, because the mind itself feels like it's starting to pay lots of room for the mind. Rather than the mind caught and pre-occupied by something, the mind that's not caught opens up and relaxes and is expansive.

And this spacious awareness, peripheral awareness, as we do settle and steady on the breathing, makes possible the states of *samādhi* that are going to arise. And that will be the focus for tomorrow. Not that exact thing. But tomorrow, I'll talk a little bit about what begins to become possible with the settling and focus on breathing that becomes possible as we begin opening to the spaciousness.

In the meantime, until tomorrow, I'd encourage you to look for occasions where you can settle back to appreciate the spaciousness, the space, the wide space around you. Probably works better outdoors. But, you know, some places like here at IMC, there's a really high ceiling. And that sense of just looking up for the space, your ceiling, that itself does something to the mind. See if you can appreciate. Take time. Have tea. Look around. Open to the spaciousness.

If you're lucky enough to live in a place where it's wide open space, maybe a city park or a hilltop or something, spend the day specializing on becoming aware of open space all around you. So that might help you to find that in meditation as well. So thank you very much. And we'll continue tomorrow. And tomorrow we'll do the community meeting for our YouTube community on Zoom.

And I'll keep the YouTube channel open so those of you who don't want to go on Zoom can attend that way. But for those of you who want to attend on Zoom and ask questions and go into breakout groups to meet each other, that will be at 7:45. And already the Zoom link is in the What's New on IMC's website. It's also in the IMC calendar, and I'll put it here in the chat tomorrow. And the password you'll need is the Pāli word for loving kindness, which is *mettā*, M-E-T-T-A. So thank you all very much, and look forward to tomorrow. Amen.

Samadhi (15) Feeling the Sweetness

2025-01-24

So, welcome to this 15th talk on *samādhi*, this ongoing *samādhi* series. One of the things that this week perhaps you would have noticed is how seldom I use the word concentration. In the kind of phrase that I use for each day this week, the quality that's being emphasized is not concentration. So *samādhi* is simplicity. *Samādhi* is subtleness. *Samādhi* is steadiness.

Samādhi is spaciousness. And today, *samādhi* is sweetness. Maybe the closest thing to concentration in those five is steadiness. But to be steady with your presence, be steady in your awareness, to be steady here with the practice. These five qualities don't have to be separate. They can be part of the same state that we're in.

We can be sitting in a state of simplicity, where meditation is not something complicated, not an engineering feat, it's not a complicated thing to do. It's almost like an undoing, a not doing, more than it is a doing. It is a settling, a settling into something and not a concentrating on something. It might be that the consequence of settling is that we settle so fully in a relaxed, full way that the world around the place we settle kind of falls away or recedes into the distance. It's almost as if we're concentrating on the subtle place. But rather than poking it from the control tower, it's more like we've settled into it like we would settle into a nice soft mattress or on top of a mattress there's a nice comforter that we lay down in.

It just feels so good to settle into that. We're fully, completely here in that small little world where the body touches the comforter in the bed and the rest of the world falls away. You could say we're concentrated there, but to concentrate on that experience, for some people, immediately gets us tense, to strain or gets us in the control tower. But to settle into it becomes something that becomes embodied, something that includes all the whole body. It's the fullness of it. The steadiness, holding steady.

There's something in us that loves being steady. It's kind of like a commitment or a devotion or a simplicity of being, just this. Because when we're steady, something can relax into it, settle into it. I love to go hiking. Sometimes as we go hiking, it used to be this when I used to run. If I just keep walking steadily, at some point, kind of something settles in me.

I arrive, and I'm just there in the walking, steady in the walking. But I have to walk steadily for the gathering of all the different parts of myself, where the distracted mind, concerns of the day fall away. And I'm just steady. It's kind of like the steadiness allows something to gather

around it. Spaciousness is such an important quality for *samādhi* because to have a sense of being spacious, open, lots of openness, makes room for the sweetness that can arise in *samādhi*. Maybe some of you don't care for the word sweetness, but in *samādhi*, there is a pleasure.

There is a sense of well-being. There is, for me, one of the most wonderful words for the state of *samādhi* is beauty. There's a feeling of a beautiful state that kind of radiates out. Or the breathing has gotten quite beautiful, and it kind of radiates a sense of beauty into the body. The most classic way of talking about it is there's joy and happiness. Some people add the word gladness.

It's kind of like each of those is a deeper and fuller experience that's more and more satisfying. Some people use the word satisfy. There's a feeling of satisfaction. It's really good here. Some people maybe like the word goodness. This feels good.

Sometimes I like the word health because settling into a good state of *samādhi* feels like an embodiment of health. Even at times when I've been sick, if I could settle into *samādhi*, a *samādhi* state, it just feels like there's this healing energy that courses through the body. It just feels so good. The healthiness, the health of it. So I'm not saying that this is easy. And I'm not saying that it should happen today or tomorrow.

But this is one of the characteristics of *samādhi*. As we settle into it, the practice, it's good to start becoming sensitive, aware, when some of these good feelings begin to arise. These are good feelings which are symptoms of *samādhi*. One of the interesting things in the teachings of the Buddha is that he puts happiness as a precursor for *samādhi*. It's a little bit odd to say that because many people are suffering a lot. They're meditating in order to not suffer so much or to be free of their suffering, to work through it.

Now to have *samādhi*, you have to be happy to begin with. But we always have the mindfulness practice to fall back to. For five years now on YouTube, the primary practice I've been teaching is mindfulness. For those of you who've been following, the recourse is to go back to just being mindful of the experience until something settles and you feel like you're able to be present with what's happening in a simpler way. Then you can develop this quality of *samādhi*, this primary focus. A lot of *samādhi* has to do with having a primary focus of attention, a primary place to settle, a primary place to be at home and to relax.

The idea is moving to be absorbed in the experience. Maybe you could have as a reference point something you do in your life that you get absorbed enough into that you feel a kind of

well-being in doing it. All the difficult thoughts and difficult feelings that are in life have fallen away as we do this simple thing that we get absorbed in doing. For some people, it's reading a book. For some people, it's doing a craft or playing an instrument. For some people, it feels really just like going into a shower.

It lets everything else fall away. It's just nice to be in the shower. Some people start singing in the shower. It might be being with a friend that does that and they walk in the park or listening to music for some people can do it. So there might be something that you already do that gives you a sense of what it's like to have these qualities this week of simplicity, becoming simple just to listen to the music, to do this one thing where there's a subtleness in it, where we're not preoccupied and agitated by other things. Just here with this.

Where there's a steadiness and absorption like this here. And that there's a spaciousness around it because we're not limited ourselves in a tight way. But we're relaxing into it. And something opens as we get. Sometimes with *samādhi*, things will get smaller and more narrow first, before the spaciousness opens up. So don't look for spaciousness too early, just when it starts becoming available.

Partly I'm choosing the word sweetness because it has an S in it, to be complete for the week. I think that if I wasn't for the wanting to stay with S's, I probably would have chosen beauty for myself. So these are some of the characteristics of *samādhi*. Not necessarily easy to tap into or touch into, but they can be very subtle. If we have already a disposition in the mind orient ourselves to what's difficult, orient ourselves around our problems, orient ourselves around the pain we have or something, sometimes inadvertently, that's actually where the *samādhi* is going. That's where the concentration is going to those things.

If we concentrate on things this way, where there's fear or aversion or something that is not so healthy, that focus on the problems actually can make the difficulty feel worse. Not to ignore it, but it's possible with *samādhi* to shift the primary focus to breathing, to the settling place, to settle, to keep settling, and knowing that you're not betraying the difficulties you have, but you're placing them in a different context. It's really a delight to be able to sit in a state of *samādhi*, a state of goodness, a state of health, where the difficulties we have might be just, they're just like jellyfish floating in the vast ocean. They aren't the ocean. So they're there and they're recognized, but they're being held by the goodness of *samādhi*.

So finally, I'd like to say that for next week I won't be here. I think Kim Allen will come and I think it's Kim will come and teach for you. We have these wonderful teachers at IMC that can be my substitutes. I should probably be sure about this, so that just out of respect for

my co-teachers that I have it right. Here we go. Oh, no, no, I'm sorry. Next week it's Liz, Liz Powell, and a wonderful teacher and lives in Colorado now and delighted that she's going to be here with you all.

So, in the meantime, at the beginning of the week, I encourage you to count your breathing, because that can support the steadiness. It can support all these qualities, provided you find a really nice way for the mind to do the counting. Gentle, soft, beautiful, settled, spacious. See if you can find a way to count. There are different ways of counting, as I described. But if you find yourself being able to settle into the counting, you might see if counting from 1 to 10 and then starting over again begins to support this settling in, this steadiness, that really brings you, you start getting absorbed in this experience of breathing, of *samādhi*.

I'll be back the following week, and I look forward to this quite a bit, to continue this. Now, for those of you who would like, we're going to have a Zoom meeting for our community. What that means is that I'll put a Zoom link into the, I'll try to put a Zoom link in. Let's see if I can, and see, it's a little bit, here we go. I'm having a little bit of trouble figuring out how to put it in the chat. I don't know why that's a challenge today. Somehow my YouTube channel showing it.

If someone could go and get the link, the Zoom link from the calendar, what's new, and put it in the chat, I would appreciate it a lot. It'll take me a minute or two to be able to make it to the Zoom room myself. You need a password to get into it. The password is *mettā*, probably a word for loving kindness. So M-E-T-T-A, M-E-T-T-A. I'll be there shortly. Thank you. Thank you.

Samadhi (16) Inclusion With Body

2025-02-03

Hello, and welcome to this ongoing series on *samādhi*. This week, since this is Monday, the theme will be related to the literal meaning of *samādhi*, which is a gathering together. Sometimes *samādhi* is called a process of unification, unifying the mind. But not just the mind, because anything the mind knows and feels and experiences is part of the mind. Every, you know, our nervous system, neurons, go throughout the body. Wherever the nerves are activated by whatever stimulates them is part of the mind.

When we die, we don't feel anything. Any sensation we feel in the body is part of the overall mind that we live within, we live part of. The unification then, one of the key things about the unification of the mind that *samādhi* is, that's really helpful is to be grounded in the body, to include the body. So this unification means inclusion, an inclusion of as much as we can. The people who develop concentrations without including the body, some people live from the neck up. It's possible to get kind of a laser focus, really focused with the mind.

Some people who spend the day doing intense, maybe concentrated work on the computer, on the screen, can be very focused. People can say, wow, that person's concentrated, and so much so that maybe they don't hear other people in the room or someone coming in. They're so involved. But it's all from the neck up. It's all a mental mind, kind of brain activity that's being. If we use that for developing the *samādhi* of meditation, meditation tends to become kind of lopsided.

Occasionally it actually develops a kind of unhealthy states within. Sometimes tension builds up in the rest of the body. That's not useful for *samādhi*. But when the whole body is included, then there can be more relaxation. It's easier for the mind to then to be balanced, be settled, to not be contracted or narrow. To include the body as part of the practice of *samādhi* is invaluable.

One of the reasons for this is that as we continue practicing *samādhi*, at some point, different, just for the time being, I'll call them energies, different expressions, energies, emotions, feelings, that arise with *samādhi* are much more supportive and much more supportive of further *samādhi*, supportive of us, if the whole body is included in feeling them. It's almost like some of the emotional states that come with *samādhi* are felt so much better and fuller if the body is available to receive them or transmit them or to include them. So the body is

a tremendous support for the unification process. If *samādhī* is unifying the mind, and the mind is, you know, wherever the nerves are in the body, we want to include the body. The body that we can feel and sense. Every sensation we feel is an extension of the mind, the nervous system that we have, neurons.

To be willing to relax and open and feel allows this growing movement towards inclusion. This too, everything's included. There's no outside. As the settling of *samādhī*, we might not be so hearing the external world. We might not be thinking about the external world. But there's a growing feeling that the awareness is now inclusive.

It's just broad and everything's included within it. The paradox is seemingly that the more we settle on some settling spot or gather some gathering spot that we have, it could be the movements of the belly, some deep settling of the belly, a spot where the breath begins and ends. It could be the movements of the chest. It could be sensations in the nostril. There's different places that can be the gathering place where everything's included. The paradox is that as we get more settled in that gathering place, steady, settled, present, at the same time, the mind becomes wider, bigger, more expansive.

If the mind gets narrower and tight and contracted, then probably somebody will be a little bit lopsided. So for today, what I want to emphasize is the inclusion of the body in a process that helps both settling and allows the unification. It's almost like the more we're in the body, the more we have a receptacle to receive whatever is happening in the world. We increase our capacity to include all that's happening in our mind, our hearts, our bodies here, now. Not a few people will feel that as their *samādhī* develops, there's a lot of calm that allows them to go into their life and have kind of a calm spaciousness that allows, there's a room for what happens in the world and what people say, to just come and be held and be there without reactivity, partly because of the sense of expansiveness through the body and beyond that can happen.

So again, the paradox is that there's a way of relaxing into this settling spot, a gathering spot, and let that be kind of like the center, the centering spot, that then begins to open up and include and allows things to gather. Everything is included. Everything is here. One way to do this in meditation with the breathing is to allow the inhale to be a time to feel the body more fully, more expansively. It's almost like the breath is a massage, and you have to release your hands to feel and make room for what's there. In the massage, your hands come down to knead, to relax, as the kneading happens.

There has to be this rhythm of releasing and kneading. So the same way, kind of the breathing

in, this making space, relaxing, opening, allowing things to open and feel the whole, receive it, kind of a receiving of everything in the body as we breathe in. So that inhale, receiving the inhale, and then the coming together, the gathering, the settling, the contracting of the body as we exhale, and to ride that massage, ride that wave of expansion and contraction. Some people have used the image of a jellyfish for breathing. The jellyfish moves itself through the water by opening and closing, expanding and contracting. This opening to everything and then contracting, coming back.

And then to count. For it to be, sometimes the counting is such an invaluable thing to do. So the thinking mind has something to do rather than the thinking mind taking us away from this inclusive kind of awareness. The counting is using a thinking mind to stay present. It could be something different than counting. It could be a label or a word.

It could be the word here. That just maybe every exhale saying here is a reminder to really be here. So rather than again the thinking mind just thinking about something unrelated and off you go, but the counting also there's a little extra oomph that has to be there to remember the count and kind of really hold steady with the count that engages the mind so more of the mind is involved, the part of the mind that has to remember to be present and remember. Also, it's the same kind of mind that has to be remembered to stay present. So we're kind of gently, just enough to remember the count. It's one on the exhale, two on the next exhale, three.

So it might seem like I'm suggesting a lot of things to do, but it's a unified whole of receiving the inhale, settling on the exhale, as we settle the count one. All for the purpose of simplicity, subtleness, steadiness, spaciousness, and sweetness. So don't be hooked into, don't be tricked by all these words and instructions that I'm giving that you make it complicated. Keep it simple. And we'll continue.

So the theme today, this week, will be inclusion and how we gather together, unify as part of *samādhi*. The body is an invaluable part of that. So for today, going through the day, you might see how you can be more inclusive in your body. You can have a posture that supports readiness, engagement, presence, steadiness, stability. Be careful. Kind of study your posture.

See what you can do. Uprightness. See what you can do for staying in this body, feeling it as you go through the world. As you'd like the inhale, receive it, almost as if through the receiving the inhale, you're more there to receive the people you're talking to, who you're with. So your body is with you here, and may be keeping you steady and calm in the middle

of difficult situations. So thank you very much, and I look forward to continuing tomorrow.

Samadhi (17) Orientating Awareness

2025-02-04

So, hello for this second talk this week, and the 16th talk on *samādhi*. As I've often said, *samādhi* is a unification of mind, mind and body, a gathering together, more than a laser focus. That unification of the mind has many different characteristics. One is it's inclusive. The idea is that we don't settle the attention on something in particular, get absorbed in something, but push things away. There's a way in which there's a kind of feeling of availability and openness that makes room to be inclusive of all things.

That movement of inclusion and receptivity is a wonderful attitude for receiving and including the primary subject of the *samādhi*. So the primary subject might be the breathing. That's the standard which we're using for this *samādhi* course. This inclusion, this receptivity, in particular can be felt on the inhale. Then there's a kind of settling into it all, settling into the body, into the body breathing, so that it's a settling where we allow all things to settle into it.

It's almost like we're including everything without focusing on everything, without thinking about everything or reacting to everything. Just on the edges, everything kind of settles. So, there are different aspects of this unification. This inclusion is what I talked about yesterday, and today the focus is this idea of orientation. If some of what I'm talking about doesn't make sense to you, it's okay—maybe you could translate it in a way that does make sense to you, or you can just take it as being interesting or not, and just kind of hang in there as we go through this, especially for this week.

There might be different parts of this week that speak to you. Today is this orientation, and that's a very different word or idea, I would hope, than focusing or concentrating in a tight way, narrow way. Focusing is very much associated with the eyes, I think, for some people. Sometimes meditators engage their eyes unnecessarily in meditation if they're focusing, looking, trying to see their experience. There can actually be tension around the eyes because of that.

In a sense, because of that tension, that's kind of the place from which we're being oriented to do the awareness practice. It might be that it's more thinking, knowing, or even labeling the experience, even counting the experience. It might engage someplace behind the forehead, or even the forehead can get a little tight. There might be a sense that there's a little voice or

a little operating center, a control tower, that's doing the work, the mental work that we have to do. Again, then the orientation, the place from which we're doing it, might be behind the forehead, kind of in maybe the cerebral cortex or something.

Sometimes there might be some other place where there's some tension or holding, even if we might be feeling, kind of knowing or experiencing, feeling the experience. So the orientation is from the body itself and how it feels. There might be the one who is experiencing it, the one who's enjoying it, or the one who's uncomfortable because of it. The one who's doing the awareness, the one who's the experiencing, the one who's the victim, the one who's in the body or someplace in a disembodied place—that is kind of like the place from which the orientation is happening.

One opportunity is to find a place from which we can get oriented that has no tension in it, that maybe has no obvious association with me, myself, and mine. The suggestion I made was the back of the head, kind of in the back of the skull, generally kind of the back of the brain, near the back of the skull. Maybe if someone has a headache or something, there might be some sensations there, but there's a place there where maybe there's not a lot of sensing neurons to really sense and feel. So it's a little bit maybe free of all the associations of me, myself, and mine, free of the associations of doing the work and straining to make something happen.

You can say, well, that's arbitrary. It's made up to find a place like that in the back of the head to orient from. Maybe so, but that doesn't make it wrong. That's mostly what the mind is doing anyway, making up a place from which we're oriented. It's arbitrary, or it's not really inherent in being aware that it has a spot from which to be oriented. So if it's from the eyes or forehead or some other thing, that's made up too.

We're using our capacity maybe for imagination to find a place from which we can be oriented. One possibility is the back of the skull. Almost like there's a light there, a light of awareness. Almost a light that's not a light—it's just kind of maybe clarity or just a sense of directedness. There is not, there's no tension or no grasping or pushing there exactly, but there is an intentness, there is a sense of purpose that this is the direction we're going.

I myself love the idea of it because I spend a lot of time on a sailboat, on a sailboat going towards back to the harbor. You see the harbor, but the boat is—the waves are pushing boats this way and that way. The wind, you have to adjust by the wind, and you can't always actually be directly focused on the harbor. There might be kind of going back and forth some, but the harbor is always the orientation, always yes. The skipper of the boat can be quite

relaxed, is not troubled by the fact that we go a little bit to one side or the other side in the waves, but just because the orientation knows where they're going and just kind of gently keeps it on focus, and the mind is relaxed, the awareness is relaxed, softened, moving in the direction.

So from this place in the back, orienting ourselves, oh, this is the direction. It's more like kind of a wide field than a very tight little one. But it's orienting itself—you know, the harbor might be in the distance, it might be in the horizon, a very small little spot. So there is a place that is very teeny up ahead, but there's an orientation that takes it in without getting tight and narrow in focus.

The orientation with breathing is to find this orientation towards the breathing that, yes, this and a kind of commitment and a wonderful soft intentness, a sense of purpose that this is what I'm doing now. If you feel like other things are more important to think about or imagine or feel or have emotions about, with this intentness or this kind of orientation towards the breathing, it's not to push anything away, but it's to allow it to be there on the edges, the peripheral awareness, so that you never forget about the harbor you're going to. The skipper might have all kinds of things going on, but it's always focused there. It's like driving a car on the freeway. You always know the direction you're going ahead on the freeway, even if you're talking and having a difficult conversation with someone in the car. You're always there, there, there.

So that's the orientation. With that, it allows kind of a gathering, gathering of everything that supports that. It's almost like the orientation is a slide, maybe a big curved slide, and everything can slide in as we exhale and slide down towards what I call the settling spot or the gathering spot or the grounding spot, which I find to be the very place where the last sensation of breathing occurs for me. That could be in different places depending on where you focus your body on the torso. But I do it right at the end of the out, down in the belly. Because it's the most grounding, settling place inside, it allows everything kind of to feel settled there.

Then as I—and that's the small little spot of the harbor. So everything is oriented towards that little spot. Even if this feeling of inhale grows and expands through the torso, it grows out of and continues being rooted in that settling spot there. What this is doing, hopefully, is to create a welcoming or an appropriate or a wise way of orienting the attention towards something that's going to develop a unification, a gathering, a wholeness, a sense of being kind of really here and alive in the present moment without too easily being scattered and

being fragmented by thoughts and concerns and feelings and reactions we have.

It's because we're doing this wonderful thing. We're in this boat heading towards the harbor. So don't get—and that's what's important to do. Don't lose track of that, because you could get in trouble if you don't. The last thing you want to do is for it to get dark before you reach the harbor.

I hope that these analogies, this way of talking, works for enough of you that it's worthwhile. If it doesn't, as I said, just kind of follow along. Always use your imagination in the *samādhi* course. Don't try to understand all of it only logically or rationally or as a technique of what to do. But it's also the idea of just imagine it, in some way. The imagination might give something on your inner system, your inner life, something to orient yourself to, something to support you, so that you have maybe a better way of meditating than if you just left your mind to its own devices. So thank you very much, and we'll continue with this theme of unification tomorrow.

Samadhi (18) Organized Mind

2025-02-05

Welcome to this series of talks on *samādhī*. *Samādhī* is not an abstract topic for intellectual interest only, but it's a topic about ourselves, about how we can be present and engaged in really whatever we're doing. The general focus of this series is on meditation. That connection to *samādhī* is so strong that sometimes the word *samādhī* is a substitute for the word meditation. Really, the ability to be fully present, oriented, organized, absorbed in anything, makes anything a subject for *samādhī*.

For those of you who are going along with this series and wanting to cultivate *samādhī* in meditation, it's greatly supported by beginning to take what you're learning about yourself—about how you can be settled, how you can be oriented, organized, simple, settled, still, spacious—and bringing that into different activities in your life. So it's not just something you do in meditation, but something that you're beginning to spread through your day. When you come to meditation, you're already familiar with the territory. You haven't been out of touch with it for a long time. It's more easy to be connected to it.

I learned this when I was in the monastery, and I had a very busy, full job in the kitchen, being a cook for that large monastery, and didn't have a lot of time for meditation. I started to practice this in the monastery with the activities I did. I carried a question that I carried with me, that was kind of my contemplative question for the year I was in the kitchen there. That was the question: how can I participate more fully with what I'm doing in the kitchen? Whatever I was doing—if I was chopping vegetables, if I was washing pots and pans, if I was putting together ingredients in a pot, if I was walking around with a dirty pot to bring it to the sink and there were other people working—whatever I was doing, how could I be in that activity in a sense of really participating in it?

Why it was important for me was right away when I started to work in the kitchen, I didn't want to be there and my mind was elsewhere. I had other plans and other aspirations, and I was preoccupied with other issues with people I'd been talking to or doing. I felt myself scattered. I felt myself being kind of propelled out of the present moment, propelled out of what I was doing. What I used as my antidote to that, as a way of learning about myself, was: how can I participate with what I'm doing here?

The consequence of that, at some point after some months of doing this, after working in the

kitchen, I would go to the meditation session almost directly. I would show up in the meditation already concentrated, already there, present. It was relatively easy to enter into *samādhi*. This is a plug for you to participate, to organize, to start taking some of these lessons and applying them into your daily life where you can, where it makes sense.

One of these ideas in the theme of unification and inclusion, that's a big part of it, is the idea that might work for some of you: to organize your body, mind, and heart to be participating in the settling, in the gathering at some central place within. So at the heart or center of your breathing. As for me, I was trained and spent decades now attending to my breath in my belly, the movements of the belly, the sensations there, the subtle feelings of pressure and release of pressure as I breathe, the softness, keeping it soft. For years, for the early years of practice, I held my belly always tight and tense, and I would relax it and soften and soften. It took a while to really have that be settled.

To have this participating there, to organize yourself. I have this sense sometimes—it's not always available to me—but there are some times where when I sit down to meditate, I spend some time feeling and sensing what the thinking mind is like. Is it tense? Is it tight? Is it scattered? Sometimes I can feel that I could kind of bring it together and organize it, kind of put all the pieces together.

Maybe my mind has five major pieces, blocks or something, and I have this sense that I can kind of like, just like I could take a deep breath and bring my shoulders down and there's an organizing my body here in the torso, the here or the weight against my seat. I can do the same thing with the mind. I can sense and feel my mind a little bit, and then as I exhale, I kind of like imagine I'm putting the pieces back together, and so the mind becomes whole. All the parts of the mind are there. To what degree this is only something of my imagination, or to what degree it is something that feels more actual that's going on and putting the mind back together is not that important for me. What's important is that the tensions I feel, different ways—maybe it sometimes feels like the blood is going in different places or the blood is going all into a central place, not flowing into the whole brain—and so there's some kind of way in which I feel the brain, feel the thinking muscle, and then kind of let it settle and come together, gather together.

Let it kind of spread. What happens often is the mind gets settled and quiet, calm. It tends to feel larger, more spacious. It feels like it's expanding. Partly because any idea of outer limit of the mind is an artifice of imagination and that we are unconscious of how we're doing it. If we're no longer boxing the mind in with a concept idea that it's just inside the skull, there

can feel like there's no barrier, no limit to the size of the mind.

When we don't imagine a limit to the edges of thoughts, the edges of the mind, there can be a feeling of it kind of softening and relaxing. So this unifying and then relaxing, and the risk of offering too many images, it's the image that worked well for me also, is that of a surface of a lake that's spreading and becoming wider and stiller and quieter. Not pushing it, but kind of allowing it. So this organizing of the mind, having the mind oriented, and then in that orientation, bringing together the other pieces of the mind. So everything is working together. Settling, orienting, organizing things.

One way that I, in the last meditation that I emphasized, was everything kind of coming back, coming together in a gathering place, the gathering spot that's at the center of all things—not to exclude anything, not to be laser-focused, but kind of a soft, round bowl for attention where everything is rolling down, flowing down, where it comes together, and everything can settle there. Be resting in the weight of the sides of that bowl, resting in the lake bottom, the bowl of the lake.

So I hope that this, some of what I said today, will be useful for some of you. As I said in the beginning of the meditation, I don't expect that all that I'm teaching about *samādhi* will feel right for all of you, and that it's all a piece, all kind of fit for who you are. *Samādhi* is a deeply personal phenomenon. It's very personal and unique to each person, how they discover and understand their own mind, body, and heart, so that it becomes whole, it becomes organized, it becomes fully gathered together, so there's a feeling of being whole and absorbed in what we're doing without being scattered in distracting thoughts and activities and feelings.

So if anything that I say doesn't work for you, you're welcome not to use it. But maybe it's even more important, if it doesn't work for you, take some time to use it as a mirror to understand yourself better. What is it about your mind that may be why it doesn't work? Is there something else like it or a different thing that does work for you? The more you become familiar with yourself and what the elements of who you are are, then the easier it is to gather all those pieces and unify them into the absorption that is *samādhi*. So, thank you very, very much, and we'll continue tomorrow. Thank you.

Samadhi (19) Centered, Spacious, And Composed

2025-02-06

So welcome to this, now the 19th talk on *samādhi*, as we go very slowly into this topic, and avoiding a headlong dive into *samādhi*, an assertive kind of approach to really getting it and being deeply concentrated, but almost allowing it to grow on its own, partly out of becoming more and more familiar with your inner life, your inner life of attention, the different ways of being attentive, the different ways of being aware, the different ways that we can begin gathering ourselves together, becoming composed, being settled, being gathered here, all of us who we are. And for each of you, this is going to be a different process. And my words, my instructions, my suggestions are just suggestions or pointers for you to begin to discover what works for you. How are you? What's going on? What's your inner landscape like?

And how could your inner landscape become whole, not divided, not fragmented? And *samādhi* has a lot to do with becoming whole. And the classic language for that is unification. And I like to think of it as gathering everything together to be so everything's included. And everything is a lot of stuff. You don't have to make an inventory of everything you could possibly do to kind of bring it in.

It's more a sense of a kind of availability and expansiveness, a presence that we have, a tension we have, which is not divided, which doesn't actively limit and block things. And it's so easy to be preoccupied. And the world that we're available to is very narrow and small. It's very easy to have a particular idea, belief, orientation about things, and then we just zero in on that. That becomes important. And we don't notice anything else.

And the idea that *samādhi* is a one-pointedness can lend itself to the idea of attention with blinders on, and we're just really going to really bore into some objects of attention. But rather than that, to open awareness up, to take off the blinders and be available in a very relaxed, open way to the whole world, to everything. And in the process of that, to become composed, settled, gathered in a way that we're sitting at the center of all things. We're sitting in the center of vast space or center of all things included. And, you know, I've said this many times, but to me it's very meaningful to use the analogy of central vision and peripheral vision.

And so there's kind of a central way in which we can become, be aware, attentive to what's happening. We can have a center. But then also there's this peripheral awareness that this

place where there's no edges, where we're not staring at it. You can't stare at what's at the periphery of attention. You have to kind of be soft and relaxed and kind of a wide angle kind of seeing to see peripheral attention, eyesight. And so the same thing with awareness.

And so, to be aware of ourselves, and be aware, to find a place that's the, I call it the settling place, the centering place, the gathering place, the, in other words, at the center of it all, that it can be the place where we stand, take a stand, take it to compose ourselves on. And it's almost like being there, maybe taking a stand, but then opening our metaphorical arms really wide to be available to what's there, to all around. But we feel grounded, settled, on this place. And then the other analogy is out of a bowl, and the bowl has a center at the bottom. And so everything can begin kind of angling towards that center and be included in the bowl, but everything kind of points to the center.

Everything rolls towards a center that's going to roll. It's all included in this wide bowl of spaciousness. And so the language of today, the idea today is that of being composed in ourselves. So take a deep breath, relax, be composed and maybe be oriented the whole attention now is oriented towards that place at the center where the centering place is. We compose ourselves. We gather everything else around it.

And so that there's a wide, open sense of light awareness that supports the primary attentiveness to that center point. And if that is connected to breathing, that it's the place where the inhale begins, the exhale ends at the same place, and maybe the whole time we're at that place, that point where it begins, we don't actually leave it. There's a way in which that's the bench we sit on. That's the ground we stand on as we open up and become aware of what's wider, not with this active intentional attention exactly, but rather this peripheral awareness that opens up and allows everything then to become composed around that center. And what happens over time is that there can be this, not a straining attention, a narrow attention, a laser focus attention, there can be a centered attention there, that over time, that becomes more and more fuller and richer and fills awareness more and more.

And in some ways, the objects around us, the objects in our body elsewhere, begin to recede into the spaciousness, kind of become less and less attentive and aware. And at some point, people even feel that there's no body anymore around it. It's all just kind of space and particular sensations maybe that are floating in space. Because the mind's latching on, the mind holding on, looking and wanting and not wanting, labeling, being concerned with, judging, has quieted down. And mind becomes more and more content to rest at the centering place, at the spot where we're getting oriented, we're getting composed, we're getting settled.

And how big that place is and spot varies from person to person. Some can be very small. Some people it can be a broader place. But it is a place where we're kind of, this is where there's a continuity of attention. And we're kind of not leaving it. We're not losing touch with it. We're not getting lost in thoughts and preoccupation.

And so one of the supports for this is this gentle but ongoing counting. And some people can just count up to one and start over again, and that keeps the mind really simple, but there's something that gives us a little bit that gives us the emphasis, stay there, rest there, stay open there. Sometimes it's useful to count to ten, because that requires a higher order tracking of it in the mind. And so the mind is a little bit more engaged, instead of its tendency to wander off in thought. Some people don't like the counting, but it might actually be better than the alternative.

The alternative to have the mind wander off, that groove to wander off is so well-oiled and slick that it just feels smooth and nice and easy to wander off in thought and be lost. And it's not really helpful for allowing *samādhi* to arise. And so even though it feels less satisfying to count and let the mind wander off, it still might be the better alternative to keep you there, to keep you there. And what happens with something like the counting is after a while, the counting becomes softer, lighter, easier, more natural. And it supports the gathering. It's like the mind begins to accept that this is what we're doing, being here on the simplicity of the moment, moment after moment.

And when that happens, when the mind finally relaxes and settles and is no longer afraid or desiring or wanting, and you really settle in to being right here, it can be such a relief. It allows so much sense of goodness and health and satisfaction and contentment to begin arising. But there's a transition. And sometimes the counting can help us overcome that bump to really be able to settle in. So counting 1 to 10. And at this point I recommend you count the exhale.

So the inhale can really be living there in the wake of each count. And the exhale to really allow this quiet awareness to fill us and being centered there. So to sit quietly and begin learning the wonderful art of using this wonderful multifaceted capacity that we have for attention that can be a vehicle for love. So much so that at some point, attention and love might seem the same thing. And *samādhi* can seem not as an engineering feat, but can seem as a flowering of a kind of love that we're very happy to be completely in and let everything else kind of dissolve into the spaciousness of awareness as we stay in the settling spot, the grounding spot.

And maybe that description I just gave is what's coming, and maybe it gives you a little preview, but we'll continue step by step. And thank you very much. Thank you.

Samadhi (20) Continuous Awareness

2025-02-07

So, good morning and welcome to this 20th talk on *samādhī*. The topic for the last four days has been related to the unification, the inclusivity of *samādhī*, and that we want to bring our body, everything settled together, be here, supportive for the centering of attention in the present moment, centering it on something like the breathing. Part of this unification, bringing together, being whole, involves time, that we're also living in time, which the only way to live in time is to live in the present moment, in the way I'm talking about it. To be continuous through time with awareness, in a way where awareness is not hijacked by preoccupations and concerns, where awareness is not pulled away this way and that by desires and aversions, fears, that we're settled. One way to think about this that works for me is that of maybe even like riding a slide or being carried in a fast-moving river that's quite safe, but you have to be really present to be in the current and flowing down in a canoe or a raft. Or surfing, body surfing, board surfing on a wave going.

There's a variety of things that we do that we get carried and flow. Skiing for some people, maybe sports, sports that are more active, or as we're doing the sport, part of what can be so enjoyable about it is that we're no longer caught up in our preoccupations. Something about what we're doing brings us into the present moment, into the present moment activity in a continuous way. And if thoughts are operating, they either have receded in the background, they're not really relevant, or they're supportive characters in the event. So rather than thinking being the main actor, they're a supporting actor for this being engaged and involved in the activity. Excuse me, I don't know if I was able to turn that off fast enough before my sneeze.

And so the representative is like a slide. Most people, when they go sliding down, especially a long slide that's not too fast, their preoccupation with other things goes away. We're just in the slide. And it can be nice. It's very nice. I think there's something about our whole system that likes being fully present and engaged in certain activities.

It could be a craft. It could be reading a book. Partly because we're not being pulled out of the present moment. We're not being pulled out by fear, aversion, desires, preoccupations. And so the awareness, our ability for present moment attention, has not been compromised by the preoccupations of our mind. It turns out that if without the mind, the ruminations, the stories that we live in, some of them almost subconscious, the beliefs we're operating

under, without those kind of in place, the natural capacity just to be aware of the present, the natural capacity for attention as it moves through our body, more complete, as it's kind of more inclusive of all the different attentional faculties we have, the happier we can be, the more pleasant it is, the more goodness it feels there, the more rightness it feels to be really here.

And so part of what we're learning in the process of *samādhi* is learning the art of staying with our experience continuously through time. In the beginning, it means that we're continuous for a short time, and then we do it again, continuous for a short time. Slowly, as we relax and settle, slowly as the preoccupations of the mind kind of lessen, that ability to stay present is able to be more extended. So not by force, not by holding ourselves there with a great force. A little bit, there has to be some intention, some oomph, some commitment to being present, open, relaxed, and there. And so that we don't easily wander off in thought.

But with time, we're not feeding the thinking, not feeding the preoccupations. It's able to stay in that flow of the present longer and longer. Maybe in the beginning, it's just maybe if you're lucky, you can do the whole inhale and then the whole exhale. But over time, it becomes multiple inhales and exhales. This is where counting the exhales can be useful. Some people count the exhale and the inhale.

But the counting kind of is an encouragement to stay present and to encourage me to stay in the experience of breathing. Not staying, the count is a small piece of what we're doing. It's almost using count that you're imagining yourself counting and it's kind of like a pointer, stay there. The value of counting to ten is that the mind has to be a little more alert to the process of counting in the present moment. As we get into it, as long as it's not forceful or tight or contracted, but the sense of settling and opening and inclusivity of all with the center point on the breathing, just staying on that center point, really feeling that we're resting in the canoe as the current of the river carries us. There's a natural process of goodness, of rightness, of pleasure, of comfort that can happen.

Some of it because the tensions we carry inside of us have a lot to do with how we think about things. If we're not thinking so much, then natural comfort or well-being or a sense of relief can be quite nice. As we get deeper and deeper into it, there's more and more pleasure that can arise with *samādhi*. So this process of this week of being inclusive, being oriented, being settled, being here more and more fully with all of who we are in a sense, and then today continues through time, is a prelude to beginning to feel the pleasure or the joy, the delight of *samādhi*. We're making room for that in the body. We're making space for it through time.

We're making room in the mind for some deeper process to begin unfolding. And so continuity of attention is very important. That's what I'd encourage you to practice. Maybe even look for the ways in the daily life that you have where you can relax the scattered mind, the pre-occupied mind, enough to just simply, in a very simple way, enjoy your everyday attention, awareness of what's happening, going for a walk in a park, and just enjoying the present moment of being with the trees, the landscape, the people, and kind of cultivate this ability to be more continuous in the present moment, here and now with this. Maybe spend less time being on your device, which certainly in the present moment with the device, but generally the kind of attention when we're looking at a screen, it does something very different to the brain. It actually encourages a brain which is distractible, encourages a brain which is cut up in its thoughts, not one that where the whole system, the whole body comes alive with awareness.

So I'll end with a delightful image, at least for me it's delightful, I hope you enjoy it, of this idea of staying continuous, being carried in the current, being carried kind of on the slide of the present moment, maybe the slide of the exhale, or being, is a good number of years ago, I came out to my car on the street while it was raining. It wasn't raining super hard, but it was definitely raining, and the windshield of my car was all wet. There was a little bird, it wasn't very big, that would stand at the top of the windshield and slide to the bottom, hop off, fly up, and slide down again. It just over and over again, it was just sliding down that. There wasn't any food involved. There wasn't any searching for safety or searching for a partner. As far as I can tell, it was just enjoying sliding.

And so if a bird can do that, then I think it represents a very, for me, it represents a very deep, maybe way in which we creatures with brains have been shaped to find a certain kind of delight in being fully in the present moment with some experience of being open, relaxed, being carried along. May it be that until we come back on Monday, that you allow the flow of time or the present moment to carry along your present moment awareness. May it bring you delight and joy. So in meditation for these next few days, see if you can work on this topic. Work on this capacity we have of having attention be more continuous through time. So, thank you very much.

Samadhi (21) The Path of Wellbeing

2025-02-10

So, hello and welcome to this 21st talk on *samādhi*, the phenomenally useful ability to be happily absorbed in an activity. Absorbed as in a state of being absorbed, connected. And this is one of the gifts that can happen in meditation. And it's a state that as *samādhi* develops that involves a lot of pleasure. Some of that pleasure can be experienced as gladness, comfort, some of it as joy, sometimes as happiness. Some people will describe it as, some of it, when it gets intense, as rapture and bliss.

And when the Buddha was searching for a path to awakening, there's a story that's told that he remembered being a child and being left in a safe place while the adults were working on doing the spring plowing festival in the field. And he was on the edge of the field under a tree. It's kind of lovely that they have a record of what tree it was. It was a rose apple tree. And somehow, watching the events around him, he got very calm and settled and peaceful and in a way that was noticeable and felt a lot of joy and happiness. And then he entered into a state of *samādhi* that was very enjoyable.

And he remembered having that as a child, as an adult, and he said, wait a minute. Maybe this is the way forward. Maybe this is the way to freedom. He had been doing asceticism, where he was denying himself and experiencing a tremendous amount of pain intentionally. And he had realized that that wasn't going to lead to his awakening.

And in ancient India, to feel pleasure was considered a little bit taboo among religious people, at least some of them, that somehow that was indulgent. Somehow that was self-preoccupation of some sort. But he felt the quality of this pleasure of absorption was actually quite healthy and useful, and that it was onward leading. It led to kind of a deeper unification, deeper arriving here, connection here, and a deeper clarity that was going to allow him to do the work of coming to the end of suffering.

So we have here in Buddhism two kind of things that might seem contradictory, but are important to understand. They go hand in hand. One is it's a very direct acknowledgement of suffering, suffering in the world and our own suffering. There's not a turning away from it or denying it or pretending it's not there or overriding it with some kind of even meditation. There is a kind of mature, serious, like, yes, there is suffering. And at the same time, an appreciation that there is a healthy pleasure, healthy sense of well-being that we can cultivate

and develop as a way of meeting that suffering, holding that suffering, finding a way through that suffering.

And so how we can hold both at the same time is part of the art. And one way to do that is to not be fixated on the suffering, not be overly afraid or concerned or trying to fix it or solve it. Maybe to understand that at least in the context of meditation, not in the rest of our life, but in meditation at least, there's something about our challenges, our problems, even some deep psychological suffering that we carry, that it won't be solved, but it will be dissolved. And there's something that it's almost like better not to fixate on it, but let the discomforts and stuff be on the edges. And in the middle of it, without denying it, start, as we develop and get settled in meditation more and more, to feel the pleasure of meditating.

Of course, this is not something someone can do when suffering is new and fresh or big or someone's new to meditation. But as meditation deepens and we have a sense of it, then we start opening up to the pleasure of meditation. And this is the 21st talk on *samādhi*, so there's been a lot of foundation, hopefully to lead up to this, that if some of you are new to this, that maybe by now, maybe you can start seeing a little hint, a glimmer of the pleasure that might be there, the pleasantness, the sense of well-being.

And when the Buddha recognized it from his, you know, that he had it as a child, and that now this is the way forward, He said, I don't have to be afraid of this kind of pleasure. And again, because in his time, people were afraid of pleasure and sensual pleasure and all kinds of things because it kept them trapped in the world and created more bad karma or some idea like that they had. And for him, it was revolutionary to discover that there is a kind of pleasure, a kind of well-being, that is not a trap, is not a problem, but actually you don't have to be afraid of it. You can embrace it. You can use that as an entry.

And so the mind, it's easier for the mind to want to be present if what we're being present for is enjoyable. Listening to really pleasant things like music, listening to doing an activity that we enjoy a lot, it's easier to stay present and show up. Meditation can be a little bit like that too eventually as we begin understanding ourselves, learning the art of being present. It isn't a direct kind of sensual pleasure because we're getting a massage or something. There starts to well up from some deep inner source a sense of rightness, a sense of relief, a sense of delight, a sense of pleasure that is not because of something good in the world. Our senses are being stimulated in a good way. But it's more related to something beginning to work in harmony.

The harmony of breath and mind. The breathing is relaxed enough that it feels harmonious

and easeful within us. An easeful breath. A relaxed breath. And an awareness that enjoys being there. And so start becoming more and more sensitive to the, maybe at first, very subtle sense of enjoyments or pleasure that seems to be part and parcel of the meditation itself.

It might be a growing global feeling of a hum, a pleasant hum throughout the body. It might be a particular part of almost like a little square inch inside of a square centimeter. That just as we breathe, when we touch that centimeter of the breath or that little brief point, it just feels so poignantly delightful to feel that. Or it might be the whole exhale just feels so pleasant to exhale. But maybe not in a square centimeter kind of point, but maybe more like a, almost like you can't fixate the attention on that pleasure. It's more there in the periphery, on the edges of the breath, edge of the sensations of breathing.

And so you better not fixate on it, look for it, but you kind of just allow it to be there as a nice supporting pleasure that provides a kind of biofeedback mechanism where when that pleasure is there, connected to breathing, that then we're on track. And that kind of encourages the mind, yes, stay there. Keep doing what you're doing. Stay with the breathing. Ride the breath. Stay absorbed in the breath. And allow that pleasure to be there. And even allow it to grow as you're there.

So sometimes that pleasure is a growing pleasure, is the tingling of the air going in and out of the nostrils that can get more and more intense. It could be the soft rhythm and the smoothness of an exhale in the chest or the belly. It could be the sensations of breathing in, that maybe the speed of it and the smoothness of it, if it is that way. It could be that it's not connected to breathing itself, as I said, but maybe it's more there kind of on the edges of it, just beyond the edges of breathing there's something that just feels comforting and nice and like a radiance perhaps.

So I don't know how it'll be for any of you. There's many, many ways, maybe infinite number of ways in which we can feel a pleasure that's related to meditation. It's not because it's pleasant in the room for just the right temperature, but it's really there because of the way in which we're getting connected and present for the focus of meditation, the centering place, the settling place. We're really involved in that process. It feels good, like reading a good book or involved in a wonderful activity that we enjoy doing. So that kind of joy begins welling up.

So I'll talk more about this this week. This week we'll focus on this aspect of pleasure. And hopefully you can find something. And so you might, through the day today, until we meet again in 24 hours, spend more time noticing the pleasures you feel in the activities you do.

And maybe there's ways you can drive in a pleasant way. You have to adjust something so driving is pleasant. Maybe how fast you drive and all kinds of things. How you sit. Maybe there's ways you can bring in more pleasure in how you cook or clean or whatever you're doing. See if you can find and appreciate how you can feel pleasure in activities you do. And it might be better than the alternative if you don't do that.

So thank you. And I have an announcement. So partly inspired by what happened three years ago with this YouTube community, IMC is having a fundraising drive this week. Three years ago we did a fundraising drive for Save the Children for the children and mothers and families that were suffering from the Russian invasion of the Ukraine and we raised \$70,000 which was fantastic and we're trying to do that again this time for the Save the Children's Emergency Fund which is going to the places in the world where children are most in danger of starvation, starving to death, hunger, homelessness, all kinds of great challenges.

So money will go to Gaza, to Sudan, I think to Syria, a variety of places in the world. And I'm hoping that this community that we're here inspired last time will continue to inspire the wider IMC community to participate in this fundraising drive. So you can read a little bit more about it by going to the IMC website. And I asked someone to post it on the chat here today. I don't know if it's appeared there. But if you go on the homepage of IMC's website, there's a banner at the top that takes you to the donation page for the drive. And also in What's New, there's a page that describes it.

So this is one way that from out of our meditation community, we can benefit the world. And to feel like we're doing it together as a community. And the collective power is a wonderful thing. And it's just a, I think, a very significant, I don't know, coincidence is the right word, but that we plan to do this before the U.S. closed down the Agency for International Development, where there's now even more challenges in this world to get food and supplies and medicine to people in distressed situations. So to be an alternative to this has even more meaning now. And so thank you very much. Thank you.

Samadhi (22) Signs Of Samadhi

2025-02-11

Hello and welcome to this next talk on *samādhī*. This time I want to discuss the topic of the evidence of *samādhī*, the evidence of becoming more settled, calm, absorbed, and connected to the meditation process. In the language of the Buddha, there was a word for this evidence, the symptoms. It is *nimitta*, N-I-M-I-T-T-A. And it's one A, two A's, two T's, maybe it's one T, but *nimitta*.

Nimitta has sometimes come down into the present times and the meditation traditions of Buddhism to refer to only one example of the symptom of meditation. I'm not going to bother you with what that one example is, because it's really an example of what comes out of a very particular way of practicing meditation. In the ancient world, there were just lots of symptoms, evidence for what happens as we meditate. Whatever the symptoms are, what shifts and changes, is meant to support the practice. One of the words that I associate with this is beauty.

The Buddha talked about becoming skilled in the beauty of *samādhī* because these symptoms that we have, this evidence, have a beauty to them or a pleasure to them or a rightness or a goodness to them. Sometimes they feel healthy. There's a healthiness that comes along with them. The idea is to be sensitive to them and include them as part of the range of what we're aware of as we meditate. Generally, what I suggest is not to take them as the focus of meditation.

Don't get preoccupied or caught in them, and even though they feel good, some people are pumping them up trying to make this stronger. But the idea is the symptoms: I feel calmer, more settled. Often it's associated as we get deeper in *samādhī* with different sensations, feelings, emotions even, that are quite pleasant, like joy and happiness. There's a lot of pleasure, a physical kind of sense of pleasure that flows or radiates from the meditation itself. Rather than focusing on them or being preoccupied with them or drawing conclusions from them or congratulating yourself for them being there, the idea is to take them as cheerleaders that say, continue what you're doing.

What you're doing is good. Let them be there on the edges supporting you, guiding you. Sometimes what you can feel is that as, like with the breathing, with the rhythm of breathing, you can feel that as you kind of follow that rhythm and get more absorbed and more intimate

with it, you can feel that it has a growing effect on the evidence, on the *nimitta*, on the wider effect that it has on your body, mind, and heart. There can be tingling in the body. There can be a sense of wonderful, delightful humming or vibration.

There can be a feeling of the body becoming lighter and softer, translucent. The body seems to become—the inside of the body can start feeling like it's a vast, wonderful kind of cavern or great space. Feeling more and more space is one of these evidence of the mind entering *samādhī*. Sometimes some people will feel that the mind seems to become quite expansive. The narrow mind, the contracted mind, is often a sign of preoccupation, being caught in something.

As we're less caught, the mind starts feeling more expansive. That's the evidence, the sign. Sometimes people use the word sign quite a bit for what I'm talking about: the symptom, the sign, the evidence. Sometimes there can be a strong sensation flow of pleasure. Sometimes it has a flowing feeling in the body.

Sometimes it has a pulsing feeling in the body, and sometimes in intense ways it can feel like a cascading waterfall or breaking waves of pleasure that rushes through the body. So it can be strong, but it doesn't have to be strong. In some ways it can be more useful if it's not so strong. Some people push it and try to make these things strong. But just well enough that it supports the mind to get quieter, supports a seeing or following the trail that's opening up in front of us as we meditate, of a trail or an onward leading to a feeling of—each person can choose their own word to describe this—a feeling of coming home, a feeling of intimacy, a feeling of being deeply calm and at ease, a feeling of being peaceful, a feeling of kind of being absorbed.

We're gathering together and being really here in a wholehearted way, in a whole-body way, in a whole-minded way. This feeling of being complete and whole, right, with our experience. Sometimes the symptom can be the inner eye or the eyes—it can seem like—sees light. Sometimes it can be a white light. Some people will see different colored lights.

Sometimes the lights or colored lights are shifting and changing in different kinds of patterns or something. Again, it's best not to get focused on those things that can be quite entertaining or interesting if it's colors. The idea is to always let these things, these symptoms, be in the periphery as saying—it's almost like encouragement—yes, this is a sign that the meditation is going well. Let's not get involved with the signs. Let's not get preoccupied with them.

Let's just hold the course. Hold the course. Don't get distracted by them. Some of the signs

and symptoms will settle away over time and disappear to be replaced by others. Some might get stronger before they settle away and disappear.

Generally, the momentum and movement of *samādhi* is a movement towards more calm, more peace, more simplicity, greater and greater simplicity that feels very, very satisfying to have. These signs, symptoms, can start occurring at the very beginning when you first sit down, especially if you're used to—you have a familiar and comfortable posture to sit down into when you meditate. The familiarity, the regularity of assuming this posture means that almost immediately we can start feeling something is beginning to shift, shift in a good way. With a little calmer, the body softens and relaxes. There's a feeling of the body not being aligned.

Some people don't really live in a really good aligned posture in ordinary life, but in meditation it can feel so good to kind of take that kind of a posture that's upright and aligned. Anything that feels good about the posture, then about relaxing, centering oneself from the breathing, kind of resting in the settling place, the grounding place. Any way in which it feels good for the mind to be attentive. This is where the art of *samādhi* has a lot to do with the art of learning how to use our attention in a way that we enjoy, that feels nice. If we're jerking the mind around, if we're pouncing on ourselves because we've wandered off and that's not good, and we're straining and bearing down, it's like we're desperate to be concentrated.

That's not a beautiful, that's not an enjoyable, that's not a pleasant way of being aware. But to find a way that's pleasant to be aware, so the mind wants to be aware in the present moment, so the mind is more interested in being attentive to the present than it is to be preoccupied in thoughts. All of what I'm describing can be understood as being the symptoms and signs that the meditation is beginning to create a good context, a good feeling within. Sometimes it could be subtler than some of the difficult feelings that we have. It isn't that we want to push the difficult feelings away or condemn them or something, but to feel any of these subtler signs of calm or subtleness or goodness or receptivity that's there, that becomes a way to hold what's difficult.

That's a way to relate to it. That's a way of caring for it in a nice kind of container, in a nice attitude, so that it itself, the difficulties we have, are being tended, being cared for, being nurtured by love, by care, by kindness, by spaciousness, by allowing them to be there in a soft, accepting way. There's a kind of a sense of the beauty of it or the calm or the pleasure of meditation kind of maybe allows what's difficult to soften by itself, to be felt in a different context so we're not so caught in it or troubled by it. So the signs of meditation, the *nimitta*,

the evidence of it, of what's happening, there's an art to learning how to gently, modestly, use them to support the gathering together, the unification, the settling, the onward leading nature of meditation as we start entering into the world of *samādhi*, where we're entering into kind of a new space, a new way of being for the duration of *samādhi*. So thank you very much, and may you...

I'm very fond of this idea of the word whisperer, like a horse whisperer. So may you be the whisperer of your *samādhi*. May you respectfully care and listen and sense to the things that are often overlooked so that you can settle more deeply into the practice. So thank you very much. And we'll continue tomorrow.

Samadhi (23) Supported by Pleasure and Well-Being

2025-02-12

So, welcome to the next talk on *samādhi*. But before I do it, I would like to repeat the announcement I made on Monday that IMC, partly inspired from what this YouTube community did three years ago—raising money for the refugees from Ukraine—IMC is inspired to do this again for children in areas of great crisis who are facing famine and illness, injuries of all kinds. The way we want to do this is by making donations to Save the Children, a wonderful organization that does wonderful work in the world for children for many decades now. So we started this week the fundraising drive, and we're about a third of the way to what I'm hoping is the inspiring goal for us. If you're interested in joining together and participating in the kind of collective effectiveness of a community doing something with each other, you can go on the IMC website. The homepage has a couple of places where you can get to the Save the Children donation page that we're using, which is specific to IMC.

There's a red banner on top of the website, and there's a What's New section of the homepage. There's a notice as well. So thank you. And in talking about that, the gathering together of a community and the power that that can bring—so in meditation, the gathering together of ourselves into a unified whole, entering into a state of being that's called *samādhi*, gives the individual a certain power that can then be used for good in the world. It brings the power of love, the power of peace, the power of being settled, and the power of being present in a very full and embodied, complete way.

This gathering ourselves together of *samādhi* is supported by pleasure. Supported by the pleasantness or the happiness that can come from meditation. There are times when meditation teachers have de-emphasized the joy and the happiness that come with meditation. One form of that de-emphasizing is by telling the practitioner, when they feel some joy or happiness or pleasure in the meditation, that now there's one more thing for you to let go of. But I think I would say it differently. It's one more thing not to be attached to, but don't exactly let go of it.

Stay with it. Maintain it. It's one more thing to open your hands, to hold kindly and supportingly so that something there can grow and develop. It's almost like not clinging, not being attached, not being resistant, not being afraid of the pleasure and joy that comes in meditation, is almost like we're opening up, or there's an opening up like a flower that opens when it's going well. We don't say the flower is letting go of itself when it opens, but it is no longer

bunched up and tight.

The reference to flower works well for some people who talk about the beauty that can arise in *samādhi*. That's sometimes a more useful reference point than pleasure or joy, where some of us can have a complicated relationship to that. Maybe we have a certain standard of what joy means or what pleasure means that gets in the way of us appreciating what's here. Or we appropriate the joy. We hold on to the joy or the pleasure like we want more. The beauty of meditation—it's difficult to appropriate that.

It's difficult to grab onto beauty because it's kind of amorphous. It's kind of like it's not something that can be destroyed the more we cling. It's almost like an open hand disappears if we grab onto the hand to hold on to. We like that open hand so much we don't want to share it with anyone and we make a fist. Well, the open hand is lost in that process. So beauty can be that way.

Some people can feel the beauty of maybe of breathing. There's something very sweet that can start happening. Maybe the word sweetness is another way of talking about these positive, positive feelings that can start coming from meditation. It's okay to evoke it slightly, not to make it a big project, but a classic instruction is to have a little half smile on your lips. Sometimes that brings kind of pleasure sensations around the lips, around the cheeks or the face. Sometimes it begins to shift some whole inner feeling that we have.

It kind of reconditions or recontextualizes something that maybe creates an alternative to how we might be shaped and affecting our body or heart or mind by doing with our mind something that's the opposite of a smile. Sometimes it can be an automatic pilot with resentments or anger or aversions or finding what's wrong or being critical, self-critical. It can be so common and so frequent we do this that it just seems like the natural state or way of being. We don't even know that we're doing it. But it has a very strong conditioning effect influence on our whole being. Sometimes it's nice to do, within reason, a slight kind of re-orientation towards what is good right now, what is pleasant right now, what is nice right now.

Some people find it useful when they sit down to make sure that they're sitting in a place where no one's going to disturb them, where they feel safe. Maybe even look around in the room, the door's closed and no one's there and there's no monsters under the bed. Actually feel the safety of it. Some people feel very little safety in their life. So that the fear doesn't get the upper hand, it might be good to actually take time to feel the sense of safety that might be there. Some people take time to feel gratitude at the beginning of a sitting.

Being reminded of things that we're grateful for is an antidote to some of the other non-grateful ways in which we're operating. Some people like to evoke a sense of contentment. Contentment is in the family of well-being, happiness. So to find the ways in which you feel content in your life as opposed to discontented. To kind of bring into the meditation some kind of appropriate way, not forcing it, not Pollyannishing it, but some appropriate way to start kind of evoking and bringing forth and being connected to a well-being, a pleasure in the pleasant present moment.

For some people, that pleasure that can come from meditation comes from starting to be absorbed in the focus of meditation, such as the breathing. Just staying continuously with the breathing means that we're no longer concentrating, absorbed in thoughts and feelings which create the opposite for us, opposite of joy, opposite of well-being. When those begin quieting down and settling, and they're not fragmenting us or irritating the heart or the mind, there's a natural sense of being more peaceful, more settled, more calm. As we kind of stay continuous with the breath, there's something that gets evoked that is clearly a feeling of pleasure or joy that is not in the breath itself, but it is in the way the mind is getting organized and absorbed with the focus of attention.

It turns out that there's something about the brain that when it gets really peacefully absorbed or attentive, gathered around a thing, that it seems to release—maybe it's releasing hormones or something. It tends to release something. Something begins to be evoked and pleasure and joy that comes. Maybe partly because with that kind of absorption, there's no longer a feeling of unsafety. There's no longer a feeling of discontent. There's no longer a feeling of being oppressed or being put upon or no longer being reminded of all the responsibilities we have to accomplish, all the plans we have to do, the to-do list.

All these things that make us fragmented and cut up and tense begin kind of falling away. Just that feels good. There's the pleasure of relief. Ah, just here in a simple way. Of course, it's not like this direct kind of highway to pleasure, but it's helpful to realize that pleasure, well-being, contentment, gratitude can coexist with the opposite. It starts kind of creating a different atmosphere, a different influence on ourselves when we kind of begin centering ourselves on the more subtle sense of well-being.

Again, not to push everything else away, but to appreciate that we will take care of the world, ourselves, better when we're really centered and calm and peaceful in a way that *samādhi* creates. *Samādhi* creates a kind of capacity and power and ability to meet the world in a full and open way and direct way so that we can care for the world out of, from the place that's

the best in us. We don't want to care for the world from how we are aversive or angry or greedy or afraid. There is possible to care for the world, care for ourselves from beauty, from peacefulness, from love. That's the kind of wonderfulness of *samādhī*, that as it grows, we have the ability to respond to the world in that way.

So, thank you very much, and I hope that on this day that you'll smile more. I'd like to offer a little bit tongue-in-cheek, but a little bit serious, that if you find a nice way to smile twice as much today as you normally would, probably you'll have half as much feeling that you have problems in your life. May you smile, and may you share your smile and your sparkle with those around you. Thank you.

Samadhi (24) The Inner Pleasure of Samadhi

2025-02-13

So, hello and welcome to this 23rd, 24th talk, I think, 23rd talk on *samādhī*. And this week the topic is the pleasure of *samādhī*. Pleasure takes different forms at different times. Sometimes it can feel like pure pleasure, physical pleasure. But it also can morph into the pleasure of delight, the pleasure of gladness, the pleasure of joy, the pleasure of happiness, the pleasure of tranquility, the pleasure of equanimity, the pleasure of release and freedom, and the pleasure of refuge, pleasure of knowing we have a home that brings a certain degree of safety and care, orientation, meaning to this life of ours. All kinds of aspects of refuge.

And so pleasure is an important part of Dharma practice. Maybe we can call it Dharma pleasure. In the teachings on mindfulness, the Buddha makes a distinction between two kinds of pleasure. There's a pleasure that comes from, that we might want to call sensual pleasure, if we understand it to be that our senses are being stimulated by an external source. So if I eat a tasty food, that would be called sensual pleasure in the taste because it comes from the food. If I stand in the warm sun on a cold day and feel the pleasure of that, that would be called sensual pleasure because it comes from outside and touches the nerve endings and does something nice.

If we're thinking about things, there's a way in which the thinking mind represents almost like something outside of ourselves. I can have a fantasy about something, and the fantasy can bring a lot of pleasure. So it's still kind of on the outside. The thinking sometimes, certain kinds of thinking, is on the surface. It kind of stimulates the surface pleasures of the mind. Even though many of us would think the mind is not part of the external world, it's almost as if certain kinds of surface thoughts are the external world, which are providing kind of an external stimulus to things.

There's not necessarily anything wrong with that, in any of this. But there is an alternative, which is a pleasure which is not of the senses, not of these sense doors that take in the external world. There is the pleasure that kind of arises in a more diffuse way, that swells up, emerges, arises inside for no particular external reason. That comes from meditation. So it's a whole radically different pleasure because it doesn't depend on the world. It doesn't depend on getting the world in shape, getting everything just perfect in the world and feeling content and sappy with how the world is and how our external relationships are and everything.

But it comes with a kind of coming into harmony with ourselves and a deep inner sense of sensing the beingness of our life as that beingness comes into harmony, as that beingness comes into a kind of tenderness or wholeness or orientation that feels very meaningful, for example, in meditation. So there are pleasures in meditation that are certainly welling up, and I'm sure there are some sense nerve endings that are being stimulated, but it's not because they're kind of like they're stimulated from the outside in, but rather from the inside in. Something, a deep welling and inspiration. There's also in that unpleasant sensations that are of the senses that come from the outer world or thinking about the outer world. Or there's unpleasant sensations that can well up that are not of the world exactly, not of the sense world but also come from when we feel something is profoundly out of alignment in this world and there's a feeling of something is not right.

But in meditation what we're beginning to give birth to—and this is a language the Buddha used, the language of birth—we're giving birth to a deep sense of wellspring of pleasure, wellspring of well-being in meditation. This sense of well-being is closely connected to a number of things. It's connected to faith or inspiration or confidence, that yes, that's represented, I think, with a big yes. I'm here. This is good. I know this world. I'm inspired by it. I have refuge in it.

So that we're more kind of inclined towards being present here for our experience, rather than being present, continuing to be in the thinking mind that may be thinking about the external world. It has this external relationship to everything, a disconnect to everything. Even if we're thinking about something we did yesterday, and maybe we did something that was harmful and we feel regret, now, if we spend too much time in the imagination of that event, we're kind of removed from something deeper here. So the idea is to come into this deeper place. In meditation, there could be a sense of well-being, a sense of being at home, goodness here, inspiration about what this is about to meditate. So faith.

And there can be a wonderful sense of yes to being present for it, the effort, the energy of it. But here, look for how to apply oneself in meditation so the very application itself is enjoyable. Maybe it's a very light touch. Maybe it's with inspiration, it's just a delight. Sometimes we can put a lot of energy into meditation, and it just feels like a play almost, or it feels like a delight to do it. Sometimes we need to do very, very little effort to get the best results from meditation.

So finding how can you enjoy being focused, how can you enjoy being present with attention. And then there's mindfulness. Mindfulness brings joy because it brings safety. Mindfulness,

we see everything clearly enough that we learn to not pick up, not continue involvement with things which are harmful for ourselves. Mindfulness creates the open space in which things can just be and evolve and change, and we can learn to trust, delightfully trust, that if we're present, things move towards health. Maybe not directly, but over time.

And then there is *samādhī*, beginning to feel absorbed, connected here, kind of like the joy of a cat that's being petted, stroked, being able to really center ourselves here and beginning to feel more whole, more settled, more calm. There's a strong correlation with *samādhī* with calmness, so as we get calmer in meditation that's the pleasure that we start appreciating. Then there's the more subtle pleasure of wisdom, of being able to be happy that we can see clearly enough to find the path, to find our way. Meditation is onward leading. *Samādhī* is an onward leading path where we kind of—not that we're expecting something or trying to make something happen—but it's kind of like we can see, feel, sense, here's where the path opens up, here's where the slide, top of the slide is that'll take us on that wonderful Dharma slide, or here's the path in the forest.

Maybe it's not so easy to see at first and we're lost, but then we start seeing traces of the path—ah, and the delight of knowing it. Maybe after being lost in the wilderness there's a great joy and lightness and pleasure of finally having seen the path. So the function of wisdom is to help us find that path between, so we don't get caught in attachments, expectations, aversions, desires, but we see the path of what's wholesome, what's good, what's healthy for us, healthy way of being present, a supportive way of entering the world of *samādhī*. So there's many forms of pleasure, of goodness, of rightness, of wholeness. One of those words of this pleasure that comes along with time is harmony. That *samādhī* is entering into a state of being in harmony. All things harmonious here and now.

So, pleasure. Part of what we're doing in going into *samādhī*, developing *samādhī*, is becoming an expert or a connoisseur of pleasure within us. So we can find that onward leading pleasure which is not there because the world is any particular way or a fantasy of the world is any particular way, but something that's deeply connected and wells up from within and where we discover that just to be alive is wonderful. Just to rest in our beingness without needing anything else to happen is very, very meaningful and significant. So the *samādhī* of pleasure.

So today you might go around maybe with a smile on your face or maybe with the lightest touch of beingness to see if you can, when you feel that there's a different kind of pleasure that's not there because the world is providing pleasure, and maybe it's the wholehearted-

ness in which you wash the dishes, maybe it's the full embodiment as you walk, walking down the street, that you're really there for the walk from the inside out, than studying the world around you. May this day be a day of deep pleasure, varied pleasure, so that you learn more about this world.

And then, I wasn't going to say anything about our fundraising today, but last night I talked with someone who used to work for Save the Children and has many friends who still work there, and an IMC member who's kind of been our connection there. She said that many of her friends, many of the people around the world who are doing the good work of Save the Children, their positions were funded by the Agency of International Development, and so they lost their jobs. So I think that our fundraising drive to support Save the Children is even more important and meaningful now than it would have been even some weeks ago, and maybe it has even greater value to be able to support this wonderful organization to continue their work at a time when the world really needs it. You can read more about our fundraising drive on IMC's website under What's New, or there's a red banner on top of the website. May this be one of the ways that our wonderful YouTube community steps in to care for this world. Thank you.

Samadhi (25) Pleasure for Samadhi

2025-02-14

So, hello and welcome to this fifth Friday, the fifth day of looking at the pleasure of *samādhī*, that to enter into *samādhī* and really is deeply supported by being attuned to pleasure, the pleasure that comes with meditation. Not the pleasure that we can get by having really wonderfully soft clothes to meditate in or the most perfect sensuous cushion to sit on, but rather the kind of pleasure that begins to radiate or flow from the inside out. As we start being sensitive and attuned to the pleasure of the simple, very simple pleasure of maybe being calmer, and it might be a relative in that we're a little bit calmer than we were, and that feels good. There's a certain pleasure in that goodness, maybe a pleasure in the relief, a pleasure in the hope that it provides. It might be that we feel a little bit more at ease in ourselves, at ease with what is difficult. And that sense of a little bit more ease or ease is pleasant.

It might be that there's a calm that begins spreading through the body or a feeling of being stable after being agitated, feeling like we're not going anywhere, we're settling down more and more into ourselves. There could be that there begins to be some joy or delight. There could be some feeling of ease in the breathing. I think one of the great experiences that really was very meaningful for me when I was quite young and beginning to meditate was to discover a breathing that was free. It had its own ease. Breathing was breathing itself.

And sitting quietly in meditation or having tea or something and just feeling this complete freedom in the breath to breathe itself. Before that, I would never have imagined. I thought my breathing was relatively free, that I wasn't involved in it. But there were so many ways in which my mental and emotional life was somehow involved with the breathing. And have all that settled down enough so that the physical breathing, which is breathing itself, felt like such a great pleasure.

So there's many kinds of pleasures that can come with meditation. Some of them really feel like they're healthy, like they're beneficial, that they're supportive. Because they feel wholesome. They feel like they're good for us to feel. And so we don't tighten up or we don't bore down on it. We don't try to pump it up.

We don't try to be selective about it, to be like, okay, this is the one. This is the pleasure to really focus on and build up. But rather we kind of trust it. We absorb it. We let it register in our system. And in particular I find very useful is the kind of very subtle pleasure or maybe

joy that can feel like it's pervasive through the body.

Becoming more and more embodied, more and more present in our whole body is phenomenally useful for *samādhi*. When people try to get concentrated only as a mental exercise, they often can get a certain kind of concentration and a certain kind of satisfaction from it. But in the bigger picture, it's not so useful, because it's not part of a movement towards becoming more peaceful, more settled, more free. There's something about opening up and settling into the full body and feeling the goodness of that and the pleasure of that. There's pleasure in breathing. So there's all kinds of pleasures, and so each person is going to find their own.

But there's something about the mind that it's more, mind is more interested in being present if it's enjoying it, if there's pleasure. Certainly we can develop a lot of mindfulness, strong mindfulness, being in the present moment with things that are unpleasant. And that's valuable when we have to. But it just makes it easier and nicer for the mind to want to be there, to become partners with the body, partners with the meditation, so that the mind begins to gather, the mind begins being really interested. Yes, this is good. This is where I want to be.

Some people might complain that this is hedonistic. And it can be that the purpose is to only really just savor or indulge in the pleasures of meditation. But it's not meant to be that. It's meant to be able to dip into, drop into a state of health, a state of well-being, a state of harmony. The kind of pleasure that comes when we're at ease in a deep, peaceful way, when we're not in conflict and not agitated, not chasing things or running away from things, not judging and making commentary about everything happening. But the whole psychophysical system begins to come into a very healthy place.

I think of *samādhi* as health. And it feels good. It feels pleasant. There's a pleasure to it. And it's leading us in the direction of becoming good people, leading us in the direction of becoming kinder, more compassionate, more caring, more intelligent, more attuned people, attuned to the world, attuned to ourselves, attuned to others. *Samādhi* provides a tremendous amount of benefit for how we're going to walk into the world if we kind of shift the whole way in our stance or attitude.

In Buddhism, *samādhi* is the means for liberation, to become free. And to become free of suffering is one of the great purposes, goals of a human life. And it's a great goal for supporting other people, a great goal of compassion. And so to know and discover for oneself how thoroughly and fully we can become free of suffering makes it possible for us to be attuned or attentive to how that's a possibility for other people. And so we're not overly influenced

by their behavior or their quirkiness of people, but we see them through a different eye. We see them with this deep love and care, knowing what's possible in them and knowing that there is goodness and beauty within them that can be grown and become full.

We feel a kind of kinship with people, a deep kinship with *samādhi*, because the strong lines of separation that we have become softer. So it's not hedonistic, but it is going along and supporting with pleasure. So this is a piece of the puzzle that's needed to be understood to really begin finding a way to settle in and getting concentrated in a *samādhi*-type way. And so we'll keep building as we go along here, and hopefully this week on pleasure will support us as we go further. At some point that pleasure becomes a pervasive feeling of joy, a pervasive feeling of very deep, peaceful happiness.

So the pleasure shifts and changes as we go along. And for now, the next step in this, which we'll talk about next week, is kind of the preparatory, final preparation for dipping into what most clearly is called *samādhi* in the teachings of the Buddha, to really get absorbed into this. And for that, there's something that's sometimes called access concentration. And so this pleasure supports a kind of attention, a kind of awareness that now begins to become in the groove of the present moment. So that will be the topic for next week. So thank you very much.

And as the week comes to the end, one more time here for our YouTube community, I want to evoke or remind that we have this fundraising drive that I'm so grateful for all of you who made donations. It's quite inspiring that so many people come together and we've raised, you know, maybe close to, I don't know, two-thirds or something of what we're hoping to raise. We're trying to match what we raised three years ago when we did a fundraising drive for Save the Children of Men and maybe even surpass it. And so I think given the challenges of our world these days, it's particularly significant to support these kinds of nonprofits that are trying to do good in the world. And I think everyone benefits. The benefit spreads widely through the world for this kind of offering of support to save the children.

So thank you. And you can find information about it on the IMC website. Just go to IMC's website, and there's a red banner on the top of the website, and there's a little discussion about it in the bottom right where there's a What's New section. So thank you, and I look forward to coming here on Monday to continue.

Samadhi (26) Approaching Samadhi

2025-02-17

Thank you for those of you chatting about the exercise. I'll read more of them after I finish now. Welcome to this next talk on *samādhi*. For this week, we're going to be looking at something that is commonly in English called the access concentration or access *samādhi*. The word access never really quite sits well with me. The word in Pāli, *upacāra*, my understanding is it means something more closely to approach, approaching.

Acāra means to wander and to wander towards something. And based on that meditation we just did, the idea that attention has a little bit quality of wandering, soft, roaming, but it's roaming towards a particular place. It's moving towards something. When I think of access concentration, I think of like there's a door I have to go through. But if I think of approach, then wandering towards, approaching, then it's more of a kind of a gentle movement like a river flowing or I'm in the groove of something and now I'm gliding along, I'm in the slide, sliding, I'm approaching.

And we're approaching a shift that will happen when the *samādhi* kind of clicks in, when the *samādhi* kind of envelops us or begins to have a life of its own, in a sense, when we don't have to make as much effort. It's not so much dependent on us practicing, but it's more that we're being practiced at some point. But we're approaching this point where the shift begins to happen. And there's a number of things that begin coming together in this stage, the stage called the approach. And one of them is that we get in the kind of, in the rhythm or with a sense of ease with these two factors of *samādhi*, which is connecting attention and sustaining attention.

And the awareness that places attention and the awareness that stays there. Some people emphasize that sometimes that involves a little bit of very rudimentary thought, that the thought is, oh, come back to the breathing, and the thought that kind of begins to feel and sense what's going on, and know it more carefully, oh, that's a smooth inhale, that's a smooth out-hale, that's a step-by-step inhale. Just moves, inhale goes up, up, up in kind of steps. Or that's smooth, that's pleasant. So it's not so conscious, the thoughts, but exactly and consciously done.

But it can be a very simple kind of thinking that keeps us in the flow of it. And so the classic analogy that we'll talk about again later is akin to, in the modern world, mixing water into

flour to make dough, where we start kneading the dough in order to really spread the water into the moisture, and all the flour particles become moist. And some of it is kind of a kneading and a folding, and maybe it is like folding, folding bread and kneading bread. And if you are very relaxed and enjoy making bread, enjoy kneading bread, it can be delightful to just be kneading it and folding and kneading and folding. Or I associate sometimes with when I have received a massage, and sometimes in certain massages, I like to breathe in the rhythm of the masseuse kneading my muscles.

And this breathing with the slow kneading of the different muscles just feels like such a nice way of flowing and being really present and connected to what's happening. And so it's not a fixing attention. It's not staring at something. And some people, when they think of concentration, they feel like they have to kind of have this laser focus that's unwavering. And that can create a lot of strain. But rather, it's a very soft, I like to think of it as just short of doing nothing, just enough.

And at different times of day, different times of situations, that just enough is different, how much effort we have to make. But we're trying to make a very light effort so that some of the natural way in which awareness kind of roams and explores and moves around an object happens. Just like with the eyes. Relaxed eyes will roam around an object to see it in different ways with very relaxed movements. Not staring at something. If we want something from the object that we're looking at then we stare and then there can be a strain, but if we just kind of want to know it in a relaxed way, so the same thing with feeling and sensing.

And some people it's much more physical, it's a sensing and feeling, sometimes it's more of an observing, sometimes it's more of a knowing that goes on. But it's really right there with the breathing. And what's nice about the rhythm of breathing, people for whom this works, is that the rhythm of the breathing is a little bit akin to the rhythm of connecting and sustaining attention. Connecting and sustaining attention. Stay right here. Stay right here.

And if that can be done, so it's almost like the concentration that builds, it doesn't build in sustaining, but it builds in action, in the activity of connecting and sustaining, connecting, sustaining. And the art of this is to know how to do that so that it just feels like, for you, the natural rhythm or easeful or absorbing to do it. And as I said, sometimes you can almost use the inhale and exhale as the speed and rhythm of that massage. So to connect with the beginning of the inhale, sustain it to the end, connect to the beginning of exhale, sustain it to the end. And these two little activities, connecting, sustaining, give us just enough to do that it might be easier to stay focused there on the breathing in a relaxed, absorbing way.

And there might be thoughts, but they kind of go to the periphery. We don't have to be focused on them. And at this stage in the meditation, yes, there will be thoughts that begin taking you away. That's normal. That's completely at this stage, the approach stage. But they don't take you very far.

And now you can kind of watch and see the mind beginning to go and because you're in this rhythm of connecting and sustaining you see the thinking beginning to go away and then you kind of fold it back in, fold thinking back into the activity of staying with the breath, the rhythm with the breath. Some of you might find that it works better if you always maintain that very quiet counting, very still, soft count because it gives the thinking mind something to do that keeps you focused rather than have the thinking mind idle so it wanders off. For some people rather than counting there might be a single word like in, out or even the word yes works very well. And I found the word yes to work really well when I'm also at the same time starting to become aware of the good influence that the meditation has on the rest of me, the pleasure that we talked about last week. And the pleasure becomes like the supporting actors or the pleasure becomes the cheerleaders or the pleasure becomes the encouragement.

You're doing well. This is good. And then you're, you know, it's almost like the pleasure is teaching you, oh, this is a nice way of doing it. So, for example, kneading the bread. If you're in a hurry and you can't really have to finish it quickly and maybe there's people around you wanting your attention and they're upset with you because you're not paying enough attention to them, then you start kneading it really fast in a stressful way, and it doesn't feel good.

But if no one's there, and you love doing the bread, you like the quiet and peace of the kitchen, the lighting is coming in from the window just right, and everything is clean around you in the kitchen, and you don't have any pressing responsibilities at the moment, and it just feels such a wonderful delight to feel the texture and the moisture and the movements of kneading the bread. And something inside of you kind of begins to relax and soften that says, oh, this is good. Almost like you don't want to stop doing it. Even though you're kneading it way beyond what's really necessary, it's just like such a nice thing to do. So, whether you could follow all that in your own practice, that is, you know, the idea is all this is supposed to, if nothing else, not be what you should do, but it could be maybe a reference point to understand what you do do, what works for you and what doesn't work for you.

So, maybe some of you will know clearly that, yeah, counting doesn't work. Other people

will, yes, it works. Some people will say, oh, this thing about this connecting and sustaining, I don't quite understand it. I already have a good way of being with the breathing. So, I think I'll stay with it for now. So, you're kind of finding your own way.

But I'm offering you all these different elements, and hopefully some of them will work for you and support you in the process of becoming really absorbed in the meditation practice. Absorbed in such a way that the mind, thinking mind, becomes quieter and stiller and softer, and there's a feeling of well-being connected to meditation. So may your connecting and sustaining of attention, may that movement be one that can bring you joy through the day, that maybe throughout the day there's a gentle massage of things you have to connect to and then sustain. Even if it's as simple as connecting to a door handle and sustaining that connection until the door is open. And may it be a way of entering the present moment more fully. So, thank you.

Samadhi (27) Joy

2025-02-18

So, continuing this series on *samādhi*, the topic I want to talk about now is joy. And with that in mind, I want to express my joy and my appreciation, my gratitude, for all the people who made donations to our Save the Children fundraising drive. The little meter on the Save the Children's page for IMC shows us more than 90% there to the somewhat arbitrary goal that we set. I'm quite inspired and delighted and happy that this community came forward so much to offer. So it's close to \$70,000 there. We're actually raising more because of a donation that came in indirectly, not through that particular page on Save the Children.

So, and some of you, if you would still like to make a donation, it's a donation well offered and inspiring to have done it together. The sum total of what we're doing here is quite impressive. It makes a kind of a loud statement for some of us of what a community can do when they come together to do good things in the world. So thank you. You'll find information about it on the IMC website.

So, joy. Joy as part of meditation. Now, it's not so easy to feel joy. I mean, when people come to meditation, they often will begin because of some challenge they have, maybe the suffering they have, difficulty they have that they can't just sit down and smile and feel joy. But at some point, as we learn mindfulness, learn how to be present for our experience, it's phenomenal that we have a practice that can meet our suffering, that can meet our sadness, our grief, our anger.

And we can do it, that practice of mindfulness does it effectively. It's a very significant way of not being caught by the emotions, while at the same time developing the capacity to hold them in a beneficial way. We're not being driven around or controlled by our emotions, but we're also not avoiding them. So this whole process of mindfulness is such a good foundation. And as mindfulness develops, then at some point the capacity to be present grows, and it becomes time maybe to begin appreciating that mindfulness can partner with *samādhi*, with a kind of a steady, stable, calm focus of really staying here in the present moment.

Some people call a certain kind of concentration *samādhi* a momentary *samādhi*, where we're really here moment by moment. You can really feel a shift sometimes when we feel, now I'm really here. I'm not being pulled off this way and that way anymore. Now the whole system is settled enough, clicked in enough, that I'm just going to be in the flow of the present

moment. That can bring so much delight and joy, especially if it's been a long time coming, that we've been working with the reactivity and the strong preoccupation of the mind and bringing the mind back and waking up again and again. At some point it doesn't become so much work to be present anymore.

We're here. Even the most experienced meditators have to begin again at the beginning. Even experienced meditators will sit down and their mind will be preoccupied and it feels like they're beginners again. The difference between, in a sense, I like to think that we're all beginners. Just some of us are experienced beginners. The difference between a raw beginner and an experienced beginner is that an experienced beginner kind of knows the territory, knows to recognize what's important to recognize, what to be present for. Someone who's a novice in meditation might not know that yet.

So when we start kind of bringing in *samādhi* as a partner to mindfulness, we're going further into recognizing what is important, what is useful to notice in the present moment. So it's not a complete random kind of choicelessness about what we're being present for. Because if we do that, then the old habits in mind actually give priority to certain things. We're not really choiceless. But when we really settle deep, and then at some point, we start noticing that it feels good to meditate.

There's more calm. There's more subtleness. The mind is not so much out of control. As we develop the *samādhi*, we're going to start recognizing some of the good factors that begin growing and developing. One of those is the ability to stay present. One of those forms for *samādhi* is what I talked about yesterday, this connecting attention and sustaining.

That there's a gentle kind of stay there, stay there. So we're not ready yet to really click into the present moment, but we're there close enough. We just stay there, stay there. It can be kind of delightful. It can be very pleasant. Almost as if it's pleasant to get a massage. It's pleasant to massage the mind, the attention, the present moment. Stay there. Be here. Be here.

And then as the meditation develops, part of the landscape we want to become familiar with is that whatever kind of pleasure there is with it, and the word pleasure, as I said last week, involves a wide range of good feelings. Sometimes it's kind of a sense of beauty, a sweetness that's present. Sometimes it's more clear, physical, kind of strong flow of pleasure, of tingling, of delight that moves through some parts of the body. Some of it has more of an emotional quality. One of the things that becomes invaluable as we're approaching the immersion, the *samādhi* approaching and getting immersed in the world of *samādhi*, is to feel joy.

The Pāli word is *pīti*, which is P-I-T-I. I've seen sometimes that it's translated as a thrill. There's a kind of little bit of a joyful excitement that's there. So it's represented by a smile. Sometimes with a smile, there's kind of a little bit of energy that awakens and becomes strong, maybe a kind of sparkle in the eyes and maybe the cheeks and in the head. There's a kind of a feeling of delight, kind of energized delight, kind of an enthusiasm. Yes, we're here to practice.

That enthusiasm, that yes, that delight and joy can be kind of soft and sweet, and it could also be kind of quite strong at times. It's kind of like the connecting and sustaining, staying there with experience, becomes a little bit like blowing on a fire, and the fire gets stronger and stronger. But staying there, staying there with the breathing, the focus of attention, this connecting, applying attention, and then sustaining it, is a gentle kind of blowing that lets that joy arise.

This joy is considered to be, in the tradition, to be a little bit more mental in contrast to another form of well-being that comes into play when we go into *samādhi*, which I call happiness. It's one that's not, it's more sublime, it's more settled. So often it's associated with being a little more physical. But it's because the little bit of mental excitement, thrill, that involves joy, quiets down, becomes quieter. Then we feel kind of a settled, calm, peaceful kind of happiness that feels very still. The joy has a little bit of movement or excitement in it that this deeper happiness doesn't have. These two can coexist.

But these are kind of elements of this gathering together. We're gathering together these good qualities. Now emotionally we're gathering our emotional life, the goodness that's there with our inspiration and practice, the goodness of the intention of why we're practicing, the goodness of the purpose, the goodness of how we offer ourselves in the practice, the self-respect, the care, maybe the love for ourselves that grows as we do this practice. There's all this kind of gathering of goodness that's here that is being collected to be present in a very simple way, to be present almost as if we're doing very close to nothing, but we're engaged, we're fully here. At some point this fully here, this engagement begins having a life of its own and sometimes the effort to practice does not feel like we're doing nothing but it feels like I'm not doing it now the practice is carrying me, now the practice is flowing and we're here, connecting, sustaining and this joy of practice the pleasure of practice begins carrying us, begins moving, flowing us.

It's kind of like we've stepped onto the moving sidewalk, and we're walking and walking, and we suddenly step onto that moving conveyor belt, and we can stop walking because now we're being carried along by it. So at some point, as we gather, as we feel, allow ourselves

to connect to all this, it clicks in and we're being practiced rather than doing the practice. For this to happen, there is this organizing, gathering of ourselves, unifying of it. Of those things that we know are part of this process of *samādhi*. So there is a selectivity not to push anything away, not to deny and put blinders on. *Samādhi* is the opposite. It's the releasing of blinders, but then also of beginning to take in the pleasure, the goodness of the practice here and now.

We're allowed to feel joy in this practice. Not only are we allowed, that the joy itself is, and then happiness, these qualities, is what begins to allow, is part of the approach to the wonderful, sweet lake that we're going to go dipping into, immerse ourselves in. These are the qualities that come into play. If we chase them, if we try to engineer them, then we get in the way. If we have a strong expectation, we're forcing it, it gets in the way. It's the pleasure of not forcing anything, the pleasure of not chasing, that's part of the pleasure of the *samādhi*. That allows us to settle in, allows something to come into play, and puts us on the conveyor belt that may be in the airport, where the San Francisco airport has all these, you know, moving sidewalks we can stand on. It takes us to the plane, so we're going this, and then at some point, there's somebody, we're in the plane.

So I hope this makes sense, and I certainly hope that for those of you who your direct experience isn't the same of what I'm talking about, that you don't lose heart, that the great joy of this practice is that the practice puts us in the middle of our life as it is, and then we find our way with that, with mindfulness. I've had a lot of joy in the practice by, oddly enough, by having a practice that connects me in a useful, significant way to my personal difficulties. So even there, we can find a certain kind of pleasure. So thank you very much.

So you might today as you go through your day, see if you can find more joy. Avail yourself of the joy that's here. There's probably more opportunities to feel joy if you slow down, look around, than you usually allow yourself to feel. See what happens if you spend a day allowing yourself to feel the simple joys of life here and now. Thank you.

Samadhi (28) Well Being and Being Practiced

2025-02-19

So hello and welcome to this series on *samādhī*. Delighted to be able to share this topic in this slow way that we're doing it. And we're doing it now for a few weeks. As we're going deeper into it, please always remember that it's good to restart as a beginner whenever necessary. Sometimes the art of meditation is to know when is it the right time that we have to practice, we have to apply ourselves in some way, and when it's time to not apply ourselves but be more receptive, to be more allowing.

In a sense, rather than doing the practice, we are being practiced. Rather than doing the walking—on a walk through the airport here in San Francisco, you are now stepping onto the conveyor belt that carries you horizontally through the corridor. You can stop walking. You're carried along. The nature of our practice changes over time. At some point, and this is one of the nice things about practicing regularly for some time, some of the ways in which we are practiced, some of the ways that things are familiar and a homecoming and a good feeling of, hey, I'm back now in a place I'm really comfortable in, that begins to open up a sense of deeper comfort.

A deeper feeling of the practice is doing me, meditation is doing me rather than I'm responsible for every single little thing that happens in meditation. To develop kind of a meditating, meditator's body, which means that it's such a familiar and comfortable and nice place to be that we feel like it's doing us in some way. It's nice to settle into it and we can let go and relax. That takes a while to develop. It's really worthwhile finding it. Sometimes slowly over time, we begin to, the body adjusts and changes, we find our way.

At some point as we practice, there comes a phase of practice when we're before entering into this state of being called *samādhī*, that we're beginning to approach it. Classically, it's called access concentration, *access samādhī*. I like to call it approach, the approaching *samādhī* stage. This last summer, I went back to my hometown in Bergen, Norway. Being driven from the airport back into the middle of town, where it's such a home place for me, something very cozy began happening in my body. I felt very contented and satisfied.

Something like just being here was enough, just being in this, as I moved closer and closer, something began to open inside, something began feeling confident and comforted and home and safe, something, just approaching it. In the course of the days I was there, I would

come and go out of the center of town, and each time I came towards the center, I remember having this feeling, or visiting the places where I had lived growing up, and just, oh, it felt so good to even approach it, be there. This approaching, approaching where we begin feeling that we're not the only one practicing. Our body is practicing. We're being practiced.

There's a sense of a state of being that's a little bit suffusive and broad that feels like it's inclusive, it's unifying, it's holding everything of who we are in its broad kind of bubble of pleasure, well-being, delight, confidence, calm, contentment, peace, spaciousness. I offer all these words not because any single one of them is right, but rather that this approaching, this feeling of rightness, this feeling that feels like this is really good to be here in such a way I don't have to keep practicing. I'm being practiced. It's almost like a state of being where just to be alive is enough. The idea that we're the ones in the control tower, engineering the practice, making the practice work, begins shifting as something else now begins to be suffusive, pervasive through the body, through parts of the body, maybe the torso, maybe the front of the chest, maybe down the arms, maybe in the face or in the hands or someplace in the body that starts kind of, maybe vibrate, maybe glow, maybe feel more open.

Maybe parts of the body in a very contented way just feel like they disappear, like there's no resistance, there's nothing, almost nothing there because it just becomes so peaceful in that part of the body. Some of this will feel like just very nice pleasure. Some of it will feel like a joy, delight that begins welling up. Some of it can feel like a very contented sense of or a satisfying feeling of happiness and that we're just here. Then what I talked about Monday, this rhythm of applying attention and staying and resting and kind of settling again and resting.

Kind of like, you know, as I keep saying, petting the cat and the pet purrs. It's very nice and it's very comforting for the cat petter just doing this nice thing, nice thing. It's almost unselfconscious. It's not trying to provide oneself or the cat with the highest peak of human ecstasy. It's just kind of a contented feeling, happy to be there. So the same way with the applying attention to the middle of all this sense of well-being with the breathing.

The breathing is clear enough. It's kind of at the center of it. But it now begins to be feeling like this wider state is somehow the context of attention, a context of awareness, like awareness is continuous with the state of being, as opposed to awareness being created and engineered from the mind. Awareness becomes, maybe for some times, becomes a suffusive or diffusive feeling. It's more like a suffusive feeling through the body. Maybe if you don't want to call it awareness, that's okay.

But it's kind of like the feeling, suffusive feeling of well-being now pervades or influences or

shapes or informs how we're aware, how we're mindful, how we're knowing the experience. We're knowing it now in an easy, relaxed, easygoing way, staying there. And then so the art of meditation, of *samādhi*, is to know how much effort to make. Now when the mind is really distracted and really spinning out, doing kind of a relaxed, open, peaceful, calm awareness is not going to work. We want to practice the way with the amount of effort we put into practice is measured a little bit by if we don't do it, the alternative is worse.

So we have to do just enough that it's better than the alternative. Just enough to be present in an easy way. Then slowly things settle in and we develop further and further. As we get into this approach phase of practice, the amount of effort we have to make in some ways diminishes. There's less self. There's less idea of attainment.

It's almost like it doesn't matter if I go into *samādhi*. It doesn't matter how concentrated I get. It doesn't matter if I attain anything. What matters is that you're so good to lay there and be there in this contented way. Sometimes when I take a nap in the afternoon, I feel refreshed when I take a 15, 20-minute nap. But then sometimes I have no desire to get up from the bed.

I just feel so contented and happy that just to be there and breathing and being alive, it feels like it's enough, it's good. There's no idea of attaining anything or proving myself or having something to show for myself or no idea of non-attainment, of getting away from anything. Just there. So to this approach stage of *Fibbati* is when it comes to time when there starts to be a shift between us practicing and being practicing. Us kind of doing the focus and somehow feeling the awareness or the focus or the presence that we have is easy to do.

It's almost like there's some momentum happening. Something is holding us. Something is supporting us. So that practice feels more like it's being done from the inside out. We're being carried now. We're being supported now.

Something is gathering. Something is unifying. Something is holding it all. I apologize to offer all these words, but I do that because no single word is going to work for everyone. Some of this is very personal. What I'm trying to offer here is to offer you a little bit of the map so that if there's better words for you to describe how it is, then please go along with that.

But now we're at the approach phase. I hope that this teaching, even if you don't exactly follow it or understand it, maybe it brings you a kind of delight and confidence that this practice is good. It's good to be part of it, knowing that there's a wonderful map, there's a wonderful

territory, there's a wonderful life to move into and be part of in this practice of meditation. Thank you.

Samadhi (29) Coordinated Wholeness

2025-02-20

So, hello and welcome to this next talk on *samādhi*. We're now at the point of *samādhi* where we're at the phase of the approach, the approach phase, the approaching *samādhi*. The classic way of talking about this is a gathering together, or maybe you can say a coordination, of five different factors that come into play. Having these somehow in the field, there to be coordinated, creates a kind of onward movement, an onward kind of opening or settling or strengthening of the state of awareness meditation that we're in. So to kind of gently not try to make anything happen, but to allow the coordination to happen, and then to kind of gently feel where that onward leading spot is, and just rest with it. Almost like you're allowing yourself to be pulled along.

So these five coordinated faculties of ours that come into play, they become a little bit more pronounced. They have to identify every single one, but the tradition says these are the five things that are starting to become coordinated and working together. The first is these two: the applied and sustained attention, the connecting attention and the sustaining attention. So there is, we're not just resting still on some focus of attention like the breathing. There is a kind of gentle, kind of like a wave-like movement of connecting and releasing, connecting, releasing, connecting, wandering away, coming back. There is a kind of gentle massage that's there: stay here, stay here.

Sometimes even I've had the very sense of a little voice in the back of the mind that says, telling me, stay here. Stay here with us. Stay with us. Stay now. Now. Sometimes I've used the word yes for this. Yes. Yes.

And there's a little bit of wave, a little bit kind of like connecting and sustaining. I like the yes because that speaks to the next thing that the five coordinating faculties. So the first is the connecting attention. The second is sustaining that attention. In a very small, kind of relaxed, kind of nice way, like yes. The third is some degree of joy.

Some degree in which the mind is getting lit up. The mind is saying, oh yes, yes, this is good. Yes, this is nice. It's not necessarily verbal like that, but it's as if there's a kind of a brightness, a kind of a, maybe a teeny bit of a thrill or a teeny bit of pleasure that feels delightful and wonderful that comes with this feeling like you're now on the slide and it's so great to be sliding along. Now you're in the field. Now you're kind of nicely connected.

It's almost as if this connecting, this ascending attention, is like you're like a cat being petted. Something kind of just feels so joyful, happy, thrilled. But then there's also, and this sometimes is less clearly felt, but there's also a deeper feeling or embodied feeling that maybe initially can be described as contentment. I often think of it as happiness. It's less of the mental brightness and thrill that can be there, the mental, yes, this is great. But now there's a more settled, ah.

Then it becomes easier to kind of, this happiness is a place where it's easier to happily be calm, happily be settled, happily to be here, not needing anything else. Happy to just be arrived and be present, because just being alive is enough. So it can be a feeling of contentment, it can be a feeling of coziness, a feeling of sweetness that's settling, calming, reassuring. It's a kind of happiness that brings a sense of confidence, like this is the right place to be, this is a good thing. So there's the connecting attention, sustaining attention, there's joy, there's happiness, and then the fifth of these factors, coordinating factors, is sometimes called one-pointedness.

But that one-pointedness is too easy to have the idea that we're tensing up and straining to be really locked into something. Sometimes there is a feeling of being really clicking in and really being present in a very clear way, but we're not the one who's doing it. It's the system that's doing it, so the mind can be quite relaxed. The metaphor or the example I like to use for this is that say we're just staying with the breathing and the breathing is a cut. Let's say the breathing is like a wave coming and going, rising and passing.

Then someone says you should concentrate on the breath, and so then there's the mind here and to concentrate, everything in the mind gets tense and focused like a point, and then it goes and kind of points and tries to pierce this breath that's kind of a moving, flowing thing. Sometimes that can create strain and headaches and all kinds of problems to do it this way. Another way of doing it is to let the mind be very soft and relaxed, to calm the mind, calm the body, relax everything, so there's a feeling of spaciousness and open, like the hand now is open, not collapsed on itself. Then you bring these two together. So this is the holistic, kind of broad, wide sense of being aware, because the mind is quite open and spacious.

The body feels quite open and kind of pervaded with a kind of a hum of just being alive, or the hum or vibration of all the different little sensations of the body kind of singing together. The open mind, there's no tension in the mind, and the breathing is still moving. What you do is you bring this together so that maybe the breathing gets quieter and quieter, and so the breathing and the most sensitive part of the mind meet and join. So there's a resting,

a coming together. There's a kind of a sense of being right centered on the breathing, the massage of the breathing, staying there.

Connecting attention is kind of like connecting, sustaining, falls away, connecting, sustaining, to the most sensitive part of the mind. So there's a lot really centered there, but it's not focused, it's not preoccupied. There's all the same time a broad field all around it that can feel sometimes just like space, sometimes it can feel like a sweetness, a pleasure, a joy, a holistic kind of sense of being here in the whole body. But this is soft and relaxed. So this begins taking prominence.

Sometimes what will happen is this here, this connection, will become stronger and stronger, and everything around it becomes softer and softer. Maybe parts of the body seem to disappear. The wider world disappears. We're just sitting right there on the breathing. So that's the one-pointedness, the one gathering, the one settling, the settling place, the gathering place, the sensitivity place that we really feel, oh, this is it.

So then when these five factors are coordinated, then there's a kind of a gentle, there might be a gentle, gentle, gentle feeling of onward movement. One way that I felt it is it's almost like there's a place, maybe in the breathing, maybe in whatever the, where the sense of joy or the pleasure maybe is the strongest with all this. It's almost like the *dhamma* is up ahead with a string, and it's gently pulling you here, here. So there's some place inside that feels like, oh, here's where the slide is. Here's where the world is opening up. Here is where to relax into. Not to rush into, not to, but it's a place of approach.

As we are approaching, this feeling of being content, being holistic, being whole, being unified, becomes a little bit stronger and stronger. Everything is here together. There's nowhere else we'd rather be. The thinking mind is quieter and quieter. To the degree to which we're thinking, it's thoughts about the meditation. It's thoughts about, ah, here it is, here's the infrared, here's the whole feeling. Here I'm present. It's nothing more sophisticated than that, just the most simple kind of thoughts about the experience.

Then in the process of that, there might be a feeling that there's something operating here, which is not you. It's something operating here that you can trust. Something, an onward movement, a deepening settling, a deeper opening. This is something that, if you have any role at all to it, is to trust. Anything at all, it's kind of let go. Let go into that place where, into that onward leading feeling, where either it's onward leading because it feels like the pleasure, the joy is going to grow, or onward leading because it feels like this is where the center point is that you want to kind of really rest and follow and be with.

Allow yourself to be pulled by that string. Allow yourself to be carried on that slide. Allow yourself to open that door. Allow the, you know, like if you have a parachute on, allow kind of the floor of the airplane to fall open so you can start floating and flying in space with that parachute. So there is this kind of sort of onward leading.

So this coordination of all these things, and that coming into a wholeness this way, is not something you can engineer and plan for. But you can feel the symptoms of it. You can feel the joy, feel the pleasure, feel the goodness of it all, the sweetness of it all. The contentment of just being fully here and trust it. Trust it and allow for it. Don't be the engineer. Don't be the constructor and the maker of it. Don't be measuring and trying to, am I there yet? Just trust to be the fastest way from A to B is to be fully at A. As we're at A at this approach stage, then the *Dhamma* will know what to do.

Your job is to trust the process, not be in a hurry, not to try to make it happen. Maybe the biggest thing you can do is to let go into trusting the process rather than making the process, however long it takes. So we'll have one more talk on this approach point. And thank you very much. Thank you.

Samadhi (30) Harmony in Approaching Samadhi

2025-02-21

So, good morning everyone, and hello, and welcome to this now fifth talk on the approach to *samādhi*. Now, I think we've done maybe six weeks now on this topic of *samādhi*. The last piece of approaching or moving into *samādhi* is what's called the approach *samādhi* or access *samādhi*. I'd like to evoke the idea that it involves some kind of harmony. We're gathering ourselves together, a unification of ourselves. Not every single thing that we are, we know we are, is included, but everything that's present in meditation is included.

Whatever we can be aware of here and now as we're settling into the present moment feels like it all gathers together into one large whole, one large harmonious whole. And so to find a way to live in this harmony. In the ancient world, *samādhi* is sometimes associated with harmony or an evenness, where all things are held together in a kind of even way, harmonious way. Sometimes there's a word that's used as beauty, that there starts to be a kind of beauty, and we begin to live in kind of a beauty. We meditate in beauty.

I love this expression beauty because it's not something we can appropriate for ourselves. We can't kind of claim it to be ourselves or who we are, but it's kind of like the atmosphere or the context in which we're operating. We're operating in the context of beauty, walk in beauty, talk in beauty, meditate in beauty. So the world that we live in begins to change when we start entering into deeper *samādhi*. And, so, it's not easy to do. Most of the time when people meditate, they're not in *samādhi*.

It's still amazingly beneficial to practice mindfulness meditation, well short of entering into a state of being that's known as *samādhi*, or recognized as *samādhi*. Or, we could say that *samādhi* is many different types. For people who do practice mindfulness, there is a kind of *samādhi* that has to do with how we enter into any single thing we do. If you're washing dishes, there's a *samādhi* of washing dishes where you're really there in harmony with that activity. You're not trying to do it quickly to get on to other things. You're not doing it while doing a second or third thing at the same time.

You're just there in that. This idea of just being present for this activity, fully in harmony or attuned to this activity, is sometimes called *samādhi* in daily life. The more we do that, it supports doing that then in meditation as well. So this *samādhi*, the approach *samādhi*, I like to use an analogy. Say that you've never ridden a bicycle before and that you want to try,

you know, and so you never plan to ride a bicycle. It's the last thing you want to do.

But then there's a friend of yours who may be many miles away, is really in need of some medicine. It's really important the person has the medicine. But you can't get there fast enough. You don't have a car, you don't have any public means of transportation, but there's a bicycle. But you've never ridden a bicycle before. But someone says, well, if you ride the bicycle, you can get the medicine there in time.

But if you have to walk, you won't be there in time. But I've never ridden a bicycle. Well, it's up to you. So you said, okay, well, I might as well try. So you begin getting on the bicycle, and it's really difficult. The first few times you try to get on, you fall off.

You pedal a little bit, and you kind of fall to the side. You get back on. It's so important to keep trying because of your friend. And so you keep trying. And you keep moving on. Slowly you can pedal more than a few pedals without falling off.

Finally you seem to be able to pedal and stay on, but it's very wobbly and shaky and difficult. You feel like you're ready to give up because why bother when it's so difficult? Maybe you have one big spill and then you're really ready to stop. But you remember your friend. So you get back on again no matter what, even with scraped knees or whatever you have. Then you keep pedaling.

After a while, you get the hang of it. After a while, you can pedal, and it's a long, flat stretch. You're pedaling along. After a while, you feel like you're in the groove. You feel tired, so you stop pedaling. But then the bike stops.

It's a little hard to start again because you're still wobbly. Maybe you fall again and finally get going again. Then you realize, I just have to keep pedaling because when I have some momentum, it seems like it's easier. So you keep doing it and doing it. The way the terrain is set up to where your friend is, you know you're going to get there in plenty of time because with the bicycle. But as the terrain goes, it slowly begins to slant down the road, a slow grade.

At first, it's so slight you don't even notice. Then you notice, well, it's a little bit easier to pedal. Then you feel it's getting easier to pedal and easier. At some point you feel the momentum, the pull of gravity and you realize you don't have to pedal anymore. You're being carried, you're being pulled. You can just glide down.

You're now in this place where you're approaching your friend's home that's down that hill. It's not a real steep hill, but all you have to do is to stay on the bicycle and feel that momentum.

Stay with the momentum of gravity that pulls you and you get pulled all the way down to your friend's house with the medicine and then your medicine is happy ever after. Your friend is happy ever after. So *samādhi*, practicing meditation, can be like that. At the beginning it can be wobbly and difficult and we fall off and we get discouraged.

The point is to always just get back on again and back on again. The regularity and familiarity with this, something starts developing and it gets easier and easier. At some point, as we keep practicing and keep pedaling, there's almost like there begins to be that slope that begins now beginning, you know, there's a directionality. There's an onward leading. Just like on the bicycle, if it's on a grade going downhill, if you're keeping your balance in the bike, it's onward leading now to some place. At some point, you're really all there.

It's all smooth. He's all in harmony. Biking is in harmony. Everything is flowing. You have the balance. Now you're in this approach stage.

At some point, you have to learn to just let go of the pedaling. Then allow the momentum, the onward leading nature to kind of pull you along. That takes a lot of harmony. It means to be in harmony with all things. It means not to be resisting, not to be wanting, not to be ahead of yourself or behind yourself, but to be centered here in yourself. So to bring everything into harmony.

We're here now at this approach stage of *samādhi*. This seems like a good place to pause because I'm going off to IRC for a couple of weeks, our retreat center. We'll have wonderful guest teachers who come to teach while I'm away. In the meantime, and then I'll come back. We'll continue the Samadhi series in March. I think on March 10th I'll come back.

On that day, we will do one more week on this kind of approach stage to *samādhi*, kind of warm up again, get back into the groove of it. Because it's a kind of very refined state, and becoming more familiar with some of the challenges that can happen in the *samādhi*, and this approach state will help you kind of maybe understand better what it's all about. It may be easier to kind of maybe follow along when we go to the next step with it all. May Elliott will be here next week. Diana Clark will be here the following week. They're both wonderful teachers.

I look forward to our return to continue on this. If some of you would like to kind of stay a little bit more in the flow in this Samadhi series, you might want to re-listen to some of the previous talks or guided meditations of this series, maybe even going back to the beginning, to kind of stay in the flow. Some of the earlier teachings can be more familiar for you and

supportive as we go forward here. So thank you. Then I also want to just offer a big thanks and final report about the fundraising we did for Save the Children. We exceeded our goal.

On that little thermometer kind of circle that we have, it shows we've now raised over \$73,000. Plus there's another some little more than \$10,000 who's come in directly to IMC that we're sending to Save the Children. We're getting close to \$85,000, not quite. If any of you would like to offer more, it's still available. But I want to thank all of you who did. I'm very happy and very grateful that our community could come together this way.

So thank you, and I look forward to seeing you all or being with you again in a couple of weeks.

Samadhi (31) Basic Elements of Samadhi

2025-03-10

So, hello everyone, and welcome to this ongoing series on *samādhi*. We had a two-week break, as I was mostly at our retreat center in Santa Cruz during this time. And now I'm happy to be back. And it's a bit of a gap, so I'd like to just a little bit kind of start over. With meditation in general, but also with, especially with *samādhi*, there's something invaluable about always feeling like you're starting over, so that you're not measuring or looking for something or trying to tap into something too quickly, so that you sit down to just be with yourself as you are, to discover how you are.

Because it's very easy in a life, busy life, full life, scared life, angry life, to view ourselves, our world, partially, to only be connected to part of who we are, and to enter into *samādhi*, we really want to be connected to all of who we are, because *samādhi* is a process of unification. It's a process of gathering ourselves together so that all parts of who we are can be working together in harmony. And so in the beginning of this series, I talked about *samādhi* being a temple, and that we're entering the temple. And we want to bring all of ourselves along. And we want to do it carefully, with respect, with kindness, with a certain kind of humility.

We're not storming a fortress. We're not storming aggressively trying to attain something. We're going with respect and care, and almost as if Dharma willing, the doors of the temple will open. And we're bringing all of ourselves along. Just like if you go to a literal, to a sacred place, all of you goes with you. And some sacred places, some places that have tremendous tranquility or peace or sense of inspiration to be there, it can actually kind of, our whole body can kind of be awakened or tingle or feel inspired and feel included, feel the calm of the place.

And so this ability to feel our whole body, to calm our whole body, to settle ourselves, the Buddha's instructions for first foundational instructions, beginning instructions in mindfulness, and in *ānāpānasati*, mindfulness of breathing, is to breathe mindfully, be present for your breathing, feel the whole body, and then relax the body, calm the body. And when we feel the whole body, part of what we're feeling is the reactivity, the tensions in the body, the holding patterns, the effect of our karmic actions. And the challenging aspects of our body, for the Buddha, his recommendation is to bring a sense of calm to it. Let it, bring tranquility, hold it, calm it, settle it. Like you would if someone is really agitated, dangerously so, you might do things that are calming for them.

So to discover what's here, to enter in a calm way into the temple with all of ourselves, and to not be assertive, not be expecting or wanting or pushing to make something happen. We have to be diligent in practicing *samādhi*. We have to be deliberate. There's a deliberateness like this. I'm going to be here. It's not too casual. It's not like, oh, I'll get around to it. I'll just sit here and let something kind of settle by itself.

There is a deliberateness. This is what I'm here to do. And then you might begin by not trying too hard. There is a kind of natural settling that some people can experience if we don't try too much in the beginning, maybe for five minutes, ten minutes, and then as we go further, then the deliberateness comes into play more and more. Okay, here I am. If we try too early, we might be stressing ourselves or being tense, and deliberateness is to kind of define, oh, this is the territory, here and now, to be here with this experience, now.

And then to steady oneself, to steady oneself, stabilize oneself in a kind of inner stillness, steady oneself in a kind of still way with the whole breath coming and going, coming and going. Not fixating on the breath, but as if the breath is at the center of the global body, the whole body. And we're resting there with the breath. We're riding the breath. We're surfing the breath. We're coasting on the breath.

So we practice. And one of the things that can begin happening for some people is that you feel the benefit of it in your daily life. To interrupt the normal patterns of thinking and reacting in the mind, the loops we're in around fear or distress or anger with the world and how it is, it takes a break. And we can experience ourselves in a different way. And that's more calm, more centered, and not so easily caught in preoccupations and needs and all this. And that can make a world of difference.

And when the world is in a difficult state, *samādhi* is one of the great protectors of us. Not to escape it, but to be able to be grounded and centered in ourselves so that we can go into the world in a more effective way. *Samādhi* is a great support for living our life. And maybe we can live more calmly, less reactively. Maybe from the platform or from the vantage point of being settled and unified and calm, we can go into the world more kindly, be more friendly, less contentious, less ready to argue, less ready to see conflict wherever we go, but to see wherever we go an opportunity for connection, an opportunity for the unification, the unity, the gathering together, the connecting more and more fully wherever we go.

Whereas *samādhi* is a unification of body and mind, right speech for the Buddha is speech which unifies people, that overcomes divisiveness between people. And so we see here this parallel between unifying and harmonizing all of who we are when we sit in meditation. To

not be contentious, not be opposed or not be pushing away any part of ourselves with how we live in our world. To enter the world, to unify, to find connection. To see if we could have a warm-hearted connection with someone rather than a contentious one.

So *samādhi* is a great help for how we live our life and how we go about. And for *samādhi* to have its greatest benefit, it helps to be able to practice every day. So I hope that this, our 7 a.m. sitting here on YouTube, allows some of you to have that continuity of every day. And as we do this series on *samādhi* and we get back in the swing of it, or at least I get back in the swing of it, that this might be a good time to start meditating twice a day, if you can. And even if it's just 10 minutes the second time or 20 minutes the second time, to have one sitting here on YouTube that's guided. But one sitting a day where you really don't, it's not guided. You're just left with yourself and practicing in silence. Do whatever comes up and whatever you see.

So you're developing, it's kind of like taking the training wheels off. And now you're starting to see for yourself what the experience is, what's happening. And some of you certainly can practice more than 20 minutes or 10 minutes, but maybe you don't and so maybe you can figure out to at least add a second sitting of some length that works for you as we continue for some weeks more on this theme of *samādhi* and to kind of remind you we kind of reached the approach stage, what's called access concentration, approaching a deeper *samādhi*. So I want to kind of review a little bit for a few days and to get us warmed up again. And then we'll kind of at least talk about and point you to the possibility of deeper states of concentration. And some of you, it'll just be informative. Some of you might be familiar or recognize these states for yourself. And it's part of the temple, the temple of *samādhi*. So thank you very much, and I look forward to being with you again tomorrow.

Samadhi (32) Connecting and Sustaining

2025-03-11

So, hello and welcome to this now 32nd talk on *samādhī*. This week the orientation is a little bit of a review. Part of the way of presenting this is that when you're practicing meditation, especially *samādhī*, but really anything, it's valuable to always think of yourself as starting over as a beginner. Don't come with a lot of expectations that you know what to do, you know how to meditate, and you're going to just sit down and do your thing. It better not come with any expectations. Maybe realize that we're often just beginning again.

We're all beginners. Sometimes it's the beginning steps of meditation that we have to repeat over and over again. It's invaluable to do that. We're actually transforming ourselves, changing ourselves in the background by just starting over and over again. It's like getting a massage. Something's being worked and relaxing and opening.

Learn to be gracious. Learn to be relaxed and willing to be a beginner over and over again; this is how we can be an experienced beginner. One of the little secrets of an experienced beginner is that it's expressed in this little saying: the fastest way from A to B is to be fully at A. So just to really be willing to be here with how you are is a way. It turns out that we're not going anywhere in meditation. We're going from A to A, but we're really going, almost like we're going deeper into A.

We're just really being here. So we start where we are and allow that deeper settling to happen. A very important part of the kind of beginning of really starting to enter into the world of *samādhī* is that the attention starts to be continuous in the present moment. With some kind of place that it's the nest, it's the home base, it's the primary place where we really stay connected. Classically, that's the breathing. There can be other objects.

Practicing loving-kindness and the feelings of love that come up can be another alternative one. But with breathing, the idea is to be able to sustain attention over time. You can't really just kind of lock in as we start in the beginning. The idea is that there's a gentleness where we persist, we sustain the attention there. Part of that is this massage, this rhythm of connecting and sustaining. Connecting and sustaining.

Maybe it's like a bird that only has to flap its wings once to catch the updraft and soars, and then does it again and soars. Maybe it's like a bee that lands in a flower and just walks around looking for where the nectar is. There's this classic metaphor of taking a cloth to polish a bowl:

you connect the cloth to the bowl and then you gently rub it. Then you do it again in different parts. So this sustaining, this connecting and sustaining. I've offered you in that meditation a lot of different metaphors for that.

I apologize if the metaphors are too many. The idea, hopefully, is that one of those will work well for you. Sometimes a metaphor in the imagination helps the imagination, helps connect more to the practice. The Buddha used a lot of metaphors to help the mind really feel or sense how to enter into the world of meditation. Then the idea is to sustain. I suggested in the meditation that connecting with the beginning of the inhale and then sustaining it through the whole cycle of breathing in and breathing out.

Sometimes that's too long. Sometimes what works better is to connect to the inhale, ride it, really stay there, sustaining the attention however long it is, the inhale, and then do it again, connecting to the beginning of the exhale and riding all that all the way out. One interesting way to help the sustaining and connecting, connecting and sustaining with the breathing is, and you have to do this very gingerly, very carefully, gently, just enough, not too much, maybe slightly, you know, less than. That is to, at the end of the exhale, let there be a little pause that allows the exhale to maybe relax further or the whole body to relax into the experience. Because you're pausing at the end of the exhale, there's a little bit in the body that gets interested, like where's the next inhale? I should be breathing, but not with any distress, just a gentle kind of, oh, I'm waking up almost.

Okay, relax it. The pause allows us to relax, to let go. Maybe it wouldn't do that if we go immediately to the inhale. Also, you could do that sometimes at the end of the inhale: just pause and let there be a relaxing, an opening. Then release into the exhale. So this is like the massage.

This is kind of the working; the classic metaphor is kneading, kneading a kind of powder with water, making it moist. We're working the breath in a very light, soft, relaxed way, no strain in the attention, but just enough. In the muscles, there's a difference between tense muscles and taut muscles. The tautness of a muscle—many of the muscles are taut. That's what their nature is, to be taut, the muscles holding up the back, for example. But they're relaxed enough.

So kind of a simple tautness or commitment or interest—just stay interested, or love or inspiration, something. Stay there. Stay with the whole flow. If you sit down to meditate, sometimes the breathing can be quite fast, and it's just really quick breathing in and out. That idea of sustaining, you're not really ready for it. But as we settle and get calmer and calmer, and

the breathing begins slowing down, and the inhale and exhale become longer, that's when it starts to work better and better to just stay with the whole thing.

Sometimes it's the awareness that's connecting and sustaining, and sometimes you can turn it around and feel it's the breathing that's doing the work of meditation. The breathing is connecting to awareness and sustaining it. The sensations of breathing and the sensing of those sensations are one and the same thing. So whether you're the one who's staying there sensing, or whether it's the sensations that are coming into the sensing, it's just a kind of, it's a little bit hard to separate them out, so you can say it either way. Sometimes the attitude that the breathing is coming into awareness, the breathing is what's connecting and sustaining, can make it lighter. It can take the habit of being the doer, the one who's trying to make something happen, and let that take a rest.

So the idea is play with it. Play with your attention. Find the lightness. Find the sustaining and connecting, really kind of settle in, and then to feel the pleasure of it, if there's any, even the slightest sense of pleasant, to take that in as well. Once you start feeling some of the pleasantness, the sweetness that comes with meditation, then it might be easier to let go of your thinking so that there's more relaxation, the thinking mind, and let go of the thoughts so that the mind itself, the space in the mind becomes larger and can somehow receive or take in or share in some of the pleasure of the meditation. A quieter mind is a mind that can feel more pleasant.

So I hope all this gives some of you some— all the ideas of today are too many, but maybe there's a few of them that really help you be an experienced beginner here. As I said yesterday, if at all you're able to meditate a second time today, even 10, 20 minutes, I think that, and then maybe without guided meditation, trying to do some of this on your own and be very accepting of however you are and however easy or difficult it is. Assuming just sitting and meditating is enough. Don't be too measuring how well you're doing. So thank you and look forward to being here tomorrow.

Samadhi (33) With Support From Pleasure

2025-03-12

So, to continue this series on *samādhi*, at a certain point, as the mind and body get settled, collected, and unified, as it gets stabilized, the means for the support for entering into the temple of deep *samādhi* is through the doorway of pleasure. Not necessarily sensual pleasure, but certainly an embodied pleasure that begins to feel like a sense of well-being, joy, and happiness. And so you're allowed to take in, feel, be nourished by, saturated by well-being when you're doing *samādhi* practice. And so to be oriented towards it in just the right way, to not be attached to it, expecting it, pushing for it, but rather to be open to it, to allow it, to acknowledge it when it's there, to appreciate it. And as it's there, to gently allow it to be a kind of a feedback loop between the joy, the pleasure, and the meditation, and the focus on breathing, focus on your primary object. And so that the joy, the pleasure keeps you connected.

And it's a feedback loop where as you get more stable, more engaged, more fully in the experience of the breathing, of the meditation, you can feel that the well-being shifts and changes, gets richer, gets stronger. And so this is not, it can seem like you're, you know, wanting or, you know, clinging or trying to make something happen. It can, some people get tense, but the idea is to stay relaxed, almost as if you're not expecting anything to happen, but you're allowing it, *samādhi* willing. *Samādhi* willing, let the joy, the well-being spread. And one of the little tools for this is to have a little half smile, turn up the corners of your mouth just a little bit until you feel a sense of pleasure there and let that pleasure be the support to keep you connected, keep you here in the present moment. And some people will shift then from the breathing to the pleasure, the physical pleasure of the smile, and get absorbed in that.

But I recommend that you just use it as a background support, as a pointer, as an encouragement. Stay, stay with the breath. Continue stabilizing. Continue entering into the world of breathing. And as we do this massage of connecting and sustaining, it almost, it can be in harmony with breathing in and breathing out, where we gently, lovingly connect to the beginning of the inhale. And that massage of sustaining is there as the chest, the torso fills with air.

We feel the expansion, the movement, and the becoming larger. And then we connect to the exhale and sustain the attention, feeling the pleasure of the smoothness, the release, the softening, the settling that can be there in the exhale. And sometimes it's nice to feel the

slight pause at the end of the exhale. That's really easy to do. And feeling the emptiness of it, the lack of anything, the relief, in a sense, of just being for a moment or two, and that pause. And because of the pause, the call to breathe in is maybe a little bit stronger.

So it's a little bit more pleasant to breathe in because the body somehow wants it. We're not holding the breath for a long time. There's no holding, really, just a pause to accentuate being there with the breath and enjoying it. And then part of this then is to, this focus on *samādhi*, on breathing and the pleasure of it, is meant to be a way to help the thinking mind become quieter. And the thinking mind is fueled by focusing on thinking itself. The food for discursive thinking, distracted thinking, is we lose our attention in the thinking.

But if the attention goes somewhere else, then the thinking is not being fed so much. It might be there in the background, but it's the preoccupation that being caught in it is not being fed. And often the thinking becomes quieter. But it's also possible to participate in quieting the mind by relaxing the thinking muscle, to relax the tension, the pressure, the contraction around thinking, and maybe softening the mind, opening the mind, making this feeling, the sense of the mind, become expansive and open. And so sometimes that can happen on the exhale. As you exhale, let the thoughts evaporate, float away, so that there's more space in the mind.

The absence of thoughts is not just a pure absence. It's an absence that will kind of make room to feel the joy, the pleasure. It's an absence that makes it, you feel it almost with the experience of *samādhi*, with the goodness of it, with the breathing, with the sensations, with the pleasure. And so there is a kind of art in the *samādhi* of knowing how to give yourself fully to the experience without straining, of giving yourself fully to it while we relax and while you let go. The first time I ever got instructions in *samādhi*, specifically for the purpose of *samādhi*, I was told it was all about letting go. And I thought that was a useful instruction to get, because then I kind of understood not to cling, not to crave, not to be pushing, not to be trying to make something happen, but just keep letting go.

It's almost letting go into breathing, letting go into *samādhi*, letting go into this nourishing, settled, enjoyable place within. And what's really special that can happen is that the pleasure, the joy, the well-being of *samādhi* belongs to a different operating system within us than the operating system of difficult emotions, sadness, grief, depression, distress. It's a different operating system than physical aching and pains in our body. And so because it's a whole different operating system, it can operate beautifully, wonderfully, without feeling that we're being somehow disloyal or somehow bypassing or somehow that we have to kind of fix the

emotional difficulties we have first so we can get concentrated. It's more the opposite, that as we get into *samādhi*, it puts us in a much better place to meet and understand and address our suffering.

And this is one of the great possibilities from *samādhi*. Enter into *samādhi*, really use meditation to get really stable and settled and calm. And then when you come out of meditation, glance and look at your challenges you have and see if you can see it now in different eyes, see it from a different context, a different frame of reference. And you might find yourself living in a kind of different world with a stable, quiet, settled body and mind than the world you see when you're spinning in your thoughts and preoccupations, spinning in your suffering, so that it's almost like the glasses by which you see are the glasses of suffering. If the glasses you're seeing is the glasses of calm, well-being, peace, then you can address and understand and have room and capacity to be with your difficulties in a much better way.

So the art of *samādhi* includes the art of being attuned to our body, heart, and mind's capacity for pleasure, for well-being, which moves into joy and happiness. And some of the most sublime forms of happiness can come as we dip into deeper and deeper *samādhi*. And if sometimes the joy or the happiness gets quite strong, be rest assured that there's better things than joy, and there's better things than happiness. So these are just waypoints, waypoints along the way. That strong pleasure, if it is strong, the joy, the well-being, these are just means along the way. They're not the end.

So, so for today, as you go through your day, you might want to see if you can spend more time appreciating the pleasures that are already here. So don't go out and, you know, buy pleasant, pleasurable food so you can have pleasure. Just as you go about your daily life, check in regularly today to notice the pleasures that are already here. Many people are so busy, they don't avail themselves with pleasure that's already here, the simple pleasures of life. Stay closer to it. And maybe staying closer to the pleasures of life will also keep you close to being calm in the middle of it because it means that with staying, giving time for the pleasures means that you're not fueling and continuing the spinning mind, the pressured mind, the tense mind.

But take time today. Today you have permission, if I'm allowed to give you permission, to spend the day being attuned to the simple pleasures of life as they become available and see what difference it makes by the end of the day. So, thank you very much. And I'll continue this *samādhi* later tomorrow. Thank you.

Samadhi (34) Movement Toward Unification

2025-03-13

Hello and welcome back to this series on *samādhi*. This week is a little bit of a review and getting back into the momentum of the practice after I was gone for two weeks. And today the emphasis I'd like to make is talking about the unification process of *samādhi*. That *samādhi* practice is a practice by which the different scattered parts of who we are, scattered energies, scattered thoughts, begin to gather together. It's a feeling of unification, a feeling of, some people might call it a feeling of becoming whole, where there's nothing scattered, there's nothing separated, nothing cut out. All of us are working together.

And it's a slow process to get there. Some people are very disconnected from parts of themselves. They're very connected to certain parts, which feels like it's maybe the whole, but maybe they're not connected to their body. Some people are not connected to their emotions or some particular emotions. Some people are so involved in their thinking that almost they don't know their thinking. The idea is for the field of awareness to open and become wider.

And so this organizing, unification, can be done in two ways. One is a feeling of gathering together. And the other is a feeling that the awareness is getting expansive, open, wider, to hold it all. So there becomes lots of room for everything. And either way, there can be a subtle feeling of movement, of even direction, towards becoming whole. And sometimes that wholeness is a feeling that awareness just wants to expand outward, to include it all.

And so rather than zeroing in on something, which is what the thinking mind or the anxious mind does, or the angry mind or the desiring mind, is focusing on what it wants, what it's worried about, what it wants to push away, what it's for and against. Here, the feeling is that in the deeper mind, the deeper kind of profound kind of place of existence in us, just wants to open up, doesn't want to be limited and held tight. It wants to just become expansive and include it all. At the same time, that can also feel like everything is kind of settling together. There's a settling process, a relaxing process, and everything is kind of gathering into this subtle kind of movement. And the difference between widening awareness to settling is not so distinct.

They happen together. And sometimes the expansive one is called the *mahā citta*, the big mind or the expansive mind. And so the idea is that things are becoming unified, organized,

working together, not at odds with each other. And so this is all part of the emphasis in Buddhism that everything is changing all the time. And what's important to appreciate is that the change is not chaotic. The change follows the patterns or the conditions.

It's influenced by the conditions we set in place. So if the condition is a preoccupation with thoughts, preoccupations with difficult emotions, then that creates a movement towards being more scattered and disconnected. If the orientation is towards calm, to be centered, to be settled, that moves the change towards becoming organized, collected, connected, everything connected together. And so we can contribute to that. We set up the conditions by what we're oriented towards, what our practice is, what we're seeing, how awareness operates, to allow this kind of movement towards wholeness. But what it needs is kind of acute sensitivity to this, deeper and deeper sensitivity to the meditative experience as opposed to heightened kind of preoccupation with me, myself, and mine, heightened preoccupation with our desires and aversions, our fears and anxieties.

There's a kind of a shift of orientation from what the mind is gripping onto to what it's like to have the mind be open, the hand be open. And it's almost that difference. And in some ways, the hand that's open is unified, ready, open, receptive to what's there. The hand that's fisted together might seem unified in a certain way, but a lot is lost in the process. And quickly, the tension that's there in the fist becomes the predominant thing. When the hand is whole, open, there's a way in which the whole hand is kind of gathered or connected or involved together in what's happening.

And so the same with the mind, the same with the heart, this relaxing, this opening, gathering together. And so what I'm emphasizing today is this subtle feeling, subtle sense that we can have of a healthy direction for the meditation to go, that is more subtle and quieter, shyer, than the pull of our ordinary preoccupations. But to start being quiet enough to listen, to feel, to sense this subtle movement towards becoming settled, becoming open, becoming expansive, becoming connected. The subtle movement that cares for everything, that wants everything to come together, everything to be itself in a settled way. It's almost like every way in which we are scattered, every which way which we're pulled into preoccupations and desires and aversions, if you feel your way into the middle of the desire, the aversion, into the sensation of pulling and pushing and fighting, if you feel your way into each of it, you can feel that in there, it itself has a movement towards wanting to relax.

Everything which is fisted wants to relax. Everything which is forceful, everything which is tight, everything which has excessive kind of willful feeling to it, everything that is anxious,

everything that is insistent, everything that's needy in us, these are all things to respect. And from this deeper place of sensing, you can sense into them and feel how they want to be connected to the whole, how they want to relax and settle, that all things, if they're really attentive to it, the heart of it, you can feel that they belong to a process of getting organized, being connected and unified, returning to the whole, if you will. And so as meditation gets deeper and deeper, this becomes part of the hallmark, part of the characteristics of the meditation. It's not a desire, it's not a wanting. It's inherent in the whole psychophysical system that when it becomes aware, clearly aware of what's here, when it becomes settled and relaxed, when there starts to be a kind of a centered, focus-centered experience of here, that everything wants to kind of continue that process of centering, continue that process of opening.

And you can feel the pull, the desire for that. And sometimes that desire can continue after meditation in daily life. There can be that clear sense of, this is what wants to happen. I just want to meditate more. I just want to connect to this more. This is what the whole system is about, is this coming into whole, coming into the healing, coming into the fullness.

And so there can be this feeling of, this is the direction to go in my life even. And some people will decide to go on long retreats. Some people will decide to just meditate more. Some people will decide to meditate longer. That you can feel inside that after a short period of meditation that what's in here is not finished. There's this momentum, this movement, this desire almost to continue this process.

And so the gathering, organizing, the process of it all. And sometimes it feels like it's all coming into a simple, simple center where everything gets simpler and simpler. And as it gets simpler, for example, just with the breathing, at the same time the mind can feel more and more expansive. And sometimes the movement seems like it's more and more expansive, like everything is standing in a wide circle. But then what's really left is the edges disappear. And what's really left is the center.

And things get simpler and simpler. So it's a movement towards simplicity also in a certain way. Because the mind is not thinking about so many things. The mind is not interested in thinking about so many things. The mind has been spending a lifetime thinking and wanting and worrying, and it's done enough of that. It's had its chance, and sometimes it doesn't seem to have done much good anyway, and there's a strong feeling enough for now.

There's a vacation time. There's a time to really settle into this other way of being that is not scattered, not preoccupied, not desire-driven, anxious desire-driven or something. So this

is the unification. And the word *samādhi*, that's one of the meanings of *samādhi*. It's kind of a gathering together of the mind. In Zen, seven-day Zen retreats are called *sesshin*. That means something like the gathering of the mind.

So thank you. And we'll do one more day tomorrow of this kind of a review and kind of getting into this again. And next week we'll return to what we did before, which is the approach into this deeper *samādhi*, what's called *jhānas*. And we'll spend another week with the approach part of *samādhi*. And then I'm hoping the week after that we can begin at least a discussion of what's called the *jhānas*, the absorptions. So, thank you all very much. Thank you.

Samadhi (35) Onward Leading Attention

2025-03-14

Hello and welcome to the 35th talk of this *Samādhi* series. As the mind relaxes, as our ability to be centered and be more fully present here, there is this amazing feeling that to be here fully and completely is not a static thing, but there's an onward leading nature to it. There's something that wants to move through us, something that wants to express itself, something that wants to be for us. That can be many things, but in terms of *samādhi*, when we're giving ourselves over to this one primary activity of just being present here, for example, for the breathing, that starts to kind of become the place that the whole mind and body gathers, enters into. The goodness of the rightness of it, yes, the feeling of yes, this is where I want to be, this is healthy, this is appropriate, begins to stand out and highlight. We start realizing that to be caught up in our thoughts, caught up in our plans, our worries, our memories, our regrets, our irritations, or complaints, that is not as healthy as being really here fully.

Being here in the deep *samādhi* is almost like entering into a deep vacation, a deep rest, a deep healthy alternative to the usual way in which the mind is stressful, what it does. It feels good to be there. It body. There's a kind of feeling of yes to this. That feeling of yes has a kind of feeling of there's an onward leading nature. It's similar to being on the top of a slide, and you maybe slid a little bit down the slide, and then hold on to the side so you don't go any further.

But you can feel the tug, the pull of gravity that wants to kind of pull you down, if you just let go. So the same thing, there's a kind of a slide or a kind of a movement that we can feel that is not, that is kind of like the pull of the heart's gravity or the gravity of the inner life, that is not willful, it's not a desire from the usual self that wants and expects and demands and is disappointed. It's almost as if it's a kind of a biological feeling that is deeper than any mental movement of the mind. To appreciate that to be fully present is not static, but it's to join a kind of momentum, to join the living stream of life that now is kind of going along into more and more presence, more and more just here, just with this experience. Certainly there are times in ordinary life where we get absorbed in a particular activity and just feel so good. Some people say they feel lost in the activity, and they just can't wait to go back into it, they might get pulled out.

Sometimes it's interesting to see how being pulled out of activity we're absorbed in, their part of the mind just wants to come back. It's like the momentum is there. Then as soon as we let

go of the other thing that has to be taken care of, it feels so good to be back in the groove. This is the way to go. This is the way to move forward. So it's actually very useful for the purpose of *samādhi* to not just be willfully trying, not at all to be kind of willfully kind of pushing and straining, concentrated, but a lot of it is letting go, but just letting go at some point into the onward leading nature, into this way in which our system wants to move forward by stepping into the experience more deeply, give ourselves over to the experience more deeply.

Sometimes this onward leader nature can take the form that we feel, just as a subtle feeling that says, oh, this is where the attention should be. It might be, if it's connected to the breathing, it might be this part of the body where attention should be. Having attention rest there like a hand resting maybe on your thigh. Now the hand of awareness is resting on some place in the body where breathing is felt. Sometimes that shifts and changes as we develop the practice. I've often had the experience of I stay, I'm often centered on my belly as I breathe, feeling the movements of my belly as I breathe.

But then sometimes as the mind, as the breathing gets quieter and quieter, sometimes the place that feels like this is where the attention should be moves up to the middle of the chest. I feel this little movement in the chest there. Then sometimes it moves again. Sometimes it moves back to just a little point, a pressure, a little point of sensation, deep somehow, deep in the belly, below the belly button somehow. It's just like that, this is where the attention should be. There might be almost no movement if I'm really still and quiet, but there's a feeling, oh, this is where the attention wants to be. This is onward leading, or this is where the request is. This is where the, where it feels the yes is there.

This yes, this onward leading nature, can also be related to a number of other things. One of them is it can be related to faith. Faith, *saddhā* in Pāli, is kind of a desire, a healthy desire, that says, yes, this is where it's right to be. This is what wants to happen. This is what I have faith in. This is what I have confidence in. Again, it's not I, even though I say I. It's something deeper inside that's not really the control tower, the control self. This is the place where there's a natural system operating. The natural system has this faith, has this confidence, has this yes, has this desire.

Just stay here, be with this, but don't push it, don't, if you feel the onward leading nature, let go into it, participate in it, but don't bring the control self, the control desires to bear, like okay, now I'm going to do it really well, I can feel it, and now I'm going to really push against it or, you know. But it's more like be soft. Ease into it. Trust it. The faith is the, can also can be a trust. Trust this experience and trust to go along with it.

This is particularly important for *samādhi* because any degree of concentration that we have always has a lifetime. Concentration, you can't just get into a state of *samādhi* and stay there forever. It always has a lifetime where it peaks, and then it's going to fade away. So if you're coming with your kind of control desires to want to get concentrated, then you might be overriding the wave of *samādhi* that's going through. Part of the art of *samādhi* is also to appreciate when the peak of whatever degree of subtleness you have has passed. Partly you know that because the thinking mind begins to start up again. It's not wrong that the concentration wanes. It's just a natural part.

What part of a healthy kind of relationship to *samādhi* and concentration is to learn to recognize when the concentration fades, starting to fade, and then be gracious about that. Just continue the practice for a while, but not with any idea that it should be any different, that it's not supposed to fade. Maybe switch to mindfulness more than concentration. Don't fight it. Don't try to override it, that fading away when that time comes. If that fading away happens before the end of your normal meditation, then just continue with the practice the best you can, but don't have a high standard. It's not going to look that great as your concentration wanes, but the effort to continue with the practice is building the muscle of practice, the strength of practice, that then will support you at other times.

So, the onward leading nature. This becomes important for what we'll do next week, which is go into a little bit more detail or in a different way, the approach stage of going into deep *samādhi*, deep absorption, and becoming skilled a little bit in the approach stage is helpful, which is where we really kind of start feeling that we're in the approach where the momentum is starting to kick in and to learning how to ride that is important. So the other thing, next Friday, after this 7 a.m., I think it starts at 9 or 9.30, I'm teaching an online day-long for the *Insight Retreat Center* that will be on Zoom. It's on mindfulness of emotions. So it's a different topic than *samādhi*, but certainly the more we're mindful of emotions and are wise about it, the more that actually supports *samādhi*. Because in a certain kind of way, *samādhi* is emotional. It belongs to deep, deep emotions, profound emotions of well-being, of peace, of confidence, of joy, of equanimity. So learning how to be with emotions can be supportive. If you're interested in doing that, you need to register. It's in the *Insight Retreat Center* website. So thank you all very much. I look forward to our approach next week.

Samadhi (36) Approaching Subject Well Being

2025-03-17

So, welcome to this series on *samādhi*, and today also marks the, maybe the five-year anniversary of beginning these YouTube mornings together. Some of you have been along for the whole ride for five years, and I'm very grateful for all of you who come. And I have some confidence that the goodness of our time together spreads from you into the world. So this kind of network, this kind of radiating network of bringing good to the world is a great thing to be part of. And thank you for these five years.

So, *samādhi* this week—we're going to kind of cover the territory more of the approach called access concentration, usually in English, but the stage of approach, approaching *samādhi*. This is when it's relatively easy to stay in the present moment. If we lose the present moment, it's almost like it's obvious, it's easy to come back, or there's almost a call inside to come back, be here. And there starts to be a shift of orientation, where the orientation is towards the goodness of meditation, the joy, the happiness, the well-being of meditation, or of concentration, of really staying present, over the mind, not wandering, not being scattered, not being caught by other things. Really be here.

And it's almost a little bit of a quantum shift, like, okay, now we're here. And it is a reorientation of some kind. With that reorientation, it becomes a form of joy, a form of delight, or this is good. So in the classic teachings about going into *samādhi*, going into *jhānas*, the penultimate activity that is done is to learn to let go of the hindrances. We've talked about this before.

But here, the five hindrances are very subtle. They can be very big forces in the mind, huge, and that can be very destructive for people. But in deeper meditation, we're getting into the subtlety of it, how easy it is to drift off into thoughts, concerns of sensual pleasure. Easier to get involved with movements of aversion. How easy it is to move into getting kind of sloth and torpor, rigid and resistant, the subtlest versions of restlessness and regrets, the subtlest versions of uncertainty, like what am I doing here?

And so it's somehow settling those and appreciating the goodness, the rightness, the pleasure, the well-being of not having the mind caught in those kinds of concerns. I think of this as a shift from objectifying thoughts to a subjective feeling. What I mean by objectifying thoughts is that when we're caught in desires, for sensual desires, sensual pleasures, they

usually go with thoughts about the experience of sensual pleasure, about the object of sensual pleasure. Same thing with aversion. There's no aversion without something we're averting, pushing against, wanting to go away. That involves engaging the thinking mind, where whatever we have aversion for or desire for is now an object of the thinking mind.

To the degree we're not strong, it keeps us disconnected from ourselves. We're no longer present for the deeper subjective experience of what's actually the feeling of being alive, the vitality of being here. So the shift now, to really begin happening deeper and deeper in as we approach, is that we're no longer satisfied, content to be objectifying, to be caught in thoughts that are about the world, about desires, about diversions. There's a shift to trusting or resting in the subjective experience. So with the breathing, for example, it's the deep subjective experience of the breathing that we linger with, we stay with.

To give a little sense of what the subjective experience is like, how directly, almost somatic it is, it's kind of like you take two fingers, your thumb and your pointing finger, and press them together. You'll feel some sensations, maybe of pressure, maybe heat, maybe firmness, something. Some of the sensations are there. Those sensations you feel as you press your fingers together occur together with sensing them. If we didn't have the capacity to sense, to feel, we wouldn't know that there was pressure. The sensing of the pressure and the sensation of pressure are one and the same.

You can't really separate them. Linguistically, we can say there's a sensation as a thing out there, that we're aware of something, that's the sensation. But in order to sense the sensations, that's not out there, that's in the fingers. So the sensing and the sensation together make up the subjective experience. Now, I can be objectifying it by saying I'm not having the right kind of feeling of pressure, there's a particular right way of doing this and I'm not quite getting what the sensation is supposed to be—it's supposed to be maybe harder or softer or more pointed or more spread out—and this makes me think about why is Gil doing this as an exercise.

It could be doing it with some really pleasant, delightful sensations of the body. That would be the way to get my attention. Those thoughts are in the objectifying world. The subjective world here is a place where sensing and sensations occur together. So with the breathing, it's those sensations of breathing that are known where they're being sensed, where the awareness is, the attention is. To stay right there in that subjective world of sensing and sensations.

As we stay there, the subjective experience can grow because there's a goodness, there's a

sweetness, there's a well-being that can arise. That is not the well-being that comes from physical pleasure, sensual pleasure. So there's a shift of orientation in the approach stage from being concerned, interested, enamored with the objectifying thinking mind, and instead feeling like we're at home and this is where it's good. It feels delightful to be here in this subjective experience where sensing and sensation occur together. That subjective experience can be quite broad through the body. It could be a tingling, a warmth, a vibration, a flow, an opening, a lightness that happens even as we stay very close to the inhale and exhale, maybe counting them.

So really stay right there with them. But the idea is not to be in the control tower, tightly focused, but rather to be relaxing into the subjective experience, letting go into it, trusting it. Thinking of that subjective experience of breathing is kind of like the nest, the resting place, the grounding place for our sense of being and our life. The Buddha talks about how as we make this shift from the hindrance of sensual desire to this deeper subjective experience, just that feels good. It can feel like a relief. It can feel like a happiness or contentment that now we know something that's more satisfying.

This is good. And it's less exhausting, less tiring. Thinking about sensual desire is exhausting. The mind is kind of restless, kind of forceful, kind of agitated, and you sometimes have a contraction and tightness in the mind. Resting in the subjective experience allows the mind to soften, to open. The control tower no longer has to work so much.

It can just settle back and allow for the subjective experience to inform it, to arrive, to be there. There can be a great sense of well-being. In the approach stage of practice, this is where you're allowed or encouraged to start feeling the well-being that's there in meditation now. However subtle it is, to recognize it and trust it, allow it to be there. There's something about giving our attention, giving awareness, making room for what is wholesome that lets the wholesome grow. The wholesome gives us a different subjective way of being with everything in our life.

I know that our lives are difficult. I know that there's all kinds of difficult emotions, sensations in the body that can happen. But as we get into this approach stage, we've learned how to be mindful of them, how to relate to these difficulties in a good way through mindfulness practice. It's okay to recognize and allow them to be there on the edges. Now it feels, in this approach stage, it feels just right to open to the deeper feelings of well-being, however subtle they are. So the breathing into the sweetness, breathing with the beauty, with the subtleness, with the contentment.

This is the work of the approach stage. But maybe I shouldn't use the word work. Some people think of it as play. Some people think of it as an act of love, lovemaking. Some people think of it as nurturing and caring and nourishing ourselves. The deeper experience of this kind of joy sometimes is because of a word play in Pāli, where *pīti* in Pāli also means to drink.

We're drinking the goodness. We're drinking the wholesome. So for today, as part of this ability to make a shift of orientation, I'd encourage you to spend a day kind of feeling the difference between the objectifying world of thoughts, especially thoughts of sensual desire, whether it's food or sex or some other pleasant, wonderful experience, that the objectifying, that living the thoughts of that versus deeply subjective experience. The metaphor that I have for this is that a person can be on a hot day or a cold day sitting at the edge of a beautiful lake and thinking about all kinds of sensual pleasures that would be wonderful to have, daydreaming, wishing, being angry for not having them, and preoccupied by how difficult it is to have these sensual desires. Right there in front of the person is this delightful lake, pond.

On a hot day, it feels so refreshing to go into it. On a cold day, it's maybe hot pools. It's so good to go into it. As soon as we go into it, what brings a tremendous sense of relief, joy, happiness, is the subjective experience. It is not just simply the subjective experience of being in the wonderful water. It's also the subjective experience of putting to rest, putting aside all those objectifying thoughts on the control tower.

Ah, this is good. So study that. During the day, the objectifying mind versus the subjective mind. Maybe you can step into the lake more often through the day than you realize. Thank you.

Samadhi (37) Releasing into Samadhi

2025-03-18

So, welcome to this next talk on *samādhī*. And *samādhī* is the Buddhist word for being deeply immersed in the meditation, deeply immersed in anything that we're doing, where in that immersion, there is no holding back, there's no resistance, there's no self-consciousness in a kind of attached way. There's a giving ourselves over to the meditation, to the attention to the present moment. And a lot of that has to do with letting go. I think I mentioned some time ago that one of the first instructions that I received about going into *samādhī* was in Thailand.

I first went there to practice and I met some monk who said that he was a little bit dismissive, I think, of *samādhī*. And he said that *samādhī* just involves letting go. Just let go, let go, let go. But I don't think we need to be dismissive of it. It's kind of remarkable that if you place yourself in a nice meditative posture and then let go, that this natural process occurs that is a kind of a releasing, a freeing, a deepening, a sense of well-being that wells up.

Almost as if a natural state of being immersed in our activity brings joy without there being any worldly reason for that joy to be there, except for the complete immersion in the activity that we're doing, with the meditation we're doing. And so this deeper release into the meditation, we're releasing a lot of things, but one of the things we're really seeing is any strain or expectation around the meditation, any pushing, trying to make something happen, any thinking, anything that the thinking mind is doing, trying to do, in this kind of superficial way, coarser way, it all gets let go, let go, let go. But don't just let go—let go into the object of meditation, a release into the body breathing so that you're really like the idea is you're finding a way to immerse yourself in it. And that immersion is kind of also then becomes the totality where everything that we are is unified with it.

And so then, you know, the analogy I gave yesterday was someone at the edge of a, maybe it's a hot day, and there's a nice, cool, wonderfully cool lake. Person sits there being very hot and thinks about lake, thinks about going into an air-conditioned room, thinks about getting a fan, thinks about all kinds of things, sitting there being hot. And the mind is just busy thinking, planning, wanting. Well, the lake is right there. All the person has to do is immerse themselves in the lake.

And then there's an immersive feeling of the water, the coolness, the sensations of it. It's

clear that we're immersed in something that's wonderful now. And all those thoughts, planning thoughts about going someplace where it was cool, fall away because they're clearly not needed anymore. And maybe for a little while, there's no need to think of anything. It's just so good to be immersed in that cool, refreshing pool of water. So we're sitting in the edge of a wonderful, refreshing, or if you prefer the different metaphor of warm, nurturing pool of *samādhi*.

And don't think about it. Don't be involved in planning and wanting and expecting. Release. Let go into it. And don't let go too hard. Don't let go too quickly or too often, because that itself then is just more of the same kind of attachment and trying to manipulate and make something happen.

And just let go in a relaxed, open way, almost like you're not trying to make something happen. Because any holding, any tension, in and of itself, there's a desire, there's a yearning, there's a momentum to let go. Just like any ball that's put on a slope will start rolling downhill. We could say the ball wants to. That's what it wants to do. The pull of gravity is its desire.

In the midst of any clinging, any holding, any attachment to self or to outcome or to pleasure, is a kind of holding the ball against gravity. And if we release the ball, it will roll downhill. There's an onward leading nature of going into the experience more and more fully. Entering the experience fully is the direction that our whole system is designed to do if we let go of everything else. And there can be this surface kind of preoccupations and attachments. But as those get quieter, we can start feeling there's something, a deeper movement, a deeper desire, a deeper thing that wants to happen.

That is not really associated with our usual self, our usual desires. It's more like a, as if it's kind of a natural or deeper or freer kind of movement, desire, approach, that places us right there in the breathing. And so to think of the breathing, breathing in and breathing out, like a river, it's flowing. And we place awareness on the surface of that river. And awareness can maybe think of it as a raft or a canoe and we keep it that close, it's floating on top and then the boat is carried by the current and flows along the ups and downs, the twists and turns of the river as it flows with the in-breath and out-breath all the different changing sensations, just right there.

And to get really intimate I find it useful to remember that any sensation that we experience, the sensing of it is non-dual with this sensation. Or what I mean by that is that you cannot separate out as two different things sensing in the moment and the sensations that are being sensed. These two occur together and that's there's an intimacy and a closeness where sens-

ing is a little bit more what the mind does, maybe the nervous system does, and sensation is what is being triggered by some event, some someplace, but those things arise together. And that intimacy to be right there to awareness to sense and to feel for feeling to be abiding in that place where sensing and sensations occur together, to really stay with that, with the breathing, the sensations of breathing, wherever they might be, and to release.

And there's an art to letting go, releasing into the river of breathing that recognizes also that you're releasing into whatever pleasure, whatever joy, whatever thing that's been feeling, oh yes yes, this is good. So the refreshing part, the sweet part, some people refer to it as a beautiful experience that goes on, yes, we're dipping into this, the relief of it, the pleasure of it, the goodness of it, the healthiness of it, yes. And you can't make this happen. You can't, you know, if you don't feel that or know that as a lived experience, you can't argue to someone that the experience is pleasant or wonderful. It either is or isn't. But when it is, in whatever way it is, yes, let go into that goodness. Let go into feel that, be it.

And at some point with this approach stage of meditation, it becomes easier to stay with the breathing than it is to go away. You might still go away, but it's almost like where you want to be is with the breath. There's a desire, there's a goodness. Yes, here's where I want to be. And so if the mind wanders off, it almost like will come back by itself. I used to have this sense, the feeling, like there was a rubber band attached to my thoughts.

And my thoughts would start wandering away. And when the rubber band got taut enough, it would bring back the thoughts into the present moment, bring myself back. It was not me doing it so much. It was like, here, stay here, be here, flow along. And so this approach stage, the important part of it, is that it's not so much work anymore to stay present. It's not like continually coming back and being here, coming back and being here. It's not continually relaxing, softening. It's now we're here, and it feels like this feels like the right place to be.

And certainly there are plenty of times where even experienced meditators are beginners. And it's just manual labor. It's just we come back out of confidence and trust in the process and just kind of do the manual work of coming back from thinking, letting go, starting over again, starting over again. So we need to be gracious and appreciate that this is an important part of meditation. It's on a regular basis to be feeling like a raw beginner.

But then at some point, when the meditation, the *samādhi* begins to kind of, there's kind of a shift, a kind of a, something, it can be a gradual shift or a sudden shift, that now it's like the right place to be is with the breathing. The right place to be is to be immersed. This is good. The system wants to be here. Anything else is not so satisfying anymore. And this

starts to become the approach stage of *samādhi*, that we're approaching a pivotal moment where we're going to drop into a deeper *samādhi*. So that'll be coming. But this approach stage where it's, oh, this is good, this is good.

And I describe all this to you so that you can recognize it when you're there and recognizing that this is also part of meditation so at the right time you have a sense that this is possible, you're allowed to do this, you're allowed to start releasing into it, you're allowed to immerse yourself, you're allowed to immerse yourself in the joy and the pleasure and the goodness, the rightness, you orient yourself towards it. So the mind is getting organized, oriented, stable, steady, at ease here to flow on the surface of the river of breathing. Breathing in, breathing out, just staying there and being massaged by it, being nourished by it, just there.

So I hope that what I'm saying makes enough sense for you, either intuitively or with your imagination, or maybe even your experience sometimes, that you can kind of like file it away and remember this, so that, and inspire you, that no matter what stage of meditation you're at, this is an inspiring process to be part of. It's an inspiring, very natural process that's kind of built into our whole psychophysical system to have this ability. And it kind of brings a lot of faith, a lot of awe, a lot of inspiration to know, yes, yes, this is possible. So thank you very much. And we'll continue with this approach tomorrow.

Samadhai (38) Samadhi with Love

2025-03-19

So, hello and welcome to this continuing series on *samādhi*. And now that we've been doing it for a good number of weeks, I'm now bringing you into the approach stage *samādhi*. And it's approaching a deep immersion, a deep kind of clicking in, a deep kind of settling into just here. It's almost like a physiological shift and change. Like we become so fully here that the mind, you know, is clearly at home, clearly settled, clearly has no inclination to wander off. And it's a deeply satisfying immersion into something wonderful.

And so the approach stage is beginning to appreciate this movement to immersion, movement onward to really being here. And part of that is to begin recognizing the symptoms of *samādhi*, the feelings that feel good about *samādhi*, that are the encouragement, are the symptoms of the very things that awareness wants to stay connected to. Mindfulness wants to stay here, wants to know this. It's like standing in the sun on a cold day. And the system, the body, almost like it wants to stay there, with it fully facing the sun so we get the maximum amount of heat on the body.

And so there's something in our whole system that wants to be here because it's so good, it's so nourishing, it's so good. And classically, or often, there's a lot of attention given to the joy, the pleasure that can come as we get into this approach stage. And it's being kind of absorbed into the pleasure, the joy, that is kind of the avenue to this deep, deep immersion of *samādhi*. But sometimes that emphasis on pleasure and joy is a little bit too technique-focused, a little bit too, maybe, much desire involved, a little bit too narrow scope of what the full immersion can be.

And so in this last meditation, I introduced the topic of love. The Buddha did describe beautifully states of *samādhi*, deep absorption in the *Brahmavihāras*, in these divine forms of sublime love which we are capable of. The first one being kindness or goodwill or loving kindness, and then compassion, sympathetic joy, and a particular kind of equanimity, a particular kind of love called equanimity. But there's this kind of sense of tenderness or rightness or goodness or a kind of a love that's there, this is good, this is—uh. And so to begin feeling that there's care, there's love, there's gentleness, there's a friendliness, there's a feeling of goodwill to what's happening.

It's not greedy to enter into *samādhi*. It's not narrowing down to just feel pleasure for plea-

sure's sake or joy's sake. It's just a little bit too narrow. The love, the goodwill is a support to keep it all very light and to keep it from being selfish, keep it from being about me, myself, and mine. It gives kind of a wider space, a wider goodwill, a wider sense of not contracting.

For the Buddha, when he talked about just a penultimate kind of obstacle to really going deep into the well-being of *samādhi* are the five hindrances. One of them, which is ill will. And so this idea of ill will getting in the way, even the subtlest little not liking, subtlest little not for this, not this. There's plenty of experiences we can be having in meditation that are unpleasant. The body can ache, the mind can be challenging, and the heart can have its difficult emotions. And we don't want to push them away or think they don't belong there, but there's a way of including them so that we're not preoccupied by them.

And this is where love can hold it all. And this idea that awareness itself is love, mindfulness itself is a kind of love. And one of my favorite reference points for this, well, favorite and also maybe sad reference points, is that I've learned as a teacher and talking with a lot of people about their lives, that when they were children, if they were not really seen, if the parents kind of ignored them or never really stopped to get to know them or saw their difficulties, saw their challenges, saw their joys, that they were kind of overlooked by the busyness or the preoccupations or the alcoholism of their parents. That not being seen as children is equivalent to not being loved, not feeling that they're loved. And there's something about the act of seeing.

As adults, there's something about the act of people stopping to listen, to really listen out and hear that is so nourishing, so good, that when people listen well, it's because there's a kind of a deep care, a love here. So this love of *samādhi*, this love that can be part of awareness, doesn't have to be a dramatic thing. It doesn't have to be something that people write songs about, but rather it's something very soft, something very gentle, something very modest, something that is very kind of pervasive and fluid. But it helps with this, yes, this is good. This is really nice to be here. Of course I want to be here.

Of course I want to enter into this world of experience. If the experience itself has this wonderful light, inviting awareness, if experience itself comes along with this inviting sense of love or care that is not added to being aware, but is part of being aware. You know, it's possible to be aware unselfconsciously. It's possible to be aware of things that we're not really focusing on. We go through the day talking with a friend, walking through a park, and we might step over a branch or a lizard in the path or something. We might kind of avoid a rock or something.

We're aware of the rock. We're aware of all these things, simple things in the park, but we're not focusing on them. The degree to which we know it is almost effortless because we're involved in the conversation and looking around. And so we have this capacity for very, very simple, unobtrusive or undemanding kind of awareness that in the same way we can do that for care and kindness. Maybe there's an earthworm on the trail as you're walking and you wouldn't step on it if you just continued the way you are. But it's the most natural thing in the world to step aside, to put the foot down a little bit different place so you don't hurt the worm.

It's a kind of care. It's a kind of love. But it's not self-conscious. It's not just a big thing. You don't even realize it. Two seconds later, you probably don't even remember you did it. It's not in your mind.

So to immerse ourselves in the simplicity of awareness, simplicity of care, don't make *samādhi* a difficult, big, complicated thing. It's a dipping into the pool, into this immersion, into this state. So we're looking for the symptoms of *samādhi*. And one of the symptoms is that the mind wants to be present, wants to be there. And when that awareness kind of wants to be there, look for the love, look for the care. And that then is part of the funnel that keeps us kind of there and wanting to be there.

Look for the joy. Look for the pleasure. Look for how the satisfactory feelings. Maybe there's kind of a, the body feels much more light. Then it has no weight. Maybe the body feels very spacious and open. Kind of be in that space, feel it, be it.

Maybe there's a delightful tingling or a vibration or a sense of vitality, aliveness that comes. Be in that, feel that. These are all symptoms. Sometimes people have experiences of light, the eyesight filled with luminous, with maybe a white field of light or a clear field of kind of light. Maybe it's colored light. Don't focus on them, don't get mesmerized by them, but that's part of the kind of delightful things, the symptom of *samādhi* where you can kind of accept it and appreciate how yes, I'm on track, this is where I want to be. Let the color, the colors, the lights, let them be there on the periphery. Let them be a part of the goodness of it that wants to keep you right there with the breathing, staying there, staying connected.

So with the approach stage of *samādhi*, it's helpful to start appreciating the symptoms of *samādhi*, what's shifted and changed, the calm that's arisen. Sometimes the mind can feel very incisively—is that the right word—precisely or penetratingly sharp in its attention, awareness, right there. And it doesn't have to be any kind of strain, but this is good, to be there sharply, precisely, right there on the breath. Or it can feel like awareness is like

petting a cat, and the breath is the petting almost, or the awareness that's resting on it, and something begins to purr inside. And so the symptoms of *samādhi* and one of those being love, care, and that's one of the great gifts of Buddhism, of *samādhi*, of practice, is to feel the almost the oneness of awareness and love that you can carry with you the world so that whatever awareness touches is also touched by love, with care, with kindness.

And you'll lose touch with that. You'll get caught up in your thoughts and preoccupations. But know that you've lost it. Know that you're no longer doing it. Maybe just recognizing it, that difference, can bring you back into this relaxed way in which awareness love, awareness that is love, can then return to becoming part of how you walk through the world. May you love, may you walk through the world with awareness love. Thank you.

Samadhi (39) The Pull of Samadhi

2025-03-20

Hello and welcome to this next part of the series on *samādhi*. We're in this approach stage of *samādhi*, sometimes called access concentration. As we get more and more settled into meditation, more settled, more absorbed, more intimate, more immersed in our experience, this is what *samādhi* is. Sometimes *samādhi* is felt to be any situation, not just meditation, where we are absorbed in what we are doing, immersed in what we're doing. Some people will describe this as becoming one with what we're doing. Some people describe it as being deeply intimate.

Some people describe it as being kind of one-pointed, gathered together, just here, just with this. And some people describe *samādhi* more as a state, a broad, wide, expansive state that is centered fully here with one thing. Right now, at this moment, at this moment. Sometimes it's called, there's a momentary *samādhi* where we're very established in the present moment. The awareness is fully there for one moment of experience, then something very different, another moment, and it freely takes in the range of things that come in through the different sense doors. So it doesn't necessarily have a single object, which going into deeper *samādhi* really usually uses simplifying into a primary kind of object.

A lot of those different sense doors start kind of receding from awareness. In deeper *samādhi*, a person might not be hearing sound so much, not conscious. They're not incapable of it, but the attention is so absorbed in the breathing that we don't necessarily hear very much or smell. So the whole world of *samādhi*, things begin to shift and change. It is a state shift. There's a radical changing from business as usual with how we go through our lives.

One of the ways that this takes shape is that our thinking begins to change. As we start getting into this approach stage, thinking more and more tends to be wholesome. There's less and less unwholesome thinking. There might be still some desires, aversions, doubt that come up. The hindrances might still be there, but they're fairly weak now. People who come into *samādhi* should really understand that hindrances, well, have studied them a lot and are familiar with them, so that the subtle pull of them no longer grabs us.

We're able to say, no, not now. Stay here. There's kind of an overriding movement towards kind of a healthy way of thinking, a meditative way, something that's supportive, a way of thinking about just here, just now, being here, stay here, continue here, relax here, don't cling,

don't push, don't pull back, stay, persist. That thinking feels healthy. It feels wholesome. To some degree, we can come to this juncture with the approach stage, where we begin to either, it happens naturally, this kind of more healthy way of thinking about the meditation itself, about the present moment experience, or it's easy to make the shift.

It is a shift where we're no longer involved in the usual way of thinking, which maybe for many people is not so healthy, that is not so productive of calm, stability, peace, even well-being. To begin to appreciate, we're actually shifting out of business as usual. It's not a rejection of it, it's not by aversion of it, but it's important to really appreciate that, you know, if you want to go for a nice swim in a pool, generally you go and change into a bathing suit so that you're shifting into a state, into a way of being that makes more sense, that's more appropriate for a nice swim. There is a kind of recognition, oh, we're going into a different mode here. Because otherwise, many of us are so committed to the usual mode of thinking, the usual mode of being, the usual preoccupations. But at least in principle to understand, this is a shift we're taking.

We're going into the pond, we're going into the lake for a swim, in a sense. Yes, it's appropriate to take off my regular street clothes to have my bathing suit. So, yes, it's appropriate to put down our preoccupations about work and family and thoughts and desires and all kinds of things, resentments that we have. It's appropriate for this time because we're now entering into this kind of a new world, a new way of being. This is where this transition really begins to take hold in this approach stage. There's a little bit wobbly still, the mind wanders off and we all come back, be here.

This is where it's really helpful to have this quiet, peaceful way of thinking that says yes, here, stay here, it's okay, you don't have to go off, not now, not now, stay here. As we're staying here with the present and the approach begins to happen, some of that approach feels like an onward leading, like there's momentum, like we're on a slide and we just kind of need to let go to let the slide carry us. It might be the onward leading nature, it might have different ways it's experienced by people. Sometimes it can be feeling like, you know, I very much follow my breathing in my belly, the movements in my belly. Sometimes it's almost like there's a little thread in there that's pulling, pulling me along. Come here. Follow that thread. Stay right here with this little bit of pressure, little pulling.

It's almost like, almost like, it's not exactly that, but it feels like, oh yes, here's where I'm being absorbed in. Here's where I'm really connected. I don't know if this metaphor works for you, but I've found it helpful for me sometimes that I'm kind of like a kite that's in the sky floating

nicely. But there's a nice little thread, a cord that goes down to the ground. That thread, that rope holding the kite in the air, it needs to be constantly taut. You don't want it to be slack and you don't want it to be too tight. If it's too tight, the string might break. If it's too loose, the kite will fall. So the job of the person who's with the kite is to keep just the right tautness there so that it flies well.

Just the right tautness there, just here, stay there, feel that pull, don't pull too hard, don't lean into it, relax. It's always a relaxing, always a letting go, a releasing into, releasing into the onward leading nature, releasing into the immersion, releasing into the lake, into the pond, releasing it down the slide. When my kids were growing up, we went to a lake nearby that had a water slide. It was fun. You could go fast and splash in. The slide of *samādhi*, it's not really a splash. It's very peaceful. But sometimes it could be a sudden shift, like, oh, I'm here. I'm in the lake. Or sometimes it can be a slide that has no bottom, but you find yourself in this peaceful space.

So, subtle, quiet, soft thinking. Not too much, not too little. A different kind of thinking than ordinary, but a thinking that's about the meditation itself. Thinking that's without greed, without trying too hard, without criticizing anything. Just simple. Just the facts.

Just the field notes. Just a little exploratory wear. So that that subtle thinking is part of this gathering together, unification, that all of us is participating, cooperating, in just gathering together into this immersive experience of *samādhi*. Then feeling the pull, feeling the little bit of onward leading nature. Not to get excited, not to push it more, but to always remember to feel and relax. Let go. Almost like letting go into the experience is the way to be with it more fully.

So I hope that this makes sense. Just as I was saying this, in the back of my mind, I wanted to say, refer to it as the poetry of *samādhi*. I don't think I've been in any way speaking poetically, but maybe there's something about the aesthetics, the sensibility of poetry, when it really moves us in a deep way, that comes into play, that supports this onward leading nature, this subtle thinking, where the poetry of *samādhi*, the poetry of beauty, here, poetry of sweetness, here, yes, this is good.

So thank you very much. If some of you would like to meditate more, a day long, it's not quite on this topic of *samādhi* but certainly hopefully supportive, that tomorrow I have a day long retreat on Friday on mindfulness of emotions and that will be through the Insight Retreat Center. On their menu, you see online retreats. Also, there's a note about it in the What's New section of IMC's website. I think it's from 9 to 4 at California time. It's online. So thank

you very much. And we'll do another day tomorrow on approach.

Samadhi (40) Deep Contentment

2025-03-21

So, welcome to the continuation of this series of talks on *samādhi*. I think we're now in the 40th talk. And what I hope is that these guided meditations that go along with it and these talks, more than teaching you techniques, more than teaching you how to do *samādhi* practice, it's pointing you to feeling something meaningful and satisfying within. The normal state that people live in involves some kind of tension, some kind of stress. It might be a low level, and it might not be recognizable by people that they're living with stress and tension. Because it's become normalized, it's expected, it's just how it is to be in the world, how it is to be a human being.

And the person might have a reference point for something that calls stress or being tense, that's some kind of serious level or quantum leap above their normal state. But still, often people live in this normal state. And what that means is that the thinking that comes from tension also has become normalized, also seems just as this is what it is to be a human being. And we're supposed to do this, or it may even be almost invisible that we're constantly chattering, talking, having conversations, remembering, reviewing, planning. But to enter into *samādhi* is to drop into some place that's below any level of tension or stress that we can experience. And in a sense, we are now in *samādhi*, dropping below the stress level of our life, the tension level.

Sometimes the stress and tension kind of continues to be there in the body and heart or some place, but it's now moved a little bit to the periphery because we feel at the center or underneath it all, a place where there is no stress, there is no tension, there is no operating on clinging desires, pushing desires, needy desires, that are there without any kind of hostile aversion, pushing away, wanting it to be different. It's like we're dropping into a much more of a natural state of who we are when there is no tension, when there is no stress at all in the system. And this gives rise to deep feelings of satisfaction, relief, well-being, joy. And each person is going to experience this differently. But sometimes it comes along with the kind of feelings you would have if you were peacefully creative. Maybe writing poetry or reading poetry.

Or maybe, you know, peacefully, quietly involved, absorbed in a very simple craft or very simple playing of music. Where there's some kind of almost emotional feeling that wells up or is there that feels suffusive and spread through the body. And it isn't that we can so much make

this happen in *samādhī*. But it begins to show itself because it's there almost. It's almost like it's always there. It's underneath the tension, underneath the stress.

And it's kind of like a treasure house within that's waiting to be opened. And it's important not to think that the treasures are too, you know, fantastic. It's important not to look for peak experiences and dramatic feelings of *samādhī*. But it's actually better to have it be kind of very deep contentment, a deep satisfaction, a deep, aha, this is good to be here. Like you've gotten really cozy in bed, and now you're safe, now it's good. Nothing has to happen, nothing more has to be done, nothing has to be said.

And now, ah, this is good. And to be able to recognize that so we can move towards it or settle into it in meditation, so we can recognize that this is important and this is invaluable, it's a treasure. Because sometimes the orientation is so strongly towards thoughts and tension, stress, that often driven by the desire to be safe because we're afraid. The desire to want something because we feel like insufficient in some way or we just want more pleasure or something. And to no longer be attracted to that, no longer be hooked into it or to be mesmerized by desires and aversions and to settle quietly into a much more deeper sense of contentment, deeper sense of satisfaction.

And at some point, because we start seeing that having any, we start seeing that desire, or when we see that desires, aversions, thoughts, are actually agitating the mind, keeping us separated from this deeper place that's satisfying, deeper connection to breathing and the underlying kind of peace or this joy or well-being in which breathing occurs. We see that thoughts and desires are agitating it. Then it's easier to just let those go, let those become quieter, kind of let the mind become stiller and quieter, let the heart be more settled. But we might need to see that certain kinds of activities of the mind are not so satisfying, are maybe a little bit alienating, a little bit keeping us away from something deeper satisfaction, so that it's easier just to let it float away. There comes a time when the desire to not have those desires is too much to have. And so it's almost like we just learn to leave it alone.

We have desires, we have aversions, we have thoughts. And there comes a time when there's a, just feels like the best thing to do is to just leave it completely alone. Don't be involved. It recedes the periphery. It's not being reinforced. Maybe it floats away.

Maybe it's kind of quietly in the background. But in the foreground is where the action is, the action of contentment, the actions of deep satisfaction, deep immersion in this lake of *samādhī*. And in this space of *samādhī*, there can be pleasures. There can be pleasantness. There can be joy. There can be strong sense of happiness.

Sometimes people feel rapture in these states. But the idea is to somehow be at ease in the middle of them, don't push for anything, don't try to pump anything up, just try to be at ease and make it space, allow it to be there, let each thing of these well-being kind of have space, breathing room to live the way it wants to live. Sometimes these states get stronger, sometimes they fade away. Don't have an agenda, but hold it steady, and what happens as we go through this approach stage, that steady staying here becomes stronger and stronger, or sometimes it feels almost like we're clicking in, and there's kind of a shift, boom, and now we've really arrived. Boy, are we ever here now with this experience. And it doesn't feel like there's any movement to get distracted or wander away.

Sometimes that is a very slow, steady movement that we slowly settle into. We don't see sometimes it almost coming until we find ourselves in a state where now we're really here. And, you know, if there's thoughts, it's only thoughts that are pleasant, nice, good thoughts about what's happening in meditation, about the experience here and now that supports us to be with it. And very, very quiet. And some people have the experience that we're locked in to this now. Sometimes it's just really like we're at rest.

We're now really rooted here right now. And so the fruition of this approach stage is because we're so patient, so willing to just stay here and be here as if forever, the desires to be anywhere else begin to fall away. And the familiarity with just staying here with the breath, staying one breath after the other, inhale, exhale, riding the breath, staying with it continuously in an easeful way. At some point we're rooted, we're there, we're not going away for a while. And then without exactly desire we're allowed to enjoy that and this is where the art of enjoyment is an art, it's the enjoyment, enjoy it in a way that helps the minds be quiet, without thoughts, with less thoughts, calm, and just stay there.

And you can feel that having thoughts takes you away from it. But you're allowed to be there in that well-being of deep *samādhi*. It's actually part of what we become rooted in or connected in. It supports us to be right there in the practice. So whether you understand what I'm saying now, any reference point to your own experience or not, I think it's good just to hear these words, hear these descriptions, so that you can recognize it or appreciate it or be inspired by it.

So some characteristics, some qualities of this can actually be there all along in your practice, in your meditation, even times when you are much more restless and filled with thoughts. That this is the orientation, this is the simplicity of it. And so we'll continue on Monday. And on Monday, we're going to start going into some of the characteristics of when the *samādhi*

really becomes clear, full *samādhi*, which in our tradition is called *jhāna*. And I'm not expecting you to be in *jhāna*, but some of the qualities, characteristics of it are useful to know, even when you're not in *jhāna*.

But in the meantime, if you feel like any kind of ongoing-ness, momentum that's happening from you from this *Samādhi* series, I would recommend that you be sure to meditate this weekend through the next two days, so that there's some continuity through the next two days that you can pick up with or continue into Monday when we start again. So thank you very much, and I appreciate your attention, your being part of this journey with *Samādhi*, and I look forward to continuing. Thank you. Thank you.

Samadhai (41) First Jhana Piti

2025-03-24

Hello and welcome to this next talk on this series on *samādhi*. We've spent some time now on approaching the deep immersive experience of *samādhi*. This is where *samādhi* becomes mature or full. Sometimes the language of being fully absorbed is used. Sometimes immersed, fully immersed in experience is used. In the Buddhist discussions of *samādhi*, it's to enter and abide in *jhāna*.

And I love this expression, to abide, to dwell, to rest, in these wonderful immersive states. So we enter into, and this entering, we're approaching, and at some point we enter. There's this transition. Sometimes it's a slow transition. We just find ourselves fully immersed. Sometimes it's a little bit faster.

Sometimes it can feel like we are just happily kind of settling into a body of water. For some people, it's a little bit troublesome, this image, if they had some challenging experience with water. But it's not uncommon for some meditators to feel like they're going underwater and very happy and very peaceful. When they come out of *jhāna* or out of this deeper immersion, it feels like they're coming up out of the water, the head surfaces. Then they can gently kind of let go into the *samādhi*, and they're happily going into this peaceful world.

The Buddha used the analogy of, one analogy for being so immersed in *samādhi* is underwater lotus flowers, beautiful multicolored lotus flowers, which haven't really surfaced above the water. So they're underneath the water. You see them through the clear water and they're just floating in a very peaceful, clear water, peacefully and kind of just immersed in the water, touched by the gentle water that's unmoving. So there's this idea of we enter, and for some it just feels like there's a kind of suddenly a flip, like a switch has been switched and suddenly we're in a new state. Some people have the experience like it's suddenly a quantum leap, but it's not usually a leap. It's more like a dropping.

More like a letting go. And it's just, oh, wow, now I'm here. Sometimes it comes with a feeling like, now we're really here. Sometimes we gradually get into it and we find ourselves, the whole mind and body is not really going to leave. We're abiding. We're resting.

We're fully here with no tendency to wander off. One of the things that keeps us here now, one of the things that is a feeling of *pīti*, the Pāli word is P-I-T-I. It's a feeling of, usually it's translated as, I like to translate it as joy. Some people like to give stronger words for it because

it can be stronger. Some people will use the word bliss. But it doesn't have to be strong.

It could be sometimes just delightfully sweet. But it's some feeling of, sometimes it's a little bit of a thrill. A trill. Thrill with it. I feel like, oh, this is good. I can settle bateful.

So I get a little bit energized. Oh, this is good. Now we're here. Sometimes it feels like there's a little charge through our body. There's tingling and warmth. Sometimes it's centered in certain parts of the body.

They're tingling or vibrating in a nice kind of clear way and joyful way. Kind of like you would do if you smiled. Some people, even if they don't feel joyful and happy, just simply making a gentle turning up of the lips of the corners of the mouth, something kind of travels through the face a little bit that feels like a little bit of joy or delight. But what it is, the sense of, I just like to call it well-being, a feeling of delightness, of joy. Some people, this *pīti* is experienced more as a light, like seeing a white light. Some people, it's experienced more as a pervasive feeling of joy and happiness.

The idea is it comes from this absorption, just being fully here. There is nothing which is distracting us anymore. All the different things that we have in our life that are our challenges and difficulties, our judgments, our negative conclusions, our negative bias, have gone on vacation, have taken a rest, receded into the background. There's nothing in the mind that's unwholesome. There's nothing in the mind which is troubling us in this state. So without those troubling feelings, thoughts, what's left just feels good.

It feels like a relief. It feels joy. Sometimes the analogy that Buddha uses for this is having no longer being in debt, having paid back a loan, being free of that burden, or no longer being ill, free from illness. That feels good. It feels like, oh, finally I'm not sick or not injured. Or being freed from prison.

Sometimes the mind and these difficult thoughts can feel like a prison. Sometimes he describes it as coming out of a difficult desert journey that was dangerous, and finally come out the other side and you're finally safe. So all this unwholesome, all these difficulties have kind of faded away, all the dangers have faded away, and now we're fully here and this is good. The idea is to be in harmony with that. Some people can still feel like the acquisitive mind, the appropriating mind, the desiring mind can still operate, and they try to push it and have this experience be more intense, just kind of pushing it and being it. That's usually not so useful.

What the Buddha talked about is taking the good feelings that come from being immersed,

being fully here now, settled here. Take the good feelings and let it spread through your body. He used a variety of words: pervade, suffuse the body. That's really the only instruction he gives when we get into this first state, what's called the first *jhāna*, that's characterized—many people characterize it by this feeling of *pīti*, of joy, of delight, of thrill that can be, ah, this is really great, I'm here, wow, and flowing along with it. But an important thing to appreciate is that entering into these absorptive states of *jhāna* have a lot to do with letting go. In one place, the Buddha says that these are known through letting go, seen through letting go, attained through letting go, and realized through letting go.

So this kind of letting go, don't try to push anything. Don't try to make something happen. Don't try to hold on to anything. Just like you're letting go into. It's a little bit like, for those of you who have maybe done some sailing, it's a little bit like you have to let go of the sail enough so it can be filled with the wind. You have to sometimes loosen the rope that's holding the sail in tight against the side of the middle of the boat so it can feel better and better.

You have to let go so something can feel. Let go so it can bellow outwards or balloon outwards. The spirit of this is harmony. How can you stay harmonious, in harmony with the good states? We stay in harmony by not doing anything, getting caught by anything, any clinging, any attachment, any appropriation into self, any self-congratulations. So at some point, as the meditation deepens, as we settle in, what's valuable is to start feeling the sense of well-being that could be here, even before we go into immersive, absorptive states.

It's to let there be a reciprocity, a feedback loop between whatever little sense of relaxing peace, tranquility you have as a way of the gentle wind that's filling the sail of awareness. The gentle kind of encouragement, yes, stay here, stay with the breath, really be here in the present moment. Don't overemphasize the feelings of well-being. Don't at this point try to push them and make them bigger so much. It's just let them kind of fill your awareness. Let them encourage you.

Stay here. Yes. So there's almost a feeling of yes. Let go into this. Let go into this awareness. Let go into the breathing.

Let go into now. So the Buddha said that this kind of *pīti*, this feeling of joy that can arise in immersive meditation is not something to be afraid of. It's not something to avoid. This was maybe one of the great contributions he made in the religions of his time, where there was a tremendous emphasis on asceticism, and in some places an emphasis on ordinary everyday kind of joys and delights and pleasures. He was offering something very different, something that was arising from a very deep place inside that wasn't an ordinary pleasure, but was kind

of a spiritual pleasure, a deep heart pleasure or joy, a deep pleasure of being in harmony with the moment, with the experience, right here and now, so that we enter and abide in states of well-being.

So, this week we'll talk about this first *jhāna* and the different factors that come into play. For those of you, most of you, you're not going to be in the first *jhāna*. But perhaps as you listen to this, that it's relevant even in lighter states of meditation. Maybe also it's inspiring that what's possible, that we all have the human capacity for this. To know this is kind of a wonderful North Star that inspires you to just be here, to let go into now. So thank you very much, and we'll continue tomorrow.

Samadhi (42) Applied And Sustained Attention

2025-03-25

So, hello and welcome to this next talk on *samādhi*. We have now reached the point of immersive *samādhi*, which in Pāli is *jhāna*. There is some idea that the etymology of *jhāna* might be connected to the word for a flame. If that's the case, then it's a candle flame which is completely out of any kind of wind. The flame is completely still, but it's luminous and dynamic. This luminosity and dynamism of *samādhi* comes when things are really completely still.

We're kind of entering almost a kind of stillness that has dynamism in it. The full stillness is partly fully in the present moment, fully just here. Think of it as fully in the subjective experience, not the subjective interpretation of this experience, not the subjective opinion about the experience, but the subjective sensations of it, the feelings, the direct experience of it. You could watch someone go for a nice dip in a peaceful, quiet, safe lake, and you can just appreciate that they seem to be just luxuriating in the cool lake on a day when it's really hot, or a warm lake on a day when it's cold. But it's out there; it's kind of objective. It's very different to go into the lake oneself and feel how subjectively, ah, this is good.

The subjective experience comes with a feeling, ah, this is good. Now I'm here. This really feels nice. The feeling of niceness, of goodness, is very subjective and it's very kind of embodied. It's not a thought. It's not an opinion. It's not a conclusion. It's something that's deeper than that, and that's one of the reasons why to go into deep absorption the thinking mind gets very, very quiet. Eventually, in deeper states of concentration, the thinking mind seems to stop entirely, almost entirely.

But to go into the first *jhāna*, what stops is discursive thinking. There's no more telling stories, no more coming to conclusions and having opinions. There's no more thoughts about the past and the future. These are all story-making mind, the discursive mind. That level of the mind, which takes a lot of energy, takes a lot of abstraction and ideas and brings them together into kind of a story, into a conversation, that becomes quiet. What happens instead is there might be still very simple thinking, but it's thinking just about being here.

It's almost like we're telling ourselves, good, stay here. Oh, this is good. At some point, there's this transition where the ordinary discursive mind becomes quiet. Sometimes that can happen kind of quickly, kind of suddenly we feel as something shifts or changes or turns upside down or settles in the mind, and now that mind, the thinking mind, is no longer there, the

discursive mind. Sometimes it's some inner feeling of being kind of arriving—boom, we're here. There's no doubt about it, then the mind doesn't want to wander off. We've entered and abided.

In the first *jhāna*, this arrival here still is dynamic in some ways. The important qualities that are present are something called *vitakka* and *vicāra*, which, as we talked about earlier, has to do with one way of understanding it as applied attention and sustained attention. Entering and abiding. Applying, stay right here. It's kind of like the movement you do with kneading water into flour, massaging something. It's kind of the movement of a bird that's lifting itself up off the ground by gently, maybe a very big bird, flapping its wings calmly and fully, powerfully.

It needs to do that flapping. It needs to lift and push down. There is a kind of connecting and sustaining, a kind of, you know, placing yourself on the slide and then sliding down, placing yourself in the waves and being carried by the wave. Kind of entering into and then abiding there. So there is a kind of very gentle, and if there's any thinking involved, it's the thought of stay here, go here, be here. Some people think that these two qualities, *vitakka* and *vicāra*, are a little bit more thoughtful with thoughts that are a little bit more evaluating.

More like, oh yeah, here, this is where to be. Ah, this is good. This feels nice. It's kind of like we're really getting close and into this experience of *samādhi* and kind of becoming, without trying to attain anything, get anything, just a very gentle kind of being present, feeling it. One analogy is like taking a cloth to polish a brass bowl, a bronze bowl, and then touching it and then gently kind of rubbing it. The ancient analogy is that of a bee that is kind of just, comes to the edge of a flower and then walks around the top of the flower looking for the nectar, kind of getting to know it, or just flying around it.

So connecting or being and circling around. Stay here. Enter and abide. In particular, what supports this is the joy, the thrill, the goodness, the pleasure of the pleasantness, something that we enjoy about the meditation itself. Sometimes this initial *jhāna*, that enjoyment, the joy, the enjoyment, the pleasure, is kind of dynamic. It feels a little bit like the flame that is completely still, but still there's a kind of, you know, inside the flame there's this wonderful movement of the heat.

There is this kind of feeling of this applied and sustaining. It's a little bit like blowing on the flames sometimes, like a bellows or blowing and the flames get stronger. Then you stop blowing and it gets quieter. There's a kind of dynamic relationship between now staying there with the experience, staying with the pleasure, and the pleasure kind of gets a little bit stronger or

fuller because we feel it, we sense it, we make room for it. As that happens, what's very useful to do and maybe even important to do is to let that pleasure, let the joy, spread through your body.

Some people in this *jhāna* are tight, they're a little bit concentrating too hard. There's a kind of narrowness of focus, kind of one-pointedness of focus, that the mind has gotten tight, and maybe even the eyes have gotten tight a little bit. Something's gotten kind of contracted. The ability for the body to be unified and whole and things flowing through it gets limited. It can feel like some of this dynamism of the good energy is blocked and it's stuck someplace. Some people, it's in the forehead. There can be kind of a tightness and tingling that's quite strong. Sometimes it's in the spine. Sometimes it's other places.

The idea is to keep softening, keep letting it spread, just gently. Don't make it—this shouldn't be a project. So don't be looking to do anything or make anything happen. There's an art to just kind of being with it, entering and abiding, connecting and sustaining. This abiding, this resting is what spreads, spreading it out, spreading it out. It's kind of maybe like you are blowing on a flame. The flame gets larger and you feel the warmth spread further out into your body. The warmth that spreads because it's warm, not because you're making it spread.

It's a wonderful world. It's maybe a little bit unimaginable for people who don't get close into this state that this is what's going on. But it feels really right. It can feel, as we enter into this first *jhāna*, that the alternative of coming out of it and getting back involved with the usual preoccupations, with the usual kind of hindrances of the mind—desire and aversion, doubts, anxieties—that doesn't feel as healthy or as good or as satisfying or as meaningful as really being here fully. Now we've entered our life in a complete way. There's a sense of vitality or aliveness or goodness. This is satisfying.

We can't wish ourselves into this exactly. We can't force ourselves into it. But if we sit with sincerity, then from time to time, this is what we begin dropping into. The instructions here are not meant that now you're able to actually do this, but it may be, hopefully, to give you a feeling for it, a sense of it, so that it's kind of a little bit a sense of showing you the landmarks of what's up ahead. Then if you come to that place, you see the landmarks, you say, oh, now I know where I am, this is a good thing. It may be easier to be here.

There's not a few people who drop into the first *jhāna* and they get so excited, they pop out, they come out. They say, well, this is really great. So stay calm. Enter and abide in the deep calm and peace of being immersed in this here and now practice. So thank you very much,

and we'll continue. I'll continue talking a little bit more about the first *jhāna* for the rest of this week. Thank you.

Samadhi (43) Becoming One

2025-03-26

So welcome to this next talk, the 43rd talk in the series on *samādhi*. And these talks are certainly building on the 42 earlier talks, so they make more sense in the context of that. So the *samādhi* is an experience of immersion, absorption, that involves a number of characteristics. And one of the forms of *samādhi* that they're emphasizing in Buddhism is called *jhāna*. And there are four *jhānas*, four of these kind of almost quantumly different states of absorption or concentration. And these are states of mind or states of being.

So that we want to be careful we don't use the word concentration too much. And the idea is that it's a laser focus of the mind. When the mind gets tight and narrow and focused and penetrating, that all too easily narrows the field too much. It's a wide open field that settles into *samādhi*. And the first *jhāna* is generally taught that are characterized by five primary kind of activities, mental states that are going on.

And those five are called the five *jhānic* factors. And so those are the initial or the connecting attention, the sustaining of attention, joy, happiness, and the fifth one is the Pāli is *ekaggatā*, and sometimes it's translated as one-pointedness, and sometimes it's translated as unification, or I like to call it wholeness, a gathering together. And so one way to kind of bring those two different ideas together, well, say before I do that, the idea of one-pointedness lends itself to narrowing attention to a single point and getting tense in the process. A lot of people who practice one-pointedness on something will try to penetrate or have this laser focus that's very tight. And it can lead to headaches even.

It can lead to some kind of tension building up. And some of the negative consequences of *samādhi* are born from any kind of tension involved as we practice *samādhi*. And sometimes people are not aware that they're tense. There can be a lot of pleasure, a lot of goodness. They can even get concentrated with that tension. But sooner or later, that tension will create some kind of unfortunate byproducts that can interfere with healthy *samādhi*.

So the word one-pointedness is a little bit risky. Unification or wholeness or gathering together—maybe it's a little bit abstract for people to understand. So the word that maybe kind of combines these two in a nice way might be becoming one. *Eka* means one. *Gata* can mean like going to, becoming something. The state of one, maybe a kind of oneness. But becoming one.

So all of what we are becomes one, becomes absorbed with the breathing. There's no sense that anything is being left out, but there's no awareness of what's outside. So it's, you know, if you close your eyes, maybe laying on the couch and listening to some really nice music, and pretty soon the couch disappears, the room disappears, the time disappears, the future disappears, the activities of the day disappear. In a way, maybe even you disappear because you have become one with the music. You've kind of centered now in the music. The wholeness of experience now is defined by music.

But you're not narrowly focused on the music, zeroing in on it. There's a feeling that the mind is quite expansive. It's like the mind has become the music, become one with the music, but the music is broad and wide and everywhere in a certain way. So with *samādhi*, there is a becoming one, but you can't do that with tension. It has to be very soft. So it's almost like a feather that slowly lands on the ground and then is centered on the ground there, becomes one with the ground maybe. I don't know what feathers are thinking about, but becoming just there.

So that kind of more like gently settling in and very light feeling. And so to find a way to be with breathing, to be with the sensations, and becoming one with it, becoming simple with it, becoming whole just with this experience of breathing. And so these five mental factors all work together. They're all there, and they're kind of part of the whole. So at this point in the first *jhāna*, there is a kind of activity going on. We are still engaged in doing some kind of practice.

But the way we engage, it almost feels like we can enjoy it more. So this applied attention, connecting attention. Yes, we're here. Ah, connect. And then sustaining. I sometimes liken it to getting a massage where the masseuse puts their hand, and it feels so good to have the hand touch us because we know what's going to come is a kneading.

And so the kneading, or maybe it's more like the rhythm of kneading and letting go, squeezing and letting go of the massage. So there's this kind of rhythm of making a connection fully with the breathing and then sustaining it, riding it, feeling it. And so the mind is gently involved with this. There's a little bit of intentionality, a little bit of participation. But the sense of participation is just a delight. It's so good to do this.

Maybe it's like being really thirsty on a hot day and then drinking cool, refreshing water. It just feels so good to take those sips and the gulps and have it, you feel, ah, this is good, this is good. Each sip feels good in new ways, like the rhythm, ah. And so that speaks to this applied and sustained attention is related to some of the sense of well-being that can arise.

And I'll talk more about that tomorrow. But there's a sense of the pleasure, the joy, the delight that comes almost as if it's like the rhythm of massaging and applied attention and sustained attention is almost like blowing on a gentle flame, keeping it going, keeping it going.

And so it's not work. It's not like we have an agenda. It's not like we're trying to make something happen. Ideally, it's just really good for its own sake. And so as we go deeper into these deep absorptions, it's very important, the more we go into it, to not have tried to make anything happen and do something and try to do better. But it's more like just really enjoying what's here now. Just to be content with that. And that allows for a deeper settling that we'll see.

So there's five factors then. The first four is connecting attention and then sustaining. Then two forms of well-being, a joy and a happiness. And I'll talk more about these tomorrow. And then today the emphasis is on this *ekaggatā*, this one-pointedness, a becoming one, this unification, which is a simplification where we allow the mind to become simpler and simpler, unconcerned about anything but just this process of the *samādhi* itself.

And we might be very aware that there's a field of openness, field of goodness, field of joy. And we're just allowing everything to be there. Everything there mutually supportive of this process of being content just to be with the breathing. Just the simplicity of just breathing in and breathing out. Nothing else needs to happen. And in some ways the world disappears. Like on the couch listening to music, your cushion disappears, the room disappears, yesterday disappears, tomorrow disappears. Maybe even you disappear in just simply staying there with the breathing.

So you might see as you go through the day today, if there are certain activities you do that lend itself to this kind of becoming one with the activity. So it could be something like washing dishes or putting the dishes away in a way that, or cleaning the kitchen floor or folding the laundry or chopping vegetables or making your bed or, you know, putting your clothes very nicely away in a drawer, where you just give yourself over to that activity, not to get it done quickly to move on to more important things, but that this is the place to become one with this activity.

And often that means that somehow we do it with care. We do it so it feels really nice. It looks like folding it in a neat kind of nice way, the T-shirt before you put it in the drawer, is not because we're fastidious, but because that's what *samādhi* does, to be fully involved with what we do, is to do things in a way that are harmonious, beautiful, pleasant, enjoyable. And see in the course of the day whether you can begin experiencing some of the benefits

of *samādhi* in being absorbed in what you do. And probably your heart will love it, if you give yourself more chances through the day to become one, whole, unified, one-pointedly absorbed in what you're actually doing in the moment.

So, thank you very much, and we'll continue. Thank you.

Samadhi (44) Five Jhanic Factors

2025-03-27

So, welcome back to this ongoing series on *samādhi*, and we're now this week covering the first *jhāna*, the first level of absorptive, immersive meditation. One of the great aspects of this stage of meditation, this area of meditation, is that we're allowed to give ourselves over to being happy. We're allowed the ability to trust joy and well-being; it's okay to give ourselves to it. And one of the reasons—there's a number of reasons—why it's okay. More than okay, it's actually beneficial and a very important part of the Buddhist path. One is that the happier you can be in a genuine, peaceful, meaningful way, the more you know that this is a possibility for others.

And the more you can support others and see people's potential for well-being, the more I think it inspires care and love for others. Perhaps also it's a gift we bring others. Our happiness is a gift. It's also a gift to ourselves because there's something about a peaceful, healthy happiness that's embodied and present that helps the mind get organized, helps the mind become whole or be fully here, be immersed in this experience. And what immersed means in part, it means we're not distracted, we're not divided, we're not fragmented. We're not caught in any attachments or clinging.

This full embodied happiness, there's a movement in it to spread out through our whole being and bump up against the places where we're restricted, where we're tight, where we're holding, where we're afraid. It's a loving happiness that can gently kind of touch the places that are hard for us, hold them, care for them, accompany them so that we're not over-identified with our challenges, with our pains, our emotional difficulties. We don't over-identify, so we're subtly reinforcing them or, you know, picking the scab in a sense, but we're loving them. We're caring for them. We're offering them something profound: nourishment of attention and care that comes in the form of well-being and trust and confidence, and allows us to then continue on the path of being settled.

So, in the teachings of the *jhānas*, it's quite common to provide a listing of what *jhānic* factors are present in each of the four *jhānas*. In the first *jhāna*, there's five factors. Then as we go along into the deeper *jhānas*, certain ones of these factors fall away, and so there's a shorter list then. Sometimes the ways that these *jhānas* are taught is that there's a kind of quantum steps of letting go, of deepening, of releasing as we go through this. What gets released is what's more coarse, what has more energy and more activation to it. So that we let go of

those so that we can drop into the more subtle factors that are much more sublime and more peaceful.

There's a movement from coarser to more refined, from more activated or energetic to less and less, to more and more peaceful and quiet. Some people emphasize these stages as being the four stages: the first, second, third, and fourth *jhāna*. There can definitely be a feeling of kind of taking a big step, a quantum kind of sudden dropping, going further, opening further. But it doesn't have to be that way. Sometimes there's an overemphasis and attachment and expectation and drive to go from one to the other. If instead what we do is we don't focus so much on the stages as being these, you know, reified kind of states that we go into, I find it sometimes much more useful to just learn to recognize the primary factors that characterize the deepening of practice.

So these five first *jhānic* factors are useful to recognize. So I'll go through them. There is the initial application of attention. There's a sustained attention. It means placing our attention someplace and keeping it there for a while, then doing it again, like a massage or kneading dough. Then there's joy.

And I'll talk a little more about joy tomorrow because it's such an important part of the beginning stage here. But there's joy and rapture. The fourth factor is happiness, *sukha*. Some people will call it bliss. Some people will call it, because it's kind of deeply embodied. Some people call it even pleasure. But that doesn't quite give it justice because it's so sublime, so satisfying, such a contentment that comes with it that I prefer to use the word happiness. Then there's becoming one, the unification, the one-pointedness that I talked about yesterday.

So these are the initial application of attention, the sustained attention, joy, happiness, and becoming one. These are the five that are at play. It's nice to recognize them. The one that seems most important at this stage is they're kind of in order. Initially, we need some kind of subtle way, intentionality, subtle continuation of some gentle effort to stay present. We're pretty much locked in.

We're pretty much not going anywhere. It feels like the mind's not going to wander off. There's no discursive thinking. It's very peaceful. But there still needs to be a little bit of kind of staying here, stay here, be here. Yes, I like the word yes, yes, with this kneading of our attention into this present moment.

So it's very subtle, very slight, but it's kind of stay here, stay here. And there can start being

this joy. The joy, compared to happiness, is said to be, even though it's going to be a lot of manifestation of joyful energies in the body—tingling, thrill—it is understood to be more of a mental activity. The mind is a little bit excited, a little bit delighted. Like when I say, yes, this is good, it's a little bit more that yes in the mind than it is to be as deep contentment, that the mind is hardly involved. It's almost like the body, the breath is involved in saying, ah, this exhale, ah. The happiness is that deep place of ah.

So the joy is a little bit like a yes. But whatever this is, both of them are present. So it's not that important at the moment to distinguish them initially. But the instruction the Buddha gives when this joy and happiness arises from really being in the moment, in the flow of the present moment, is to relax with it, open with it, let it pervade, suffuse, and spread. The Buddha uses a series of words like this: spread through the body.

There's a tendency in the body to be, through body and mind, to hold things in check, to hold things in place. There's tension in our body. There's tension in our mind. There's attachment to what's happening. There's many ways in which we bound things up to keep it limited. The opportunity here is to soften the body, soften the attention, open to a receptivity in the body and mind.

As we do this blowing on the fire, as we do this kneading of the dough, as we do this yes, it's almost like, sometimes I've thought of it as ironing out the wrinkles on a sheet of paper, just kind of spreading it out, spreading it out until the sheet is completely flat with no wrinkles at all. Sometimes it's just more like a gentle heater that's heating up from inside and spreading out in all directions. Some people like the image of light. There's a light that's spreading, a golden light that's spreading through the body and beyond. Some people are much more physically oriented. It's actually the physical sensations of that joy, the physical warmth, glow, tingling, vibration of it, that pleasure of it that begins to flow outwards.

The pleasure is actually quite useful as an object at this point. We're letting that pleasure spread and spread and spread. So it's not kept bounded. It's almost like a letting go around it or with it. So there's nothing holding it from spreading out beyond us, beyond the edges of our body. Some people will just focus on the pleasure itself, like become one with that pleasure. I prefer to have the pleasure and the breath be coterminous.

The pleasure, the well-being, the joy, to be intimately associated with the breathing. Almost like the pleasure, the joy, and the breathing are holding hands, or they have become one. And so this wonderful rhythm of breathing is what supports the spreading, the letting go, the opening of that well-being through everywhere. So this can't of course be done too easily or

just sit down, plop down, and do this. This becomes the instruction when we finally arrive in the present moment, we feel like, oh, now I'm really here, this is good. And that's, you know, as I've said a number of times now, don't expect that often.

What you'd expect often is that you're always a beginner, and that is incredibly profound—to always be a beginner and be content to practice with how you are at any given time. But if you do practice regularly every day, every day that slowly the tendency to go into deeper meditation becomes easier and easier. There'll still be ups and downs through the days and weeks depending on what's happening in your life, but you're predisposing yourself to be able to go further and further over time. And for this *samādhi* series, as I've said, this is a time in the series where I want to encourage you again to consider meditating more, maybe twice a day—I mean, once with this YouTube offering, maybe one time on your own. Or if you really need support, would like to support, you can listen to the guided meditation again a second time. But really kind of make this more part of your life.

As you go through your daily life today, look again for the pleasure, look for the times of well-being. For most people, there's a lot more pleasure, a lot more things that are joyful that are available to us than we avail ourselves of, that we take time to experience. The weather, it's springtime here in the northern hemisphere, maybe there's delightful colors of green or flowers or new life being born, or maybe there's a delightful animal running around that brings you a lot of pleasure. You see someone smiling. Whatever it might be, the small pleasures of life, take time to feel those. Your ability to let go and feel the small pleasures might support you to feel those pleasures in meditation as well. May you be happy. Thank you.

Samadhi (45) Spreading The Joy

2025-03-28

So, good morning everyone, and good day, welcome. Welcome to this talk. This is the fifth talk on the first *jhāna*, and continuing talk on a wider series on the *samādhi*. And *samādhi*, as I've often said, is a state of being. It's not a particular mental activity of being concentrated or hyper-focused. And so it's a state of being that we enter into.

As such, it's a radically different way of experiencing ourselves than usual. We're always in some state, and even the expression in English, "that person's, boy, is that a person in a state," has usually meant that they're kind of, something's really unusual about them or odd about them. But we're always in some kind of state. Unfortunately, we take some of the states we're in as being normal and ordinary. That doesn't just how it is. But often we're fragmented, we're stressed, we're de-stressed, we're preoccupied, we're caught in things, and that feels normal.

There are certain attitudes or even emotions which persist that can feel like this is just life as it should be because that's what we're used to. But when we let go, when we let things fall away, all the extra, all the unnecessary activity of mind, even unnecessary activity of heart, even unnecessary activities of the body, and let all that fall away in a, at least metaphorically, upright position, stance, way of being, what we're left with can be a state of well-being, a state of confidence, a state of, it's enough just to be alive. There's no tendency to want to judge it or interpret it as being something is wrong or inadequate. It just makes things become better and better. It just feels good to be alive, good to be here.

And it's a state of well-being. So that's one of my definitions of *samādhi*, is a profound state of well-being in which we feel immersed. And so the first *jhāna* represents a very particular kind of *samādhi*. There's other many forms of *samādhi*, of immersions, but the particular one that is very, very significant and powerful and can be a game-changer for some people. In the ancient Buddhist tradition, the Buddha said that once a person is in the first *jhāna*, in that sense of well-being and peace and letting go of so many attachments, that it's kind of the first taste of what it's like to be awakened, to be free.

Some people might even confuse it with full liberation, Buddhist liberation, because it's so special and so nice. But it gives us a first taste. It can be quite inspiring. Oh, this is possible. It's possible to have this. Who would have known that such a thorough feeling of well-being,

that feels like a homecoming were possible.

There are plenty of people who will say, have said, that this is not possible to have this level of *samādhi* and well-being. But there is. It is definitely possible. So in this first *jhāna*, the state is one that's often characterized by the five *jhānic* factors that I talked about yesterday. And so there are the initial application of mind, the sustained application of mind, of attention. There is joy, my translation of the Pāli word *pīti*, P-I-T-I.

And there is happiness, my translation of the Pāli word *sukha*, S-U-K-H-A. And then there is said to be some overall state, the state of absorption, of immersion, that characterizes, I'm calling it becoming one, sometimes called one-pointedness, sometimes called unification. And so those all kind of come together. In the first *jhāna*, there's various strengths by which it can occur. It can be very mild, and so mild that the difference between the approach state and the *jhāna* is not so clear. It kind of, we slide back and forth between them even.

But other times it's quite strong, and it's very clear that this is, you know, now we're in a new territory. And the degree of strength that it has has a lot to do with the degree of joy, the strength of the *pīti*. And there can be a range of strengths to it. In the classic teachings, there's five degrees or ways that *pīti*, this joy, can be experienced. I find it kind of inspiring to hear this list of all the possible ways. You don't have to have them all, but sometimes it's nice to know that these are in the range.

Stronger forms of it, people can get sometimes afraid of it or scared, like, wow, this is intense. So the first one is minor. So it's just maybe subtle or minor. It's not like something that's so dramatically different than what a joy that one has in daily life. Another one is momentary, that it just seems like it sparkles. It comes and goes, maybe with every breath.

It comes and disappears, comes and disappears. It's just there for a moment. It kind of sparkles or sparks someplace. Then there is something called showering. And this is where it feels like there's a shower of water pouring through us in some way, a flow pouring through us, moving through us. It's a stream that's moving through us.

It may be like sand going through an hourglass. We're at the thin edge of the hourglass. It just moves, flows, and flows. A stream's going. And that stream can be quite intense sometimes. It might go in different directions.

It might go up the spine, up the head. It might go down into the feet. Different things. And sometimes when it gets too intense, the sense of the stream, that sometimes people find it helpful to relax the body even more so the stream becomes softer and wider. Sometimes

people even kind of redirect it so it's more grounding, like down the feet. And then there is something called uplifting joy.

And this is quite inspiring. And this is kind of almost like people feel they get very light sometimes. They feel like they're being lifted up. And sometimes, actually, the posture will change because this lifting up sometimes straightens out the spine. And it's like everything's alert and present. But, you know, it can feel like we're lifted off the cushion even because everything's so light and inspiring.

And it's kind of, you know, a wonderful experience. And then there's pervading. The showering sometimes can be quite intense. I've had the experience of it feeling like huge cascading waves. It's just kind of like you could feel the wave coming and then crashing down. And sometimes I've had it after meditation, and when it happens, I have to stop what I'm doing.

Just kind of pause and wait for this wave to crest and break and pass. So there's all kinds of very unusual things that can happen with the intensity of it, mostly when people are in retreat. But the one that I like is this last one called Pervading. And this is the instruction the Buddha gives, is to let this well-being, this joy, spread. And that's the only instruction he gives, as I said yesterday, is to let it spread, let it be suffusive, almost like with every breath is a massage that spreads it further and further.

Every breath is like the wind, the air of the bellows, letting the fire get warmer and warmer. And let it spread so there's no bottlenecks for it. There's no place that gets contracted. There's no tension in the body in which the flow is blocked, which can cause a little bit of challenges for people. Just relax. And so it's a continual relaxation, continual opening, opening to the well-being.

Feel it fully. And that's kind of continued letting go, continued falling away. And that prepares a person for the second *jhāna*, which we'll talk about when I pick up again. And so it built into this. So what tends to happen when the first *jhāna* gets strong is that the joy factor can predominate, but the happiness factor is still there as well. And so these two together, they're kind of like a combination of joy and happiness that arise together, but it is possible to also distinguish them.

And the distinction is that the happiness is more, I like the word sublime. It's more calm. It's more settled. It's more content. Whereas the *pīti* has kind of, the mind is a little bit brightened and excited by it. With happiness, the mind actually quiets down even more.

There's a pervasive feeling of well-being, more than a pervasive feeling of inspiration or a

little bit of excited joy. So these are the five factors, and they can be very minor, and you don't have to be in *jhāna* to have these present. And there's an art to recognizing, even if they're here very subtle in an ordinary mind where you may be somewhat distracted, preoccupied, there's a way of discovering that these are already here in some way and you're allowed to feel it to support you to get absorbed, to get into the meditation, to let, for temporary, let your everyday concerns, preoccupations fall away.

And it's sometimes called the happiness that leads to more happiness, the joy that leads to more joy. It's to feel even the subtle feelings of calm or well-being that begins to come when you meditate. There's an art not to cling to it, not to try to make something happen, but to register and let it kind of be massaged or open to it and support you to let go of your everyday orientations, preoccupations, just to be here.

So next week I'll be back at the Retreat Center and IRC for a more private event we're doing down there. And then I'll be back the following week, and Matthew Bensilver will be coming next week, and I think that'll be quite refreshing to have him as an interlude. And then I'll be back, and then the following week we'll do the second *jhāna*. And the idea is to spend a week on the next three, so that you can have some sense of what these are about. And I thank you for attending and listening and practicing together, and I very much look forward to being back in about 10 days, 9-10 days. So, thank you, and...

Samadhi (46) Intro To Second Jhana

2025-04-07

So, hello and welcome to this continuation of our *samādhi* series. We've had a break for a week, and so I hope that meditation today was a little bit, kind of getting you a little bit more back into the flow of what we've been doing these last months. For the topic of this week, the focus will be on the second *jhāna*. When I was here, the last week I was here, I discussed the first *jhāna*. The second *jhāna* is kind of a deeper form of well-being, a deeper form of pleasure and joy and happiness. One of the characteristics of it is that it's a sense of well-being, joy and happiness, *pīti* and *sukha*, that's born of concentration, born of *samādhi*, and born of the state of meditation that comes.

In the first *jhāna*, the joy and the happiness that's there is born from seclusion, from being separated from the preoccupations, the concerns of our everyday life. Being separated, even more importantly, being separated from unwholesome thinking. To be caught up in the hindrances, for greed or ill will. To be caught up in kind of a rigid, dull mind, to be caught in restlessness and regrets, to be caught in doubt, is unwholesome. And so there's this delight and joy and happiness when we're no longer caught in the unwholesome, no longer caught up in the mind, the difficulties of the mind.

So part of what's fueling the first *jhāna* in a sense is *vitakka* and *vicāra*, two of the *jhānic* factors of this massage of applied attention and sustained attention. There is some intentionality. There is some giving ourselves over to the meditation in the first *jhāna*. And this joy, finally I'm here. Oh, it's so good to be present. I've been so distracted, so caught up in my mind and my thoughts and preoccupations. Ah, this is good.

But in order to stay there, there is a kind of gentle massage of applying and staying, applying and staying, massaging. In the second *jhāna*, the need to kind of keep applying and sustaining attention is no longer there. Certainly the applying, coming back and connecting again, connecting again, is no longer needed. Also, there's a little movement of the mind to stay, to ride, be here, that is a little bit of intentionality involved, also is not needed. Because now we're settled, we're kind of rooted here, we've arrived. Ah, and the mind is not going to wander off.

In the second *jhāna*, in that first *jhāna*, there can still be some thinking, mostly thinking about the meditation. The thinking is all wholesome. There's nothing unwholesome about it. It all

helps us to get connected and be in the practice. In the second *jhāna*, there's no real need for thinking anymore. The mind now has a lot of space, a lot of quiet.

Some thoughts might arise, but there's hardly anything to pull us away. We don't get caught in them or involved in them. There can be mostly a feeling of a lot of empty space, beautiful space, clarity in the mind. And so I want to read to you the classic description of the second *jhāna*.

With the stilling of applied and sustained attention, a practitioner enters and abides in the second *jhāna*, consisting of joy and happiness born of concentration, born of *samādhi*. With calm inner clarity and unity of mind, free of applied and sustained attention, free of thinking and examination, free of this kind of...

So now there's almost no thinking. And so it's characterized by an inner clarity. Sometimes the word that's translated as clarity is translated as assurance, sometimes as confidence. But one of the meanings of it can be clarity, the brightness. And for me, this represents the quiet of the mind. Thinking is just about stopped.

And so because there's so little thinking, that certainly no discursive thoughts anymore, no conversations within our mind, it's feeling like, oh, now awareness, the mind has a lot of space, a lot of clarity. Like the fog has lifted, the smog has gone away, and we can see across the vast terrain, see the mountains in the distance because of the clarity. And so this is what I said earlier, that one of the characteristics of the second *jhāna*, there's a real switch now, that now we're really here. We're settled. It feels like we've really arrived. We're not easily slipping off.

We don't need the... With the first *jhāna*, it's very hard to really feel established too. But there is a kind of intentionality of staying there. Stay here. Be here. Stay here. And ride along. Ride along. Be here.

With the first *jhāna*, this is where some people get in trouble. Because there's a little bit of intentionality involved, applied and sustained attention, that if there's, there could still be some striving, some pushing, some trying, kind of tightening down. And so people sometimes are pushing it a little bit. The joy and the happiness that can arise sometimes gets pumped up, or gets pumped up and gets to be too much, or gets pumped into some particular bottleneck in the body, and some energy can build up there too much. It has a lot to do with striving.

Striving itself is a tightening. Something gets tightened when we strive. And so the energy of the joy and the happiness somehow gets compressed or gets blocked or gets somehow interfered with. In the second *jhāna*, the joy and the happiness can get strong, and more likely it gets even stronger in the second than the first. But now, it's much less likely to go awry, much less likely to be too intense or too tight or too strainful, or get bottlenecked, or get kind of blocked or something. Because now there's the intentionality of staying there.

We're not pumping it up anymore. We're not blowing on the flame to let it become stronger, which is allowing things to be there. In fact, I'll talk more about this tomorrow, the metaphor or the simile for the second *jhāna* has to do with floating in a very peaceful, quiet, clear lake that is very comfortable and very clear. The water is somewhat still, but there is this gentle movement of an underground spring that refreshes us. So the feeling here is there's still some, when it's too intense in the first *jhāna*, there's a lot of movement almost of the joy and the *pīti*. In the second, there's still this movement, but it feels refreshing. It feels delightful. And it has no obstacles to it.

This idea that this underwater spring in the lake just has no obstacles as the refreshing water spreads through the body. So I'll talk more about this tomorrow. But one of the ways I want to emphasize here, that one of the lessons of this second *jhāna*, is to be able to start seeing clearly the difference between being really dipped into the pool of water, dipped into the *samādhi*, versus coming out of it into the thinking mind. And how discursive thought, conversational thinking, puts us sometimes as fascinating and pleasurable that some of those can be, there is a kind of disconnect with ourselves in that process, disconnect with the wholeness of who we are, the fullness of us that's embodied and present here.

Part of the movement towards this deeper settling of *samādhi* is to learn how to relax the thinking mind and trust this deeper place of well-being, of subtleness, of calmness in the body with the breathing. So that the thinking mind is not reinforcing some of the unwholesome tendencies of mind. The thinking mind is not repeating itself over and over again, same stories and ideas that keep us disconnected from the possibility of a deep kind of inner settledness, deep kind of place of being calm, deep place of just happy to be alive, happy to be present for this moment as it is, independent of the concerns about the world around us. It's not a turning away from the world in a resisting way or escaping way. It's a way of starting to cleanse ourselves deeply so that we can come back into the world in a much better space, much better way.

So we'll go through the different aspects of the second *jhāna* this week. I hope, I'm not expect-

ing you to be dipping into the second *jhāna*. Some of you might be familiar with it already. But some of the individual characteristics of the second *jhāna* can be present in even lighter states of meditation. Becoming familiar with them can give you a new orientation for ordinary meditation, because you can start feeling these qualities, characteristics, are present in a subtle way, in a way that maybe you ignored before. You never knew to pay attention to it. The more you start feeling these wholesome, beneficial qualities within, the more engaging it is to meditate and dip into this inner world of meditation. So thank you very much and I look forward to continuing tomorrow.

Samadhi (47) Calm And Inner Clarity

2025-04-08

So hello and welcome to the second talk on the second *jhāna*, the second absorption, the second state of deep *samādhi*, immersive *samādhi*. And it's a state where the word immersion is particularly apt, that we feel like we're immersed in a state of maybe of calm, clarity, and unity. So I'm going to read to you the standard description of this state from the ancient texts that I read yesterday. With a stilling of applied and sustained attention, a practitioner enters and abides in the second *jhāna*, consisting of joy and happiness born of *samādhi*. With inner clarity and unity of mind, free of initial and applied attention. The practitioner fills, pervades, saturates, and permeates this body with the joy and happiness born of *samādhi* so no part of the body is not touched.

So, one of the great delights of this kind of deep concentration is kind of like we have joy and happiness for no reason. Or to say it more accurately, that it's a joy and happiness that's born from the *samādhi*, not from external conditions. Not because wonderful things happen to us in the world, we get what we want, we get pleasant experiences in the world. But rather, it's something that's not dependent on the world being any particular way. But it is dependent on being deeply settled. And deeply settled here means, among other things, that there's a lot of calm, that there's a lot of unity, a lot of settledness, coming together just here.

We're not fragmented. We're not divided among ourselves. The feeling of being whole, and there's almost no thinking. And for many people, this would seem impossible because of how incessant thinking can be. But thinking is an activated state. That is, it's your friend, it's a very friendly relationship, and you certainly don't want to banish your thinking, or it's very unfortunate to have a negative relationship with your thinking.

It's with time, through this practice, you become friends with your thoughts, and your thoughts can be your friend. But it's also a time where you can relax deeply. For people who like to listen to music, it can be quite lovely to listen to music. Wonderful. And they can be even more special sometimes when the music stops. And there can be a deep sense of stillness, of calm, of peace, with the absence of the input.

And so much so that to have the music start again, even though it's wonderful music, just seems like there's too much input now. There's too much activity going on. And it was just better to be in this very simple, quiet, peaceful silence. So maybe you have better metaphors

for this than music. Walking. Some people, I like to walk a lot.

But also it's nice to stop walking and just sit and then not get up to walk again. It can be so content and happy just sitting and being. And so the same way we're thinking is that at some point thinking can get so quiet that it almost seems to disappear, or it does disappear, discursive thinking certainly stops. And in a sense, it's replaced by clarity, that awareness is still present when there's no thinking. Awareness is not dependent on thinking. And so the ability to sense, to feel, to be conscious, to be aware, is still there, but now it's not filled with thoughts.

And because thoughts are kind of like the smogs, thoughts are kind of like the waves on the ocean, and the sea, and the lake. And so when the waves stop, then the lake is clear. You can see to the bottom of the lake, perhaps. And it's so amazingly enjoyable sometimes to look into the water of a very still lake where the water is completely clear right down to the rocks below. So this beginning to appreciate the quieting of the mind, the stilling of the mind. And you can't do it easily and quickly if you're just coming off the busy life to meditate.

But as things get quieter, more settled in meditation, there comes a time where you kind of see you have a choice where you see that oh, I can leave the thoughts alone, I don't have to be involved in them, I can just let them fade away, I can trust the clarity, trust the calm, I trust the place where there is no thoughts, and this allows the calm to grow. And if you're still staying with something like the breathing, then there's this wonderful delight, this joy, this happiness from being really settled, calm, unified. The idea of becoming unified, in my mind, is kind of like all the different psychophysical systems inside of us are now working in harmony, flowing together. And that harmonious flow of our inner energy, inner sense of being, can come with it a tremendous sense of joy and happiness. But one that has a peacefulness and calm associated with it.

And so I want to read the metaphor, or the simile, that Buddha gives for the second *jhāna*.

It is like a lake that has water welling up from the depths, like an underground spring, underwater spring, which has a lake which has no water flowing in over the ground from the mountainside from the east, south, west, or north, and where the rain god does not occasionally supply it with water.

So this is a mountain lake, beautiful basin, and there's nothing coming in from the outside.

So, meaning that there's no stimulus coming.

So, in the second *jhāna*, we're not really involved with hearing sounds.
You kind of, that's, you could in a sense, but it's a loud sound maybe.
But you kind of, that's not the orientation.
And you're not oriented towards seeing.
You're not oriented towards smelling or tasting.
So there's not any input coming from the outside.
And the rain god doesn't rain into the lake.
And I understand that to mean that the rain god perhaps, if our thoughts are the rain,
that if the rain god floods us with thoughts, then we can drown in these thoughts that
we have.
But even the thought maker, the rain maker, is no longer creating thoughts to stimulate
us and to agitate us.
Those are also kind of coming from outside.
Certain way thoughts are kind of an external input on this deep sense of being in a lake,
immersed in a lake.

So, then, the cool, upwelling water. So cool in India, being a hot, very hot climate, is refreshing and wonderful and delightful. Maybe a cool lake in northern England where on a damp, foggy day doesn't feel very inviting for people kind of steeped in the English language. In India, they're steeped with Indic languages and the word cool is a very welcome word, a very inspiring word even. So the cool, upwelling water from this underground spring, underwater spring, would fill, pervade, saturate, and permeate the lake with cool water so no part of the entire lake would not be touched with the water.

So also a practitioner fills, pervades, saturates, and permeates this body with a joy and happiness born of concentration, born of *samādhi*, so that no part of the body is not touched. So here there's a feeling of this vast kind of clarity of being in a lake, kind of this wonderful kind of pool of *samādhi*, pool of goodness, pool of calm, pool of clarity, pool of unity, that is completely kind of, feels like it has no boundaries, but also feels completely kind of contained in itself without any input come from the outside. And there's a good energy coming. There's a sense of joy or delight or happiness, well-being that is flowing or tingling or radiating through the body. And that is what the clarity, the calm, is making room for. Almost like allow the room for it and allow that calm, that joy, and that happiness.

Sometimes it feels stronger. It can feel like rapture, ecstasy. Allow it to kind of fill the whole body, fill everything, so no part of your body is not touched by those good feelings, by that pleasure. So the main point I'm trying to make today is that when the time is right, to let

the thinking mind become quiet. Let it become so quiet and still that you feel the remaining clarity, the remaining spaciousness and calm that the reduction of thinking provides. And then that clarity and that calm then creates more space for the joy and happiness, the sense of goodness, the sense of well-being, the sense of contentment, the sense of coziness, the sense of sweetness, the sense of beauty that can kind of well up from deep inner well.

So the welling up of joy and happiness letting it spread through the body. So this hopefully gives you a feeling, a sense for the second *jhāna*. And even if you don't experience this in meditation, maybe this kind of talk is maybe a little bit evocative, like poetry might be, that maybe touches something inspiring for you. So thank you. And we'll continue tomorrow.

Samadhi (48) Wholeness

2025-04-09

So, welcome to this third talk on the second jhāna. It takes a lot of settledness. It takes a lot of capacity to be at ease, to let go of so much of our preoccupations and agitation. It takes so much healing and settling to come into the wholeness that allows for the second jhāna. But one of the things that can get in the way of it is a mistrust of it. Somehow a feeling that if we drop into these deep states of meditation, that it's a betrayal of the world around us.

We won't be able to take care of this world, others. Somehow we won't be able to take care of ourselves. And sometimes what happens is that people are quick to judge these deep meditation states in a particular way. And that is they judge them as if this is the true way of being. Like once I go into this, I have to be this way all the time. That somehow I tap into this, I won't be able to function in my ordinary life.

And so there's a resistance, there's a reluctance. There's a fear that I won't be able to be an acceptable person or a caring person or a responsible person. And this is, you know, if that's the case, it's a little unfortunate. But what it helps to understand is that these are temporary states that are cleansing, that clean us, that provide us a sense of deep, sense of wholeness, satisfaction, peace, well-being. And it isn't that we come back into the world with all the qualities, characteristics of these deep states. But we do come back refreshed.

We do come back more connected, more grounded, more calm. We do come back more able to connect to people and to our responsibilities in a wise way, in a good way, rather than being anxious, rather than being ambitious or full of our preoccupations. And so it's not a betrayal of life to go into these deep states. Any bit more than it's a betrayal of life to, you know, sit down to have a glass of water when you're thirsty. When you're just drinking water, you are, you know, you're not talking, you're not caring for someone else, you're not doing other things for people, you're not taking care of your worldly responsibilities. You're allowed to sit there and just drink your water.

And doing so makes you so much better able to engage in the world in a good way. You know, if you're parched, you know, things don't go so well. So to be able to trust these processes. And when people finally come into the second jhāna, there's a kind of confidence and trust in it. Partly because it just feels so right, so good, and there's so little required from us. In the first jhāna, there's still something required from us, this ongoing movement of applying and

sustaining the attention, the needing, the massaging of attention and our experience and the breathing.

Just be there, come back, stay. But in the second *jhāna*, those kind of intentional efforts to be and stay, to come back and stay here, it comes to a rest. And so if the analogy of the scooter makes sense for you that I've used a few times, in flat ground, you might need to push on the scooter every once in a while to keep the momentum going on a push scooter. But if it's a little bit of a slope you're going down, maybe you don't have to kick off so often. But when the slope gets a little bit steeper, you don't have to push off anymore. Now you can just rest and keep yourself centered, keep yourself focused on staying going down the hill.

But the legs don't have to work. The legs can rest and both legs can be on the platform of the scooter. So in the second *jhāna*, we're kind of like in. Now we don't have to make any effort anymore. And so there's a deep feeling of, ah, I'm arrived. I'm at rest. I'm just here.

And one of the characteristics of this is a sense of unity or unification or wholeness. There's a variety of words that come into play with *samādhi* that can mean unification. Some people will say that even the word *samādhi* means to gather together, to unify. *Ekaggatā*, a word that's sometimes translated as one-pointedness, also can mean coming into one. And then this *ekodi* also has the word *eka* in it, meaning one. Many years ago I read that it meant something like the *odi*, the *ekodi*, can mean to weave.

I love the idea of weaving together, weaving into one, into a whole. And sometimes when I've meditated, I've imagined that the breathing is like the warp and weft of a weaving. And sometimes just gently with the weft. I guess the weft is what puts to go the warp, I think. I used to weave, but that was so long ago, 50 years ago. And so I've imagined kind of moving through the strings of the warp and weaving things together with the breath.

And that's kept me nicely engaged. Because sometimes a little bit of an image, a little bit of an imagination of what adds a little bit of kind of engagement or interest helps me sometimes to get concentrated. And then at some point I let go of the imagination because it's no longer needed for that. So weaving together into a whole. And so this quality of wholeness. I love the word wholeness more than unity or unification, because just somehow unity or unification seems a little bit more complicated in my mind.

But wholeness just seems to hold everything. It's like, you know, there's a, it's all things included in a harmonious way. It's all things have a space. Everything, no outside. And one of the things I've come to appreciate as being, for me, one of the most sacred things is the

awareness that is whole, the awareness that has no outside. There's nothing which is intentionally excluded or treated as unacceptable in the wholeness of awareness.

And this inclusion of everything, the good, bad, and the ugly, is not a condoning or approval of anything, except the idea that it's possible to hold everything in a tranquil, clear, and unified heart-mind. And in doing so, we're not making the situation worse. From the point of view of deep meditation, to start living in the world where there's an object and a subject, that thought is unacceptable. I don't like that thought. That thought has to go. Even like I have to let go of that thought.

All that, the mind is activated. Oddly enough, it's work for the mind to have those thoughts. In ordinary minds, it doesn't feel like work. It just seems like what's happened. But in deep meditation, we start seeing that kind of activity is a work or a strain. It has a kind of coercedness to it. It's kind of unsatisfying for the mind to be involved in kind of this making a subject and object distinction.

There's something out there. And the alternative is everything becomes subject, or everything becomes, some people would say everything becomes object and there's no subject. But maybe these two things comes to the same. And so it allows the mind to become quieter and more settled, all this. So there are these five different characteristics that are primary in the second jhāna. There is a calm.

And now this calm is a calm that has no boundaries, no edges. It feels a little bit more like it's the atmosphere. There is a clarity. The heart's clear. There's a clarity within which all things are occurring. And there is inner clarity, it's called.

And then there's a oneness or a wholeness or a unity that is experienced with it all, without the subject-object distinction. Those are the first three. And then the last two, which we'll talk about a little bit more tomorrow, is the joy and happiness born from concentration. So even though there's not exactly a subject-object, there's still, in a way, please forgive me, there's the object of concentration. There's the center. There's a place where the whole is centered on.

And if it's the breathing which is the object, then that's the place where we're kind of, the scooter is, you're happily rolling down the slope. And there's a kind of a thrill and a happiness, contentment, a sense of happiness, goodness, with being on that slope, being in that space, being with the breathing at the center of all things. And so I know I'm contradicting myself with this word object, but I don't know how else to talk about it in this state that there's all

subject and the heart of the subject is the center of the meditation, the centering place of the meditation. In this case, the offerings mostly these days is the breathing itself. But then with that could come this joy and happiness, *pīti* and *sukha*, sometimes rapture and bliss that can come on. And that also, that is part of this wholeness.

It also kind of saturates everything. But it has a sense of movement to it, especially the *pīti*, especially the thrill or the joy. It has a cleansing sense of movement or a showering through us or flowing through us or tingling or vibrating or sparking. Or it can feel like waves moving through us in a nice way. And maybe with every breath there's kind of a wave, there's kind of a rhythm of this great pleasure that can be there. And so those are the five kind of qualities that are mainly there and that are highlighted in the second jhāna.

So there's calm, clarity, unity, joy, and happiness. And that can't be too bad. And not only is it not too bad, it's actually quite healing. It provides a reconditioning to us that many of us are conditioned growing up and through life with a lot of challenges. And this is a very wholesome conditioning that now can really shift things in a very, very deep way, more than a lot of other ways that we try to change ourselves.

So to drop into this calm, clarity, unity, joy, and happiness, and allow it to help us grow. So thank you. And this afternoon I'm driving up to the Spirit Rock Meditation Center up in the countryside north of here. And I will continue with the YouTube this 7 a.m. from up there. So you'll see me sitting in a different place, hopefully outside. And that will be through next Wednesday.

And so I look forward to being with you from this wonderful meditation center at Spirit Rock. Thank you. Thank you.

Samadhi (49) Spreading Joy And Happiness

2025-04-10

So, welcome to this next talk on the *Samādhi* series, the fourth talk on the fourth *jhāna*. And some people call *jhāna*, just call it *jhāna*. Some people call it absorptions. Some people call it immersions. Some people have in the past, many years ago, they used to call it trances. They didn't quite know what it was.

And there are states of wholeness, of unification, where we're not divided with ourselves. We're not distracted or our attention is not pulled in different directions. And it's a pleasure to come together and have all of us here, all of ourselves, engaged in the same thing at the same time. And to really get into it, to really be absorbed in it and give ourselves over to it, there's a joy that comes. I think human beings, and I think animals too, can have, there's a joy of certain kind of, certain types of completely giving ourselves over to something that's really enjoyable and pleasant.

And there's a kind of more than just pleasure, there's a kind of happiness and delight and thrill of kind of giving ourselves over to it, or losing ourselves, not losing ourselves, but kind of fully giving ourselves over to something. And I think I told this story sometime recently, but that many years ago I came out of, out of the street, it was raining, and there was a car across the street where there was a little bird that was sliding down the windshield of the car, the wet windshield in the rain, and then flying up to the top of the windshield and sliding down again, over and over again, around and around. And I could only think that this bird was enjoying itself, was absorbed in the delight of sliding. So to give ourselves over, maybe a little bit like the delight of children, fully giving themselves over to some activity that's so much fun.

So the quality of the second *jhāna* has to do with coming into a form of full absorption, full engagement in what we're doing without any stress. When there's a vast calm, settledness, stability. When there's a vast clarity. Some people call it clarity. And some people are going to say, use the word assurance for the Pāli word, the ancient Buddhist word.

So there's a tremendous sense of assurance, of confidence, or safety. This is really a good way to be. And a unification of all of us involved. And then the art of this is to begin appreciating the joy and the happiness that's there. Some people call it even rapture because it can be quite strong. And some people call it bliss, rapture and bliss, because it's qualitatively so

much greater sometimes than ordinary happiness and joy.

And here is a situation you ought to give yourself over to it, you're allowed to make room for it and feel it and enjoy it. And there's an art in deep meditation to begin not holding on to the joy, not being attached to it, but to make room for it with the breathing, perhaps massaging it more, allowing it to flow. And mostly in the second *jhāna*, I think of this as just making more room, letting it flow, feeling the current of it, feeling the hum, feeling the flow of these good feelings that can be there. And not making a lot of them, not getting excited, staying with the calm but with the calm and the clarity allowing them to live, allowing them to flow. That this is where the food of awareness, this is what attention supports: the growing of joy, the growing of happiness.

And now the classic instructions are to let it pervade, suffuse, permeate, spread throughout the body. And so sometimes it's actually kind of nice to kind of feel like you're kind of blowing it or supporting it to flow into the arms and the hands, into the legs, into the full torso. And at times when there doesn't seem to be any boundaries to the body, to just feel like it's just kind of radiating in all directions, front and back and everything. And so I know that this kind of joy I'm talking about is far from our ordinary experience. And there's a lot of challenges that we have in our lives and challenges with our external lives, challenges with our own minds and hearts.

And it can be a little bit grating or discouraging to hear these descriptions of this kind of pervasive joy and happiness. But it also can be inspiring that this is possible for human beings. We can put aside all our ordinary concerns and get refreshed, get renewed, get settled. So that eventually we can do a deeper work of insight, a deeper work of really seeing clearly to the depths of our hearts where suffering is and where freedom is. And that's the overall purpose for this joy and happiness, not just for this meditative joy and happiness for its own sake.

And some people get a little bit sidetracked or quite sidetracked by it, by just getting addicted to it and just want to have this over and over again. But it's important to see it as a stepping stone to eventually having very deep insight. There's a purification, there's a clarification that goes on with this. There's a healing that goes on by allowing ourselves to feel this kind of joy and happiness. And it's good to take, if one drops into these kind of *jhāna* states, it's good to take one's time with it.

Ordinarily, people will often get quite excited by these wonderful states, and they pop right out. They start thinking how wonderful it is, and they get distracted almost by their excite-

ment. But the idea is to become familiar with them. Don't be in a hurry to go through them. Don't be in a hurry to strengthen them. But gently get to know them, feel them, become familiar with them.

And let the joy and the happiness nourish you, support you, guide you, feel it well. This is a time in life, in these states, when this joy and happiness is there. You have complete permission in meditation to experience up to the point of ecstasy, to experience the joy, the happiness. And maybe you can support that process by making a half smile. Or you can maybe feel that the joy and happiness wants a half smile. And you can smile with the practice as you do it.

And then if you go into these kind of deeper states, the well-being, then you can... It's valuable to come out of these meditations slowly. Don't do... Try not to be in a situation where you have to pop out and get to work or do something quickly. But come out slowly. And so you stay closely connected as if you're allowing something to still work you. You're receiving the goodness of it, the blessings of it, somehow. You're reconditioning yourself in a deep way.

Maybe you get up and start doing simple things. In the morning, maybe you can get up and make breakfast in a simple, relaxed way. That kind of goes along with the general tenor, the general feeling of how it felt in the meditation. And if you don't feel this kind of deep happiness and joy, that's fine. Mostly meditators don't feel it, but from time to time they come. And I'm hoping that you'll have a greater appreciation and readiness to practice with it through these teachings here.

So thank you very much and I'll be here tomorrow again at Spirit Rock next week, the first three days. So probably I'll be doing it from this place here with the grasslands behind me. And with a little bit of luck, we'll have sun one day, one morning, and maybe the wildflowers will start coming out during this week. So thank you, and I look forward to tomorrow morning. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Samadhi (50) Opening To Joy And Happiness

2025-04-11

So, welcome to our next talk on *samādhi*, on the last talk on the second *jhāna*. Most people who experience the second *jhāna* feel that it's much more satisfying than the first *jhāna*. There is maybe a little bit of evaluation in the mind with the first *jhāna*, kind of a sense of relief of not being caught in the thinking mind, the desiring mind, the aversive mind anymore. And so there's an ability to kind of just be in the experience itself in a deeper way. It's not in reference to what we've left behind and how good it is to no longer be caught up in the hindrances. And so the thinking mind, the active mind, becomes quieter and quieter, more peaceful, more open.

There is virtually no thinking. One of the ways to kind of move into this or enter into it is to begin appreciating the difference between ordinary thinking, conversational thinking, commentarial thinking, thinking with words or images, and begin appreciating that there are non-verbal ways of knowing. We can know without there needing to be thoughts that tell us so. When we get into these deeper states of *samādhi*, there is a kind of a knowing. There is a deeper place inside that maybe even guides us a little bit, because it knows. Stay here, enter here, be present, and this is good.

But there's the ordinary verbally thinking or vision-making kind of thinking that goes on for some people. That has gotten quiet. It's taken a wonderful, delightful vacation. Finally, it can rest. But still, there can be a deeper knowing that somehow keeps us connected here in the present moment, that kind of non-verbal knowing. It's that kind of knowing that recognizes the joy, the happiness that characterizes the second *jhāna*.

So the *pīti*, the Pāli word, and *sukha*, the Pāli word, that I translate as joy and happiness. Other people who practice *jhānas*, sometimes they're not happy with me using the word joy and happiness because they feel like generally that's too modest, that it should be something more like rapture and bliss. But as we get into this deeper, especially in the second *jhāna*, it becomes important to open to the joy and the happiness when it's there. The joy and happiness of being fully engaged, fully involved, with no distractions, with the practice itself. It's such a wholesome feeling. Because there's such a rightness being here and now.

They feel so complete, like this is good, this feels more deeply satisfying than a lot of things that people can experience in life. So there are these two things, joy and happiness. As this

second *jhāna* matures—matures means we become more familiar with it—the joy and happiness spreads, it becomes more fully embodied, we open to it more, that we start seeing the distinction, the difference between the joy and happiness. Until this point, we talk about joy and happiness, but maybe we don't really see, they just kind of mingle together. There's no real difference between them. But as everything gets quieter and calmer, and the thinking mind becomes even quieter and softer, and the excitement of, very subtle, but excitement of entering into these states begins to abate, we can start seeing the difference between the joy and the happiness.

One of the common ways to see it is that the joy is a little bit more mental, whereas the happiness is a little bit more physical. Now, the physical sensations of the joy can be quite strong, so people are a little bit confused to hear that it's more of the mind than it is of the body. But there's a kind of mental excitement. You start feeling there's a mental thrill, a mental kind of uplift, energy, excitement. Ah, this is good. Oh, yes. Not that we say those words to ourselves, but there's a little bit of energy like that.

That energy is a higher level of activity, of excitement, than the happiness. The happiness is almost like a very deep contentment in the body. It's a very deep sense of well-being, that the mental excitement or the mental activation of joy is no longer there. With the mental activation of joy, the sensations in the body tend to be a little bit more stronger, more active, sometimes quite active, or strong, like big waves of bliss that kind of wash over us. Sometimes it feels like a lot of movement. But with the happiness, the movement, it feels like a gentle hum or a vibration or warmth, or it might still feel like there's a flow, but the flow feels very harmonious within us.

There isn't any of the subtle, maybe, maybe not so subtle, excitement of the joy. As the second *jhāna* matures, being able to distinguish these two becomes very useful in terms of moving further into the third *jhāna*, which I'll discuss next week. Learning to feel the distinction or the difference between joy and happiness becomes part of the task as we go deeper into this meditation, into *jhānas*. But either way, don't be in a hurry. It's best that the *jhāna* is never in a hurry. Take all the time in the world to become familiar, to feel it, to look around, to spread whatever goodness there is, to enter into, to abide.

The study of abiding means we're not in a hurry, and opening, and opening so that, and the quote from the classic traditional teachings, so that the practitioner feels, pervades, saturates, and permeates this body with the joy and happiness born of concentration, so no part of the body is not touched.

And this expression, this body, is not referring to the ordinary physical body we might think about, but rather the body that we experience in meditation itself.

In a kind of way, the experience we have of our body is very much conditioned by our mind.

Except when the physical pain in the body is quite intense, we would acknowledge that that was not mind-made.

But so many of the sensations in our body have a very strong conditioning, very strongly conditioned by the quality, the characteristics of our mind.

Our posture shifts and changes with the moods of our minds, the preoccupations, the negativity bias we have sometimes brings us into parts of our body where we're reacting to them or pushing them away or aversion.

Certain emotions and attitudes cause a lot of tension in the body.

And so as we meditate, and the mind becomes softer, the mind becomes more relaxed, no longer preoccupied, no longer caught in things, then the body responds accordingly.

And you start feeling a very different feeling in the body.

And it's almost like we have two different bodies.

We have the body in ordinary life, and we have the body, the *samādhi* body, that kind of glows in this luminous light that's open.

It has a very different sensation.

So to appreciate, to enter into this kind of different body, even when just the feelings of it are just beginning to happen, and enter into it, help it support you to be willing to put down, put to rest the ordinary thinking mind. Enter into the state, the feelings, the sensations. Enter. Abide. Rest in it. Resting in it so it can kind of spread, so you can appreciate it, you can be nourished by it, you can let it register in a deep way, let it recondition you in a nice way, and then open to the goodness of it, open to the joy and the happiness of it.

And then next week, when we start the third *jhāna*, we'll talk about this distinction between the joy and the happiness because it's particularly important because the joy will fade away and we'll be able to enter and abide in the happiness of meditation of the *jhānas*. So in the meantime, you might want to, over this weekend, keep these three steps in mind, maybe throughout the day as much as you can. Maybe have a sticky note that you put on something that reminds you. Enter, abide, and open. And just see if you can do that in ordinary life, everyday life. Maybe when you drive someplace and you arrive, don't get out of your car right away. Sit there a little bit. And relax. Enter, abide, and open.

If you're standing in a line in a supermarket, don't read the headlines on the news that's there. Rather, stand there, maybe with your eyes closed, but looking down. Enter, abide, and open with what's happening here for you. Maybe being attuned to what is good and right right now that you want to be attuned to if you're in your thoughts thinking a lot. Enter and abide and open through the weekend. And then we'll go further on Monday. So thank you very much.

I'll still be here at Spirit Rock Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. And you'll get to see these wonderful hillsides here. You see a little bit of my view sitting outside my little room. These hills are behind that forest there. Further up there are two Spirit Rock meditation halls. There's actually 96 people in the retreat, probably like 110 people living here. You would know that from all the grasslands. So thank you.

Samadhi (51) Intro To Second Jhana

2025-04-14

So welcome, everyone, to the next week of our series on *samādhi*. And if you hear in the background all the many birds, I'm sitting meditating outdoors at the lands of Spirit Rock, and accompanied by the birds and occasionally by the animals that are here. And it's nice to be meditating outdoors. So this week, the topic is the third *jhāna*, the third of the three absorptions that the Buddha emphasized. And with this, happiness comes to the foreground. The word is *sukha*—s-u-k-h-a— and perhaps it's when we get into this third *jhāna* things get very simple, very ordinary—not ordinary exactly, but very simple.

Nothing really special exactly, except that it feels so good, feels so nice and so still and so quiet—there's virtually nothing at all. Certainly no discursive thinking, no conversational thinking. And there's one wonderful description of all the *jhānas* that maybe is a nice entry-way into the third *jhāna*. Abiding in the *jhānas*, in any of the *jhānas*, is called the happiness of renunciation, the happiness of seclusion, the happiness of peace, the happiness of awakening. I say of this kind of happiness that it should be practiced, cultivated, that it should be frequently done, that it should not be feared.

It should not be feared. So I don't know how many of you fear happiness and joy, but certainly some people fear going into this very deep stillness where temporarily we're putting aside all the reference points we have for how we live our life, including any reference point of me, myself, and mine. Conceit and self-concerns kind of fall away, which for some people is quite frightening. In a certain kind of way, our connection to other people is no longer salient, no longer operating in the moments of being deeply in meditation. And for some people, that feels like a betrayal or feels not possible.

In the time of the Buddha, I think the reason why he said this should not be feared is that the renunciant ascetic traditions of his time didn't fear any kind of happiness because they thought it was a form of attachment. It was a form of keeping you trapped, caught in attachments. And the Buddha was saying, no, there is a happiness which is not a trap. It does not involve attachment. It doesn't keep you in the world of clinging. And this is the happiness that comes from the renunciation, from a certain kind of seclusion, from peace, a certain kind of awakening, awakening from clinging, clear awareness.

So happiness is the primary characteristic of the third *jhāna*. And in the second *jhāna*, there's

joy and happiness. And joy, as I said last week, is a little bit—the genesis, the source of it is a little bit more kind of a mental excitation. There's a little bit more thrill or big, the mind kind of says, yes, or something. And it manifests often with the strong sensations in the body, energies in the body. But it has something to do with the excitement or the activation of the mind in a joyful way.

At the same time, in the second *jhāna*, there also is the sweetness of this happiness, contentment of this happiness, that is deeper, more settled, more restful, more contented. And so the shift from the second *jhāna* to the third is a quieting of the joy. The joy fades away, is the classic language. And so sometimes for many people, just the natural unfolding, because as we get more and more settled, more present, where you feel safer, more content not to be thinking a lot, not to be trying a lot, not to be trying to make something happen. It's enough just to be present, just to be here.

There's a movement towards calming that happens. It's just a natural movement. And at some point, there's a calming of this joy. And what's left is the happiness, this sweet happiness, this deep sense of well-being that feels very embodied. And some people, the way to shift from the second *jhāna* to the third is to feel the joy, certainly, but at some point, see if you can distinguish the happiness that's there from the joy that's there. Find the more sweeter, the more contented, the more softer happiness from the more excited kind of joy.

Find it in your body and then put your attention there. Rest your attention in that sweeter kind of happiness. And maybe even, and exhale, kind of settle into it, rest into it more. Letting the joy kind of fade away, fall away. And so some people can kind of—it's a way of entering into the third *jhāna*. And with the mind getting very quiet, so there's no discursive thoughts. There might be knowing—there is knowing—it might be a non-verbal knowing.

The Buddha describes it: in this third *jhāna*, there is still *sampajañña*, which is a Pāli word that means clear recognition. So there is a very simple knowing that simply recognizes what's going on and that it's good. And that doesn't have to involve, you know, conscious thoughts—nonverbal thoughts perhaps. But, you know, to really register, we know that, oh, this is good, this is happy. And because the thinking mind, the reactive mind, the mind has gotten so quiet, there's almost no tendency to be reactive, to be for and against any experience.

Different things happen if they do, and it doesn't rattle the mind, it doesn't stir up the mind. So there's a lot of equanimity in this state and there's a lot of awareness. And it's not the mindfulness that is doing mindfulness. It's not a mindfulness that involves mental noting or there's no longer any need to be focusing on something, the mind is just very present. And

in the midst of it, there might be breathing, and the breathing has gotten very, maybe very subtle now, very quiet. And that breathing might be almost continuous with the happiness and with that well-being.

It all happens in a real sense of awareness, a field of awareness, a field of openness, clarity. And so the classic description is, with the fading of joy, a practitioner abides equanimous, aware, with clear recognition, and experiencing happiness with the body.

So, here now there's four primary factors of the third *jhāna* that are here that are kind of the primary characteristic. And whether these are really distinct states or whether they're somehow all part of the same, that could be kind of like different sides of a diamond, I don't know. So these four are being equanimous, aware, clear recognition and experiencing happiness with the body, so here the emphasis is so much with the body, we're at rest, we're at peace with the body and it really feels that for the time we're in the third *jhāna*, that we're not anymore in our normal body. We're not experiencing the karmic body. We're not experiencing the physical body so much that with the aches and pains and all that. And these all kind of, that body, it's almost like we have different bodies to abide in.

And the state of the mind has a tremendous amount to say about how we experience the body. Not that the state of mind is responsible for the experiences of the body, but the state of mind has a lot to do with how we experience the body. And when thinking becomes very, very, very quiet and still, when the mind is very focused, very still and centered, when there's very little effort needing to be done to just abide, dwell, float in the present moment, when kind of active energetic joy and energies in the body get really quiet and still, at that point, the body's experience is very different. The body feels very, very light, almost like it has no weight.

The body feels very open or transparent, almost as if sometimes it's beginning to feel like it's completely translucent or something. There's no—it's like very clear. The body can feel just very cozy and sweet. It can feel like it has no boundaries. Not so much because there's no boundaries, but because the mind is not oriented or constructing or tuning into that sense of boundaries to the body. And very, very sweet, very deep, very quiet.

So, key factors of the third *jhāna* is the fading of joy, equanimity, awareness, clear recognition, and happiness of the body. All of which one abides in. One abides in these experiences. One rests in them. It's almost as if we become them. We're one with them. We're unified with them.

So that's my introduction—that's the introduction to the third *jhāna*—and we'll go spend the week with this. And maybe there won't be too much to say but to practice with it, and we'll see how this goes. So thank you, and I'll be here at Spirit Rock for two more days and back at IMC on Thursday. Thank you very much.

Samadhi (52) Immersed in Silence of Third Jhana

2025-04-15

So, good morning and welcome to this next talk on *samādhi*. And this week we're exploring the third *jhāna*. That is, basically the second and third are recognized as a form of noble silence. And silence, of course, in our society, there could be a dictionary of silence. All the different meanings of what's conveyed in silence, many of it which is not kind, and sometimes is off-putting. But this is called a particular kind of silence called knowable silence.

A silent treasure, treasure silence, where it feels cozy, it feels wonderful, it feels like nothing's needed. And there's a remarkable thing that happens when discursive thinking stops, conversational thinking stops, rumination stops. Not just a few times, often for many people, rumination, obsessing about things with the mind, storytelling, telling yourself stories, repeating the same idea over and over again, commenting, judging, having thoughts which are mean, thoughts which are scary, thoughts which are filled with desires. All these limit us. All these narrow the window, narrow the wholeness. They divide us.

They keep us not really deeply in touch in a holistic way with ourselves from the inside out. There's, in fact, even though thinking can be quite pleasant at times or quite compelling, seemingly very important, it involves a tremendous sacrifice and tremendous loss. And oddly enough, sometimes the people who are most worried about the Buddhist teachings of renunciation, letting go, which these *jhānas* have a lot to do with letting go in the meditation, the people who are most worried about it, most troubled by it, are the ones who are most involved in their thinking mind, discursive mind. And there's good reason for that, because that's the mind that tells us stories about all the things we need and should have or don't have, and all the ways that, you know, we've been offended or hurt. And of course, thinking is valuable. Of course, some of the things we think about are true enough.

But it's unfortunate if it disconnects us from the wholeness of who we are, and some of the deeper capacities of knowing and intelligence that we have, that are waiting for us, are there, kind of below the level of discursive thinking, below the level of conversational thinking. And so, going into this third *jhāna*, it can feel very silent in there, but it's not a silence that is being silenced, being ignored. It's not a silence of being disconnected. There's a feeling of, like, almost a feeling of, to be alive is enough. Someone on this retreat that I'm teaching asked me very sincerely a question of, what's the meaning of life? And sometimes if someone asks that question, it's not really asking for an answer or maybe too philosophical or something.

But there was such a sincerity that this was really important for the person. So I was careful about how I responded. So there was an example. I was using a kind of discursive thinking to think about that. But it arose from that silent place inside. It wasn't arising from fear or ambition.

It was more kind of the place where creativity or intuition arises, maybe. So I thought about it for a while. I lived with it for a while. And the answer I came back with is that the meaning of life is to discover the expression of life. What is it that wants to be expressed? What is this flowing and growing and knowing from deep inside that you can never know?

If you answer the question, what is the meaning of life, with a philosophical answer, with an answer that even is logical or somehow rational or somehow conceptual, it's like asking someone if they're involved in some wonderful playing of music or doing a dance or maybe just going for a walk with a friend in a delightful walk. What's the meaning of friendship? What's the meaning of playing music? What's the meaning of dance while you're doing it? It's not needed. In fact, to assign meaning to it during the activity takes you out of the activity.

And so to drop in and let the expression of the music, the music making, of the dance, of the friendship, that the expression of it, that is the meaning of life. So in these deeper *jhānas*, it can feel that way. There's no need for meaning. We're so fully alive, so fully here, so fully quieted, the discursive, ruminating mind that tells us otherwise. It's part of the delight for it. So, and it's also very satisfying to go through this process of feeling a lot of joy and happiness in the first and second *jhāna*, and then having the joy quiet, and then inviting this very deeper happiness where this deeper embodied happiness, again, is not a verbal, it doesn't have a verbal source.

It doesn't have a source from ideas. Many people's emotions and sense of happiness and sadness is so dependent on the thinking mind and whatever direction thoughts go, that's the way we feel. And here there's a whole different source for happiness, for joy, that wells up from deep inside and that exists deep inside that just feels satisfying, feels like this is being alive. And so I want to read the metaphor or the simile for the third *jhāna*. And it uses in this metaphor a pool of water that's cool, cool water. And you have to appreciate that, maybe imagine that it's one of the warmest days you've ever been in, hottest days you've ever been in.

Because these metaphors were created in India, in the hot climate of India. I was in the Buddha's place of enlightenment, *Bodhi Gayā*. I think I was there in June. It was the hot season. It was the hottest season. Boy, there was no one else there. It was so hot. And the Buddha

didn't get enlightened in the peak of the hot season, but he was getting close to it when he was sitting under the *Bodhi* tree there.

And in the context of a very hot day it's just a delight to go into, it's soothing and satisfying to go into a cool pool of water. And so it's in that context you'll see that coolness is used as part of the metaphor and lotus flowers are used and lotus flowers can be quite beautiful. And so it's a metaphor for something that's quite beautiful in ourselves, in our experience. So the third *jhāna* is like a pool filled with blue lotuses or red lotuses or white lotuses, where some of the blue, red, and white lotuses would be born in the water, would grow in the water, would be nourished by the water without ever rising up above the water of the surface. The cool water would fill, pervade, saturate, and permeate those lotuses from their tips to their roots, so no part of the blue, red, or white lotuses would not be touched with cool water.

So the practitioner pervades and saturates and permeates this body with happiness, freed of joy, so that no part of the body is not touched.

So a couple of things about this simile. I just find it delightful, this expression. This body is permeated with happiness freed of joy. Have you ever heard of such a thing? Why would you want to free yourself from joy? Because there's a happiness which is better. Sick, pure happiness in a very deep, embodied, satisfying way lacks the excitement, the thrill of joy. And of course that thrill and excitement is quite wonderful at first, but if it goes on and on and on and on, it's exhausting, it's tiring. And then to be able to drop into this deeper state of happiness.

And the metaphor is one of being immersed in the water, cool, refreshing water. When I was young, we lived by the seashore. Excuse me. We lived by the seashore, and I spent a lot of time in the summer, not only in the water, but under the water. I had snorkels and masks. And I would dive under the water, maybe to about six feet or so, five, six feet, and flip myself over on my back and try to stay down there as long as I could.

There were gentle waves coming in in the sea that I was at. And I'd be underneath looking up at the waves coming into the shore. And it was so delightful to be down there. There was this wonderful silence. There was this wonderful being kind of enveloped, hugged. It was kind of like being all cozy in a nest, perhaps, or cozy in a nice comforter-filled bed or something.

And the world had disappeared down there. The world of expectations, the world of needs, the world of comparing myself to others and wanting things to be different. The world was so still and quiet down there, so satisfying. And I felt more alive on my back under the water

looking up than I did almost any other time. No part of my body was not touched by this wonderful environment of the water. So as we go into these deep absorptive states, many people will actually use the simile of dipping under water briefly or for a while when they're in these deep absorption, and then if they come out, it feels like they're surfacing out of it.

And there was a time in my practice where I would go into these deep states, and I needed to, felt like I needed to, just kind of make sure everything was okay, that I wasn't straining, or things were, I knew the time, I knew my environment, and I would surface out of the water and check out what was going on, make sure everything was good, and then I would dip down back in. And then in this state, everything we experience, all the sensations, whatever goes on, feelings, any feeling goes on, is seen as beautiful, is seen as kind of wonderful, like lotuses. Each thing is distinct. Each thing is its own thing floating in this water. So you might feel sensations of breathing, and it's just delightful, like its own lotus floating in the water. You might even feel some happiness, sensations of happiness, different parts of the body, anything.

And there's a silent knowing, a silent awareness, nonverbal knowing of all this tremendous clarity. And you're not thinking about it, but you know it. You come out of it, you might think about it some, but not in this state. So I hope that this metaphor and these words give you a feel, a sense, maybe through your imagination of what it's like. And if the idea of being in a pool of water is not welcoming for you, maybe there's some other way, another metaphor that you have that can be comfortable.

One of the first times I experienced this kind of thing was going into a thousand-year-old chapel in France. And it was on top of a little hill. And being in that chapel, I was enveloped by a kind of goodness, a kind of peace that was new to me. So, the second *jhāna*. Thank you. I hope that you somehow go through the day exploring, considering, feeling into ways in which you can have non-verbal knowing.

The ways that awareness, mindfulness, can be silent and that you find that very satisfying. So, thank you very much. Thank you.

Samādhi (53) Happy, Equanimous Body

2025-04-16

So, hello everyone, and welcome to this next talk on the *Samādhi* series. And it's the third talk on the third *jhāna*. And as we go deeper into absorptions, deeper into a unified, concentrated, absorbed state, the experience of our body begins to change. And one of the ways that I've come to understand this at first, maybe through my own practice, I started to feel that these immersive states, I would leave my karmic body behind. And that one of the bodies we can experience is our karmic body.

And that's the body that we feel and sense that is a product or a byproduct of our reactivity, the ways we've reacted to the world, the way that we have resisted, tightened, tensed by the world. Now, you might want to blame the world for the ways in which you are tense or afraid or contracted. And that's okay. But still, it's something which the mind, the inner life, is doing. The contraction, the tension, the holding on, the resisting.

And it's very deep, and it should have tremendous respect and care and carefulness around this karmic body we have, this body that's conditioned by the regularity or the frequency in which we think the same thought over and over again. If you repeatedly think that you are somehow inadequate, it becomes kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy because if it's repeated enough, it's just depressing. It just kind of drains us. And so that draining, the drain body, I would call the karmic body. If what you love to do is to watch horror movies and the excitement and thrill and liveness of being afraid.

If you do that enough, in fact, you tell yourself horror movies in your own mind, then you have a fearful body. The fear body is predominant. Some people live in their fear body, and that's what I call a karmic body. It's a body that's somehow been shaped by the reactivity of the mind. And as we go through, as we settle and get more and more focused, concentrated, unified, relaxed,

The ways in which the body is tightened up, tensed up, knotted up, held tight, become rigid, the fear body, the anger body, the desire body, the grief body, the things that have gotten so conditioned that we're kind of like living, almost like we become that body. But that begins to loosen up as we go deeper into meditation. We kind of, that falls to the side. That no longer is operating for us. And it's not a loss of who we are.

It's like taking off a coat that has become overly heavy, or overly hot as the weather warms

up. We no longer need it. And sometimes it's leaving the karmic body behind. The body feels very different. And the third *jhāna*, one of the ways of understanding it, that it's a happy body, happiness body, that it's saturated, the body is filled with a kind of happiness, where the karmic body is no longer operating.

Sometimes I've called it the diamond body, the adamantine body, because it feels so clear and solid, but transparent all the way through, like a jewel. And sometimes going through the *jhānas*, the posture of the body changes. And sometimes it gets very aligned. And sometimes you can actually feel the body aligning itself with the concentration. It's almost like there's an energetic force in the body that kind of lifts the spine, opens the chest, and you feel very present.

And I call that the diamond body. And sometimes some people might call it kind of an energy body that happens because all that's left is this tingling, flowing, vibrating field of energy seemingly. And so as we leave this karmic body behind, we're leaving behind the ways in which we've been conditioned by the world, by our own behavior, our own thoughts, by the influence of others. And it can be very healing. It's one of the reasons why these *jhānas* are prescribed sometimes, because they have such a deep, there's such deep medicine for the heart, the mind.

It touches kind of the very deep subconscious places that are very hard to otherwise contact. And so the usual instructions, or at least that I'm familiar with, or at least value a lot, when if you're fortunate enough to begin to go through these *jhānas*, do it slowly. Don't be in a hurry to get somewhere. Because the idea is to allow yourself to be reconditioned, to allow yourself to feel the goodness of it, the healing of it. Allow you to kind of get a very different message into your heart, into your body, than the message of danger, or the message of being left out, or the message of not good enough.

So all these messages that we live with that are not so healthy for us, And to be able to have this other way of receiving a different healthy message is one of the values of these deep states. So in this happiness body of the third *jhāna*, karmic body, this conditionality, the conditioning we have, the reactivity we have, really settles dramatically. Then there's a lot less orientation potential for being reactive. And what becomes clear, what stands out and highlights that is equanimity. And the equanimity that is not for or against something, that's not wanting or not wanting something,

The equanimity allows each thing that arises to be there. Like the sky allows a cloud to be in the middle of the vast sky. Or like a vast sky allows a bird to fly through it. The sky is not

disturbed. It's not for or against the bird.

It's just vast kind of space and non-reactivity, openness to whatever comes. The metaphor of Buddhism is often that of a path, Buddhist practice. And a path is a clearing in the forest that's open so we can walk through it. And so the path is, to a great degree, defined by the absence, the openness, the emptiness that's there, above maybe the physical trail that's there. But the path includes this open space.

And a path in the woods, the open space, is not disturbed by you walking through it. So the mind, so awareness, so this happiness body, allows everything just to be there in the quiet, equanimous mind. And for me, very closely associated with this is the feeling of spaciousness, as if there's lots of space around each individual thing. For the Buddha, it seems to be rather in space, kind of similar, but it's the vast space that's underwater in a lake. And there the space has a kind of viscosity.

It has a certain kind of, you know, little bit of weight, little bit of physicality to it that you feel the contact of the water against the skin and maybe the refreshing, comfortable temperature and stillness of the water. And so it's not just simply empty space, but in the third *jhāna*, it kind of feels like it's this wonderful, soothed kind of texture or viscosity or soft butter of spaciousness in which we are breathing or being. And so one of those characteristics of that spaciousness, this vast water, is a feeling of contentment, happiness, kind of a deep, but it's physical. The body just feels like it's, maybe almost like the body is beginning to disappear, getting very soft, or has no boundaries. But the body is kind of saturated or filled with feelings of pleasure.

And some people, some translators prefer to translate *sukha* in the third *jhāna* not as happiness, but as pleasure. Because it's so embodied. And for me, at least, pleasure just doesn't seem to capture how good it is, how wonderful it is. So I prefer happiness. But for some people, happiness is too complicated a state.

And so maybe pleasures, or maybe contentment is the middle way for these words. Deep, deep contentment or satisfaction. So equanimity not equanimity from understanding something but an equanimity of being larger than everything the awareness is large and spacious and open that it has room for what's happening here and now giving breathing room to all things. So you might today, as you go through your day find times through the day to give breathing room, space to what's happening. And notice how it's a thinking mind maybe, the reactive mind, that narrows the space of awareness, narrows the, sometimes a claustrophobic mind, that's much more affected, troubled by what's happening.

And maybe by giving breathing room and opening up, expanding outwards, you get some of the benefit, peacefulness or happiness, or at least equanimity of a spacious, open, wide awareness. May your day be one of equanimity. And I'll continue, we'll continue this series tomorrow. Tomorrow I'll be at IMC. And I think I'll miss a little bit of being here on this wild and grasslands outside and so thank you very much. Thank you.

Samādhi (54) Happiness as Medicine

2025-04-17

Hello and welcome to the next talk in this series on *Samādhi* and the week of the third *jhāna*. And the instructions in meditation that's given for first, the third *jhāna* is very simple. The actual things that we do... It says that one enters and abides and experiences happiness in the body. So when one enters and abides in this deep state, and when they experience the happiness of the body, that's the instruction. The most active instructions experience the happiness, almost the most active.

And then it goes on to say, give this instructions. Okay. So this, if you want to do something, if you were a doer, this is what you actually do in the third *jhāna*. You would pervade, saturate, and permeate this body with happiness. So no part of the body is not touched.

I mean, it's kind of remarkable instructions. To spread the happiness around the body so that the whole body feels happy. Now, whether the word should translate it from *Pāli* into English should be happy, our happiness is a person dependent. Each of us will have a different relationship with different words and different inner states. So it's in the family of happiness states.

So maybe it's contentment. Maybe it's a sweetness. Maybe it's a deep sense of being cozy and comforted. Maybe it's a kind of warm, glowing sense of aliveness. Maybe it's a kind of glowing, happy feeling of peace in the body.

Maybe it's a kind of warm, glowing sense of aliveness. Maybe it's a kind of glowing, happy feeling of peace in the body. So, you know, the idea is to, here is not to take some impersonal idea of what these words are, but to make the words personal. So the word happiness, find a way it can become your word. With what you recognize and can feel inside for yourself.

And eventually we come into what I call the happy body, the happiness body. Many of us walk around with the fear body, and the whole body is tensed in a certain way and hyper-vigilant because it's just filled coursing with fear. Some people are in the sadness body, the depressed body, the grief body. Some people might be in the volcanic anger body, rage body. And so the whole experience of the body shifts and change.

So depending what's going on. There's the ecstatic body of something really fantastic happening. Maybe you think winning the lottery for millions, billions of dollars is a good thing. And you're just like, your whole body is just kind of firing. All the neurons is firing with excite-

ment.

And there's the excitement body. There's the nurturing, tender, caring body of maybe caring for injured bird or maybe holding a newborn baby. And the whole body shifts and changes. So in a sense, we have different bodies. And the happiness body is another one.

And that's part of the movement in meditation and *samādhi* practice, is to move into these really healthy and healing bodies. And that's part of the movement in meditation and *samādhi* practice, is to move into these really healthy and healing bodies. And one of the ways to do that is to have a kind of a good meditation posture. Good means maybe dignified, maybe upright, maybe it's better to define it by what it's not. It's not collapsing.

Right. It's not recoiling. It's not shutting down. It's not reaching for and trying to make something happen. And so we're not being...

The posture itself is not under the sway of what's happening in the world and what's happening with our emotional life inside in terms of the posture. So the posture becomes kind of like the monastery. The posture becomes a meditation hall. The posture becomes the source that can, the container, that can hold everything. And we begin to experience and recognize how much we, in fact, are being swayed this way and that way by what's happening in the world, what's happening in our relationships, what's happening with work and family and home, that our moods and emotions are so dependent, so influence, we're so influenceable, by all the things that's happening around us.

We're constantly reacting this way and this way and that way. And *samādhi* is the practice of becoming so fully present and home and stable here in the moment that the posture is no longer being under the influence of emotions, the world, the events of the times. And then slowly, the inner life. The inner, the heart, the yoni, the deep place inside, begins to come alive. And then slowly, the inner life.

The inner, the heart, the yoni, the deep place inside, begins to come alive. The inner life becomes alive, independent of what's happening in the world. And this is a revolution for some people, revolution for the heart. To feel a sense of well-being, to feel a sense of aliveness, contentment, peace, happiness that's not dependent on what is happening in the world. And this is not a betrayal of the world, betrayal of our relationships.

It's actually putting ourselves in a really healthy way that we can go into the world, into our relationships, in an infinitely better way, where we offer it our clarity, offer it our fullness, offer our peace, peace. Offer our respect, our attention, that can't be offered if part of what

we are is reacting to the present moment, caught up in our desires, caught up in the feelings, emotions about, and desires and aversions that have to do with the present moment and what's happening. We don't bring the fullness the best of us when we're being swayed, this way, and that way. So the training in *samādhi* is a fantastic training for daily life. And knowing that might make it easier for your mind, body, heart to be willing.

Put aside the world. Put aside your relationships. Put aside your preoccupations. Because you'll be coming back to them after the meditation. And you're putting aside long enough to be transformed, be changed into a kind of deeper settled-ness, deeper fullness of being.

And you're putting aside long enough to be transformed, be changed into a kind of deeper settled-ness, deeper fullness of being. So in the third *jhāna*, it's having a sense of a happiness body. And to feel that happiness body, to feel kind of cozy, delighted, contented, that we carry with us into the world. And that's medicine for the world. If we go into the world angry, that's not medicine.

If we go into the world distressed, that's not medicine. There's enough anger, enough distress in the world. Do we really want to add more? Because we're angry maybe, and because we're distressed, because we care, in that caring, make yourself the medicine that the world needs. Make yourself the medicine that you need.

That's the function of deep *samādhi*. That's the function of deeply settling. And going into this deep, deep place. It's not an escape from the world. It's an ability to become whole, complete, with the best that we have available as a human being.

And with that comes a profound aspiration to live for the welfare and happiness of this world without sacrificing our own well-being. It's much easier said than done, but that's the principle of this practice. It is possible to learn that, and it's a worthwhile skill to learn. And so I'll read you the description of the third *jhāna* one more time. Furthermore, with the fading of joy, a practitioner abides equanimous, aware, with clear recognition, experiencing happiness with the body.

The practitioner enters and abides in the third *jhāna*, which the noble ones declare, equanimous and aware one abides in happiness. The practitioner enters and abides in the third *jhāna*, which the noble ones declare, equanimous and aware one abides in happiness. The practitioner pervades, saturates, and permeates this body with happiness freed of joy so that no part of the body is not touched. I celebrate this description. What a great phenomenal pointing to a human potential that we have, that you have.

It is possible. This is a potential we all carry within us. So may you be your own medicine. May you be the medicine for the world. Thank you.

Samadhi (55) Peace in Third Jhana

2025-04-18

Hello, and welcome to this fifth talk on the third *jhāna* as part of this *samadhi* series. And sometimes I've thought that the third *jhāna* is my favorite of the *jhānas*, maybe because it certainly has a degree of... wonderful degree of peace, but it also has kind of very satisfying, comforting or deep feeling of well-being that's part of it, that seems to fill the whole body. And so, but one of the, so I want to read again, the ancient description of the third *jhāna* as part of completing this week, with the fading of joy. A practitioner abides equanimous, aware, and with clear recognition, and experiences the happiness of the body. The practitioner enters and abides in the third *jhāna*, of which the noble ones declare, equanimous and aware when abides in happiness.

The practitioner pervades... purveyed, saturates, permeates this body with happiness that is freed of joy so that no part of the body is not touched by the happiness. So one of the characteristics of this third John is equanimity, and that's a form of peace. There's something peaceful about not reacting, about not reacting, being caught and being for and against or preferences, partly because there's no reason for it, but partly because even in this third genre where the experience is just predominantly or only pleasant, that we don't lean into it, we're not grabbing it, we're not involved in any kind of reactivity, positive reactivity towards it, We're equanimous, we're peaceful about it, because it's allowing something deep in our mind, deep in our psyche, to relax, to let go, to not have to be constantly chronically active, doing, making, wanting, protecting, figuring out, responding to every little thing that happens.

There's something peaceful about not reacting, about not reacting, being caught and being for and against or preferences, partly because there's no reason for it, but partly because even in this third genre where the experience is just predominantly or only pleasant, that we don't lean into it, we're not grabbing it, we're not involved in any kind of reactivity, positive reactivity towards it, We're equanimous, we're peaceful about it, because it's allowing something deep in our mind, deep in our psyche, to relax, to let go, to not have to be constantly chronically active, doing, making, wanting, protecting, figuring out, responding to every little thing that happens. The mind can have tremendous clarity. It's equanimous. It's aware. There's a clear knowing of what's happening.

But at the same time, everything is allowed to happen freely. And the classic metaphor, as

I've said, is beautiful flowers, lotus flowers that are opened and just exquisitely pristine, perhaps, Lotus is considered somehow pure, and floating in water, underwater, peacefully, very peacefully. And everything that we experience is held in the water of the mind, the water of happiness, the water of peace, equanimity. And as we come to the end of this week on the third *jhāna*, the word peace itself is not in the description of the *jhana**. But equanimity is a form of peace.

It's not, there's many flavors of peace. This is one of the great delights of meditation of Dharma practice. Maybe one of the delights of human life is to be able to appreciate the flavors of peace, the many flavors that we can experience. Maybe one of the delights of human life is to be able to appreciate the flavors of peace, the many flavors that we can experience. And if you've never heard of this idea, that peace can have many flavors, many experience many different ways, there's different characteristics.

You might want to make a study of that. Maybe over this weekend, before we start again, you might give yourself an opportunity to experience peace. Maybe there's places you can go that you can experience it. Maybe there's some kind of... cathedral, church, new neighborhood that's very peaceful inside. Maybe a park with a grove of trees.

Maybe there's a peaceful bank of a river that you can go sit by. Maybe it's a corner of your home that may be looking out the window or maybe with setting up a certain kind of context, maybe when you're alone at home. You just allow yourself the chance to not do anything except begin to sense and feel peace in the different ways peace can be experienced. Maybe you find yourself in situations that are quite agitating and difficult, but with an assignment to feel the different flavors of peace, maybe ask yourself in a way maybe you've never done before in a trying situation. Where is the peace here?

Where's the peace while people are arguing? Where's the peace when there's a difficult tension in the room? Is there any? And there always will be somewhere. And at minimum, it can be found in the calm mindfulness, the calm awareness that searches for it.

And there always will be somewhere. And at minimum, it can be found in the calm mindfulness, the calm awareness that searches for it. And so in this third, John, there's a degree of peace. And that piece feels not personal exactly. It can feel almost like it expands beyond the edges of the body or beyond the edges certainly of any ways that we usually define ourselves or want to be.

And there's all kinds of lessons around this in the third John. And one of them is that any

appropriation, any kind of movement towards making it mine or this is me having this experience, can be seen as creating agitation on the surface of the lake. It can feel like it's unnecessary. It actually detracts from the richness of the experience. And so to begin kind of appreciating the peace, feeling what peace is here, and becoming a connoisseur of peace.

Yeah. And the reason for this is that in the fourth genre, the equanimity becomes stronger and more peaceful. And so being able to kind of sense and have a better kind of registering of the qualities characteristic of peace, characteristics of this happiness that's there. That's the means by which, or the condition by which our psychophysical system can move into the fourth *jhāna*. So it's one of the characteristics of this instructions in the four *jhānas* is to pervade, saturate, and pervade the body.

With the joy and happiness, with the happiness, with the peace. Partly so we can know it well, we can feel it well. With the joy and happiness, with the happiness, with the peace. Partly so we can know it well, we can feel it well. We can feel it in a deep way that it's almost like we are not feeling it because we're not appropriating it or measuring it against me, myself, and mine, or defining ourselves by it, or wanting more, wanting less, just really getting to know it on its own terms, how that is.

And this deeper familiarity So sometimes I've known people who go into the *jhānas* and are kind of in a hurry to go through it. They want to be masters of it. They want to be, somehow there's idea of being a good meditator or a successful practitioner. There might be a little bit conceit around going into these deep states. And this is rather unfortunate because the conceit gets in the way of the deeper lessons of these states.

And one of the deeper lessons is to take in the kind of the selfless experience of something profound going on, a profound movement, a profound opening, a profound quality of well-being and peace, that we want to really register and get to know well, without any interference, any kind of agitation or... that comes with trying to do something with or get more from it or speed along and just being very settled, very peaceful, and discovering the almost selfless quality of these deep states because we're not selfing around it. There's a deeper peace. So if you're at all inclined, I encourage you to spend this weekend getting to know the flavors of peace for you. So if you're at all inclined, I encourage you to spend this weekend getting to know the flavors of peace for you.

Search for it, look for it. Search it out where places you can go, what people you can be with, what ways of doing housework, what ways of being at home, that you can actually take time to begin exploring the different qualities, characteristics of how you experience peace. And

then you'll be a little better prepared for next week when we do the fourth *jhāna*.

So thank you very much for being part of this, and I look forward to our continuation.

Samadhi (56) Intro to Fourth Jhana

2025-04-21

Hello and welcome to this Monday, beginning of the week, continuity, continuation of *samādhi*, the theme of *samādhi*. And today, this week, we begin the fourth *jhāna*, which is in some ways of understanding the deepest of the *jhānas*. Sometimes there's a list of eight *jhānas*, but in the teachings of the Buddha, the final four, he calls the four bases, the four kind of fields, maybe. And what's called *jhāna* is reserved for just these first four. But then colloquially, people have, because these are the next four, even deeper states, that they call them all four *jhānas*. All eight of them are called *jhānas*.

But we come to a very significant step in the Buddha's teachings around the fourth *jhāna*, because it's a time when the mind is most malleable, most ready, most at ease, so that there's no lingering clinging anymore. There's no lingering resistance or pushing or preoccupation. And so the mind has gotten very equanimous, very peaceful, and it sets the stage for being able to have deep insight and for that insight to be liberating. Now, there's very little filters of concepts, ideas, stories with which we experience ourselves. There's a lot of equanimity and a lot of ease with how we are.

And that combination allows for insights to happen, and the mind is just ready to just kind of receive that in a dissolving, opening way, so that all clinging in some radical, deep way can let go. And that deep letting go is the ultimate purpose of going through these *jhānas*. The purpose is not the *jhānas* themselves. So we want to be a little bit careful not to overvalue the importance of these. They serve a purpose, and the purpose is freedom. And that freedom can be attained other ways besides the *jhānas*.

So it's a little bit important not to overprioritize and feel like we have to experience these. At the same time, it's remarkable that these are part of our human potential. And they create a tremendous feeling of beauty. The fourth *jhāna* is considered to be the most beautiful of it all. So the experience is probably one of the most beautiful things we can experience in life. And it provides phenomenal peace.

And a reorientation, a healing, quite a wonderful experience to be had. So on one hand, we don't want to strive for it. We don't want to measure ourselves by it, that spiritual success is only had by attaining these things that then work somehow, you know, the best meditator on our block and we can get lots of status for it. That's all extra. At the same time, we don't

want to dismiss them as unimportant or that they don't exist.

I remember many years ago when I was a graduate student in Buddhist studies, there were professors who didn't believe in *jhānas*. They thought that literally the language borrowing from a Buddhist scholar from the 1930s, that *jhānas* were the overactive fantasies, imagination of starving ascetics. And so it just seems so far-fetched from what they could imagine was humanly possible. But it is possible to dip into these *jhānas*. It is possible to experience them. And they are far from imagination.

In fact, these are almost the opposite of imagination, is when imagination drops away. Sometimes they're called, in the old school of translators, they're called trances. And these are not trances. These are almost like the opposite of trance. This is when the mind wakes up in a lucid and clear way. And there's very little that the mind is aware of in these states, so that can give impression maybe it's a kind of a trance, a disconnection.

But actually, we're more deeply connected to life, to the experience of being alive, than we are when we have a lot of thoughts and ideas in which we're navigating the ideas, the thoughts. And some people who are living a very active life in the world are mostly living in their imagination. And that's where imagination can interfere with our experience of freedom, of deep spirituality. And so these *jhānas* where the imagination quiets down and stills and there's very little thinking, the mind becomes lucid, kind of a lucid awareness. And where very little else is going on, partly because we're not focusing on our sense doors, we're not focusing on hearing and listening and hearing and smelling and tasting and all this.

And even to some degree, we're not focusing on sensing the body. There's no focus. There's no tightening of the mind, narrowing the mind to focus on anything in particular. It's more like we're floating in this vast sea, a lake, or the third *jhāna*, but where now even the water disappears. And we'll see tomorrow the metaphor of the fourth *jhāna* is someone sitting, meditating in the open air in a particular way. So the softness and the refreshment of water has even fallen away.

And in some ways you just feel so free and light to be in the open air now in this deep meditative way. And even that, so even the sense of the body in this is not there in the usual way. So it's a kind of a lucid awareness that's very equanimous, very peaceful. And in both the third and the fourth *jhāna*, there is equanimity. But it seems that in the third *jhāna*, the equanimity has a little bit more substance. It's its own thing.

In the fourth *jhāna*, awareness and equanimity are the same thing, just about the same thing.

It's like a compound word. Equanimous awareness, aware, equanimity. It's just this, there's no texture, there's no flavor, there's no substance to either the awareness or the equanimity. And you can almost not say it's a thing. It's almost like what's left in the absence in great space.

Can you say that the sky is equanimous as a bird flies through it? I mean, we don't attribute consciousness to the sky, but the mind doesn't react to it, but the mind holds it. It's like equanimity is not a thing that is done. It's just that there's no movement of reactivity whatsoever. So it's called equanimous awareness, aware equanimity.

So I'll read to you the description. And the description of the fourth *jhāna* and the metaphor are shorter than the earlier three *jhānas*. And that's maybe appropriate given that there's so little happening now, so little to describe.

So letting go of pleasure and pain. How do you let go of pleasure and pain? That's a koan.

That's like a what? That doesn't make any sense. You either have pleasure and pain, but if you have pleasure and pain, can you let go of it?

Well, certainly the mind can let go of its orientation, preoccupation with it.

Letting go of pleasure and pain with the disappearance of mental happiness and mental suffering. So this is something very different is going on here.

There's no pleasure and pain, no mental happiness and suffering at all in this state.

One enters and abides in the purity of equanimous awareness of the fourth *jhāna*. And so the only description of the fourth *jhāna* is the absence of happiness, mental happiness and mental suffering. A phenomenal state to be in. There's no suffering whatsoever. And there's no pain and no pleasure.

Now this can seem like very dull, you know, there's nothing, but this is one of the most sublime peaceful feelings of well-being that is possible for a human being. And so the description maybe doesn't—you have to almost experience to see, oh, this is good. One abides in the purity of equanimous awareness of the fourth *jhāna*, once it's pervading this body with a pure, clear mind so that no part of the entire body is untouched by the pure, clear mind. So the word pure here, some people don't like to use it in their spiritual life. It could also mean clean. So once it's pervading this body with a clean, clear mind, and here mind means more like awareness.

And so the whole body becomes almost like a field of awareness. It's what it is. And it's a

feeling of being very clean, very pure, and clear, this clear awareness. So I like to call the awareness here lucid awareness, a field, a state of vast, clear awareness. And what's the characteristic of this field of clear awareness that spreads through the body? It's equanimous and it's clearly aware.

And so that's the kind of classic description. And so we'll go spend this week kind of going into it with a little bit more detail and look at the metaphor and so forth. And my hope is that having done these now over 50-day sessions on *samādhi*, that as we go into the fourth *jhāna*, not expected to go into it, but maybe there's some way that you can kind of feel the edges of it or kind of feel some qualities of it that give you a sense of what this might be when it's complete and full. And if not that, I hope it's at least inspiring that this is a potential for each person's heart and mind. So thank you very much, and I look forward to continuing. Thank you.

Samadhi (57) Calm, Clear Mind

2025-04-22

So hello and welcome to the next talk in this *samādhī* series. And today's talk is, kind of one of the themes of it is calm, because the general topic this week is the fourth *jhāna*. The fourth *jhāna* represents a very profound calming of the mind, calming of mental activities. If you understand that a lot of the agitation that we have comes from thinking, as the thinking quiets down, that doesn't trigger agitation. We appreciate how the mind that is for and against things or reacts to pleasure and pain quiets down and calms down. The relationship to pleasure and pain recedes and quiets.

And surprisingly enough, we might not feel much pleasure and pain. Certainly there are times when pain gets accentuated by our preoccupation with it, by our vigilance against it, by our meaning-making and fear and predictions around the pain we feel. The micro-muscles around the pain tighten up. The pain just seems larger in the mind, like a magnifying glass on it. But when we're no longer caught in the preoccupation with pain, sometimes even the pain recedes into the background. In this quieting, calming of mental activities in the fourth *jhāna*, the pain and pleasure of all kinds just recedes and becomes irrelevant, disappears from the mind.

It represents a certain kind of coming into fullness or completion, a certain kind of the gradual calming of the mind that goes on throughout *samādhī* practice. The *samādhī* practice has a general name of being called *samatha*. *Samatha*, S-A-M-A-T-H-A, sounds like *samādhī*, but it's a different word. *Samatha* means to calm, tranquility. It's a calming, tranquilizing of the mind, making tranquil, peaceful. Tranquil like a deep, clear, tranquil lake.

So we're calming mental activities. The mind gets calmer and calmer. It's not turning the mind off. It's just quieting certain activities of the mind that are extra, that are not needed. What comes in return is a tremendous sense of clarity. The tradition calls it a pure, clear mind.

It feels like this is the way the mind is the healthiest, most present, most fully alive in this vast, pure clarity of the mind that can be there, clarity of awareness. So it's not going into a trance. It's not kind of checking out. It's not becoming unaware. But there's no thinking, no acts of recognition of what's there. There might be a deep nonverbal knowing that is part and parcel of the clear, pure mind.

But there's no thoughts. There's a kind of clear knowing that there's no thoughts, but we're not telling ourselves there's no thoughts. It's just known without any effort, without any agitation or any waves. Because this calming of the mental activity is going more and more, the way that we take in sense data from our body, from the world around us, begins to quiet as well. We're not actively taking in sense data. Places that we register sense data in the body don't operate in a conceptual way anymore.

It's not taking in the data and putting it into the usual concepts we have of body, hand, room, sound, distance, here, there. There are all these subtle ways which we take for granted, just kind of recognizing the truth of reality, that it is a kind of conceptualization of the sense data that comes in in a particular way. Even something as innocent as me, you know, recognizing this here as a bell—it is a bell. But there's a subtle mental activity that recognizes it as a bell. It feels effortless. It feels nonverbal.

But it is contextual. It's learned. It's a concept and idea that at another time, another situation, this same object might be used as a holder of paperclips, a pen holder. It might be a spittoon. It's so solid it could even be someone's pot that they put on top of a fire to cook their soup. Someone would call this a pot.

So the context changes what this is. There's a very subtle conceptual activity in the mind that makes that choice, what we're able to call it. Deep in the fourth *jhāna*, this kind of conceptualization is quieted down. There might still be a recognition that there's something here, but it doesn't have a name. It's not conceptualized. In the same way with our body, we're not conceptualizing our body in the usual way, and the body begins to become diffuse.

No clear boundaries, no clear details. It's just kind of a generalized, peaceful, clear, quiet kind of vibration or flow. This explains a little bit the metaphor that's used for the fourth *jhāna*. Sitting in the fourth *jhāna* is just as though a person were sitting covered from head down with a white cloth, so that no part of one's whole body is not covered by the white cloth. So a white cloth represents a cloth that's very clean, in which the light that comes through a white cloth sometimes feels very diffuse and clear and wonderful. The idea of sitting with a white cloth covering ourselves, our whole body, is not strange for the ancient Indian world because there was no deet.

There was no mosquito nettings. The way to be kind of untroubled by insects was to cover yourself with a blanket, with a shawl, with a cloth. Monks would sit meditating that way. From the outside, you know there's a human body underneath the cloth, but there are no details. There's no clarity of exactly the shape, the characteristics of that body. It's diffused

and kind of uncharacterized, except for a general sense of the outline that's in the cloth.

At the same time, the person inside, it feels very cozy and very safe and very comfortable, where there's no real sharp kind of boundary, in a sense, to the outer world. In the felt sense, there's a soft kind of clear light feeling, light with weight and light as luminous. Some people, in order to harmonize this metaphor with the idea of the lake in the second and third *jhāna*, the metaphors for the second and third *jhāna*, the lotuses that are floating in the lake, the person just floating in water, and they get very clean. Then they come out of the water and sit under the tree to meditate, and they wrap themselves in a clean towel, completely wrapped and covered, feeling a pure, clean, fresh, quiet content. In this way, the feeling of being in the third *jhāna* feels very clean, pure, content, peaceful, kind of indistinct, nothing's needed. Everything is cozy.

There's no pleasure in pain. Because the quieting of that part of the mind that registers and conceptualizes and engages in the construction of pleasure and pain has gotten very, very quiet. That's both physical pleasure and pain and also mental pleasure and pain that might be emotional. So this is a description:

abandoning pleasure and pain, with the previous disappearance of mental happiness and mental suffering, one enters and abides with neither pain nor pleasure in the purity of equanimous awareness of the fourth *jhāna*.

Once it's pervading this body with a pure, clear mind, which is pervading this body with a clean, clear mind so that no part of the entire body is untouched by the pure, clear mind.

It is just as though a person was sitting covered from the head down with a white cloth so that there is no part of one's whole body that is not covered by that white cloth.

So may you find calm. May you find the calm that comes from not overthinking, overreacting, being over involved with our present moment. Let calm be your companion through the day and in whatever way you can. Maybe the calm is the calm of not adding more agitation to the circumstance you're in. May it be a calm day. Thank you.

Samadhi (58) Deepening By Releasing

2025-04-23

So, good morning and welcome to this series on *samādhī*. I think we're now on the 58th talk, and discussing the fourth *jhāna*. To step back to have a little bit of a different orientation to understanding this whole process of *samādhī*, sometimes it's said to be a continuous process of letting go. That's what's required in attaining a deep *samādhī*. Another way that is similar is that *samādhī* has a lot to do with relaxing or letting up on all the ways in which attention has been hijacked or harnessed into our attachments, into pressure, into subtle ways that the mind grabs onto or pushes along its thoughts.

There are subtle ways in which we're reacting to our feelings and how we are, subtle ways, maybe not so subtle ways, in which we're very involved with kind of pressure or contraction or tightness or leaning into whatever attention is directed towards. If it's directed towards thinking, there can be a lot of it. That process of becoming sensitive to that holding, that pressure, that push, that preoccupation around anything at all, the way attention zeroes in, is important. Sometimes it's innocent enough. If you've lost your keys, then there's some part of the mind that's now intent on finding the keys, looking for the keys. There might be a subtle kind of tautness, intentionality in the mind.

Or there might be fear and anxiety and desperation, so now the mind has really gotten tight, really gotten narrow, holding on. There can be a healthy tautness, a healthy kind of engagement. Or there can be all this extra stuff. This meditation is a place to become very sensitive to the tension, the pressure, the strain that we add. Sometimes it's pretty soft. In ordinary mind states, we don't see the tension.

But as the mind gets quieter in meditation, we start noticing what wasn't noticed before because now we're quiet enough to start feeling more deeply what's happening. We're not preoccupied, we're not caught up in the thoughts and ideas. Then we start feeling the cost, feeling the tightness, the tension, the strain. Sometimes with mindfulness, just feeling it carefully is enough for it to begin to soften and dissolve. The process of *samādhī*, whether it's feeling the tension letting it dissolve or whether it's staying on the breath, focusing on the breath wholeheartedly so the attention doesn't go into that tension, doesn't go into the preoccupations and they kind of fade away on their own, both are happening in *samādhī*.

In one way or the other, the tensions of the mind are calming down and quieting. When they

quiet down enough that we really feel like we're in the present moment, we've arrived, and we're not leaving, we're just now at rest, at ease. It can start feeling like a delight. It can be a relief. It can be happiness. Then we go further.

There can be the four stages of the four *jhānas*, which are a progressive calming of the tensions and activation of the mind. Sometimes it's just enough to feel, recognize the tension or the disturbance or the unnecessary activation that happens in each state. In each *jhāna*, if you hang out long enough, get to know it, suffuse it, feel it, really enter into it, then sooner or later your system will recognize, oh, this is where there's still some kind of tension. That releases and we can move into the next *jhāna* and the next *jhāna*. The third *jhāna* for some people is the most satisfying in some ways because of the sublime happiness that's there, but even there there's a kind of attention, a little bit of something extra, activation.

It feels so good to find that which is calmer still, more peaceful, which is the fourth *jhāna*. Now, because the mind is not oriented towards anything, it's not oriented towards the happiness, gathered around for the happiness, there's very little sense of the body going on. There's no pain and pleasure in the state. Sometimes breathing gets very, very quiet. Some people report that breathing seemingly stops because we don't experience any breathing in and out. Whether we are still breathing a little bit or whether the need for oxygen is so diminished that there's some kind of cycling of oxygen and carbon dioxide in some kind of way that doesn't quite require active breathing, exactly what's going on, we don't know.

I don't know. But it can be quite... The first time I thought I stopped breathing, I was so deeply calm and peaceful and unpreoccupied by anything until I noticed I wasn't breathing. Then I gasped and said to myself, I'm going to die. Then I was back up in my thinking mind. Over time I learned to trust this and how I wasn't going to die in deep meditation when I could no longer feel any breath.

Some of that is that the quiet, peaceful mind that has so little mental activity doesn't need a lot of oxygen. One of the primary consumers of oxygen in the body is the brain because we're so busy there. So with the fourth *jhāna*, there is no real involvement with anything outside of the state of awareness itself. That's kind of described as an equanimous awareness or a clear mind, clean mind, pure mind. If anything, there's a kind of feeling of this is what there is. There's the unification, the one-pointedness.

It's just with what's left, which is this equanimous, clear awareness mind that we're here. This involves the phenomenal absence of tension, activation, that's so deeply satisfying. I wanted to emphasize this today because the balance in practice, some balance between be-

ing focused with attention, staying with the breathing or the object of attention, and relaxing and softening, is important. You can get somewhat concentrated by only focusing. But there are not a few people who do that, who don't notice the strain by which they're focusing. Then their *samādhi* gets a little bit out of kilter.

Their *samādhi* gets a little bit off in some ways, or very much off. A lot of the strain, tension builds this kind of energy that's not a healthy energy to have. If we're only focusing on relaxing and letting go, it might not really allow the kind of unification, the kind of quieting or centering that allows for the deeper *samādhi* to emerge. Where we find the balance is somewhere between the two. Some people want to emphasize more the letting go, the relaxing. Some people more the focus.

Different times, more one or the other. But ideally they're working together and they're working harmoniously, almost as if they're the same thing. That becomes a protection from the problems that can happen with *samādhi* if we're trying too hard to get into *samādhi*, if we're straining, pushing, gung-ho. I've known people who have been a little bit too idealistic, a little bit too striving around *samādhi*, and they've gotten into trouble because the tension builds so much in their body, in their mind, and they got headaches, for example, or strange kind of activation of energies happen in their body. So it's very important to see the process of *samādhi* to be a sensitivity to tension, sensitivity to holding, to pressure, to contraction, to clinging.

In all the many variations it can be there. To be sensitive to it so we know how to let go, we know how to relax. This is valuable at any stage of mind, of practice. If we're in ordinary states of consciousness, of mind, then maybe some of that holding is fairly coarse. As we get deeper in meditation, it's more and more subtle. Subtle doesn't mean it's unimportant.

It becomes what's the next, maybe the next doorway to go further and further. So the progressive stilling, softening, evaporating of tension, clinging, holding, pressure. Then we come to the fourth *jhāna*. When a person has kind of come to the fourth *jhāna* and is well able, established in it, then they can be relatively smooth and quick to move between the *jhānas*. The mind becomes malleable, the mind becomes workable. Sometimes there's a sense of mastery, of just being able to move in and out of this state because there's no clinging, no tension that interferes with that movement.

It's almost like you blow on dust and the dust kind of floats away. So you just blow in the direction in these concentration states and you kind of move between them because there's so little clinging. The idea is not to necessarily develop mastery of the *jhānas*, but rather how

the deeper the *jhāna*, the less holding there is in the mind, less clinging. The more and more prone we become to a deeper and deeper letting go that the mind does on its own. That is a miracle. That is a delight, when the mind lets go of itself.

So thank you. We have two more days on this fourth *jhāna*. I appreciate very much this chance to be able to offer you these teachings. Peace.

Samadhi (59) Effortless Clarity

2025-04-24

So, good morning, and good day, and welcome to this next talk on *samādhī*. We're talking about the fourth *jhāna*. And it's not something that people will experience often and regularly in life. Maybe occasionally it's experienced in very particular circumstances, something like this. But even in meditation, it's not something that is easy to enter into, enter and abide. One of the ways maybe to get a feel for it is through the imagination and through some of the characteristics of it which might appear in ordinary life.

One of those is there's a deep effortless quality that is highlighted in the fourth *jhāna*. Before entering into *samādhī*, there is a kind of effort that's being done in practice, sincere effort, and hopefully an effort that you enjoy doing, that you find a way that is enjoyable and satisfying. You look forward to it, just like you look forward to certain kinds of activities that are fun to do, like playing an instrument or maybe cooking if you enjoy that. Sometimes we put a tremendous amount of effort into some sport or something, go for a hike in the hills, and it takes a lot of energy. But there's a pleasure, there's a joy, there's maybe a kind of effortless quality in the sense that we're not having to work hard against ourselves.

So as we really enjoy the practice and then begin finding a way to do a deeper settling, a deeper quieting, calming, and while being deeply centered and unified and really feel like we're fully here in the present moment, here, centered here in this time and place. And then as we go through the deepening *samādhī*, slowly, sometimes with kind of big jumps, but slowly there's a transition from how much effort we have to make and how much effortless effort there is. How much there's the practice, rather we doing the practice, the practice is doing us. And so to go along with that, to feel that shift, so we're not overriding the effortless part, overriding the way the practice practices us, because we think it's always up to us. We're pushing and striving and doing.

There's an art to knowing when to let up and just enough but to stay really present. Not so much that the mind drifts off, but not too much so that there's a strain. And so this art of kind of knowing how to make this shift, gradual transition, until there's less and less effort from us needed because there's no wandering off. We're just here. We're entered and abided. We're arrived here.

And the *jhānas*, the four *jhānas*, are one way of understanding them. Yesterday I talked about

progressive stages of calming. Another way of understanding them, it's a progressive entering and abiding in an effortless awareness. Less and less effort is needed. Until we get to the fourth *jhāna*, and it seems like there's really no effort at all. It can seem like there's no effort in the third *jhāna*, for example. But from the point of view of the fourth *jhāna*, there's still a little bit of orientation of the mind towards the happiness, towards the good qualities of it.

And so in the fourth *jhāna*, the joy of clear recognition, the joy of the happiness of awareness, the happiness that's a little bit activated energy, quiets down even more. And so there's this kind of deep feeling of effortlessness. But it's effortlessness that seems to lead. What's left is a broad, unbounded sense of awareness, of clarity, of knowing, of sensing, of just being, that maybe has very little characteristics to it. It's almost like the awareness is aware of itself.

It's kind of like, you know, I'm nearsighted. And so if I kind of have complicated eyesight now, but without my glasses, I don't see so well. At certain distances, it's all blurry. But when I put on my glasses, everything is clear. And I can see in certain directions, certain distances. The seeing, it's kind of like the seeing sees its own clarity. Well, it is the object that's there that I see clearly, but there's a feeling that it's not so much about the objects. There's almost a feeling that the eyes themselves, now the eyes see their own clarity almost, and so the awareness knows its own clarity, knows its own purity.

Or maybe there's some deep, deep nonverbal knowing that knows these things. It's a deep knowing of what is really special, this effortless awareness that's clear, unruffled, there's no waves, there's no judgments. And so it's very equanimous and it's not reacting to anything and not participating in anything. So a lot of things disappear because part of what the mind is, is an alarm system. We're alert and vigilant for all kinds of things, for what we're afraid of, what we don't want, what we want, and that kind of vigilance falls away. It's a feeling of deep, deep safety.

Generally the *jhānas* are very hard to experience unless somehow we provide our whole psychophysical system with the reinsurance of a deep kind of safety in that time. Because that's another way of describing the *jhānas*. It's a progressive state of feeling more and more safe. So safe that the idea of safety and danger disappears entirely. And we're just there. And with this clarity, with this purity, with this feeling of very clean, very still, very quiet, there's no thoughts at all.

Though there might be still a little bit, just in the faint kind of nonverbal knowing, that you're not involved in. It just kind of floats there a little bit gently, quietly. It has no power. There's no energy behind it. The mind feels very clean, as I've said, and one of the characteristics of

it in the description in my translation, I said, disappearance of mental happiness and mental suffering.

It's hard to know how to translate these two words from Pāli, *domanassa* and *somanassa*. And basically it kind of means good mind and bad mind. It might mean something like a really elated mind or deflated mind, a happily aroused mind, activated mind, or unhappy mind. So the emotional tenor, quality of the mind, is neither elated nor depressed, neither inspired nor dispirited, neither sad nor inspired. It can seem like that's an amazing dullness, amazing blandness. Why would anybody want that?

Well, to be in it, it just feels like this is really good. It feels so pure, so nice, so clear, so peaceful, that maybe describing it as a profound peace, that it's almost as if that's all that's left. Maybe we're still there in some kind of way, with some kind of attention, but the degree to which there's any self-centeredness or self-involvement almost if not entirely kind of disappeared, and an effortless awareness, an effortless peace that we abide in, we feel safe in, we feel comforted in. Like wrapping ourselves after a nice, refreshing bath, bath in a wonderful bath towel that just sits and be completely content and happy as we sit there wrapped in the clean, clean towel, clean body, refreshed body, everything vibrating with an open, clear, equanimous mind awareness.

So I'll read you the description of the fourth *jhāna*.

Letting go of pleasure and pain, with the disappearance of mental happiness and mental suffering, one enters and abides in the purity of equanimous awareness of the fourth *jhāna*.

Once it's pervading this body with a pure, clear mind, so that no part of the entire body is untouched by the pure, clear mind, by the clean, clear mind.

And this is a mind which is un-preoccupied with itself, un-preoccupied with self.

Un-preoccupied with desires and aversions.

Un-preoccupied by fears and distress.

And this makes the mind phenomenally ready for a transformation.

Because as soon as the mind is preoccupied by something, and it can't, it's hard for it to shift and change and be ready for what comes.

So, the fourth *jhāna*. So, we have one more talk on this fourth *jhāna* and the *jhānas* in gen-

eral. And I'll kind of bring it to a kind of conclusion tomorrow, and talk a little bit about what follows, the *jhānas*. So, thank you very much, and may this day be a day that you feel the preciousness, the joy, the deep satisfaction of the way that your heart and mind can be effortless as it moves through the day. Don't sacrifice the depth of who you are by making too much effort. Let the mind be at ease. Thank you.

Samadhi (60) Letting Go of Unneeded Clinging

2025-04-25

So, hello and welcome to this, the last talk on the Samādhi series. The idea is that when I'll be away for three weeks, we have guests coming to replace me. Then when I come back, in a sense, I'll do the second part of this series, which will switch to *vipassanā*, to the clear seeing, to insight. The reason for that, or how this works, is that there's a traditional Buddhist idea that the purpose of *samādhi*, to go into the *jhānas*, or deep concentrated states, is for the purpose of then at some point coming into a capacity for deep insight, deep seeing. There's something about the clarity of mind and the softness of the mind and the readiness, malleability of the mind in deep states of meditation that predisposes it to both see clearly, but more importantly, to have the mind let go of any clinging which is not needed. I say it that way, that's not needed, so that's a little bit more welcoming, this idea of letting go.

It's a little bit of a, I don't know, a trick in that there is no clinging that's needed. But until you know that, don't worry about it. If it's not needed, if you see that, let it go, let it go, let it go. The ability to let go, the ability to relax, the ability to calm the over-activated mind is part of what *samādhi* helps us to do. So *samādhi* in Buddhism is not an end to itself, but as a means to discovering the end of suffering, a means to let go of what often is impossible to understand how to let go of.

There are feelings of distress, dismay, depression, sadness, all kinds of deep emotional pain that people carry. It's inconceivable. How can this be let go? This is who I am. This is the nature of the world. This is the consequence of how I live my life, and this is how I'm stuck with.

It certainly can feel like that in ordinary states of mind. There might not be an avenue in to let go of it in a conscious way, but in this very deep quiet and peace and well-being of *samādhi*, unusual things begin to happen in terms of the ability to let go, the ability to see clearly, the ability to heal. *Samādhi* is also a healing phenomenon. We can't, I shouldn't underestimate how significant it is to allow the well-being, the goodness of *samādhi*, to recondition us from the difficult conditioning we've had growing up or through our lives, which can be so deep that I was really surprised when I sat my long retreats to get the mind so still and quiet, kind of going into the deepest places of my mind and find that there were things I was attached to that I had no idea that I was attached to.

One of my thoughts was kind of in surprise about it all, was how did I let those people into my mind that deeply? That doesn't make any sense for them to be occupied, taken up space in that depth of my mind. That is so personal. That's a place where I should be free. I shouldn't be caught. I shouldn't be preoccupied with these people, these kinds of activities.

It's kind of like being possessed in some way. So *samādhi* really helps. We go through this process of *samādhi*, of deepening the stability of mind, deepening the subtleness of mind, deepening the unification of mind, deepening the calming of the mind, filling out into the vast centeredness, simplicity. That simplicity matures in the fourth *jhāna*, where it's radically simple. One of the things that comes in to highlight better more and more as we go deeper into *samādhi* is when selfing, when attachment to self in any kind of way, attachment to self-image, attachment to ideas of self, attachment to what the self needs, what's right or what's wrong with self, any kind of attachment to emotions connected to self, thoughts, judgments connected to self, we start seeing them in more highlight, and we see that they're not needed.

We see how they diminish us, how they disturb us, how they in a certain kind of way take us away from deep intimacy with ourselves. If we use that word self all the time, it's almost like preoccupation with self takes us away from the self. Preoccupation with self takes us away from a deeper intimacy with who we are. It's a little bit, oddly enough, too much preoccupation in self, caught up in self. For example, in the extreme aversion, narcissism, or heavy-duty conceit, delusions of grandeur, is in fact an alienation from self and losing touch with ourselves in that process.

So deep *samādhi*, we are seeing how this works, and we see we're better off to let go, let go, and not to have any preoccupation with self. The metaphor in the fourth *jhāna*, I kind of see as being expressing this to me in a nice way. As a person sits covered from head down with a white cloth, so there's no part of his whole body that is not covered by that white cloth. No part of the whole body is not covered or sat filled with a clean, clear mind. What I like about this idea of being covered with a cloth is that the details of a person are not seen.

Someone walking by, they don't see something, they don't see their physical characteristics very well, a lot of the details of who they are, what their gender is, all kinds of things about the person are not seen, but you see the general outline, this is a human being there, and it's not just others but also ourselves. We're not caught up anymore with our particular physical characteristics or our particular emotional capacities or our particular mental activities or what our thoughts are. These recede and settle away. There's this beautiful feeling of maybe

a piece of cloth that's very, very clean, untarnished, beautiful, letting a beautiful sunlight come through that's very peaceful and clear, that without even ourselves seeing all the details that we've been so caught up in, maybe for a lifetime. So there's much less self in these deep *jhānas*.

Then because of that, there's insight to seeing when self arises, to see the idea of self. You see very clearly, that's just an idea. That's just a thought. The thought doesn't really represent what's really more intimate, deeper, more full, or more true about what's here in this lived life. Then there might be a letting go.

With the fourth *jhāna* in particular, we are, in the fourth *jhāna* in particular, we're ready for this insight part of the practice. When I return in three weeks, we'll start with that journey together. Just as we've done this journey with *samādhi*. You don't have to have experienced the fourth *jhāna* for this. That's not what I've been expecting through this series. But I wanted to give you a feel for it, a sense for it, for those of you.

Some of you it might be relevant someday, or it is already. Some of you it might just kind of help you trust this process and understand the process and the principles of letting go, of being settled and steadied and unified, that you don't have to go into *jhāna*, but it will help you be prepared to go through something similar through *vipassanā* insight practice. There is a corollary to *samādhi jhāna* in doing deep insight work, and that's called Insight *jhāna*, *vipassanā jhāna*. So maybe we'll have a chance to talk about that a little bit when I return.

I want to thank you all very, very much for coming along for these 60 talks on *samādhi*. I hope that this has been supportive for you and made it interesting for you, this world of *samādhi*. Some of you maybe are novices to it. Rather than making you experts at *samādhi*, my wish is that this series has helped you have a deeper appreciation for this body, mind, heart, deeper appreciation of the natural processes that are at play here, that processes that *samādhi* helps us to trust more deeply. I hope that it helps you settle, be more settled on yourself, more appreciative of yourself, more have greater faith in the process of mindfulness, *samādhi*, meditation, and being present for this life that we live. May this serve for the benefit of all beings. So thank you, and I do look forward to beginning the next series. Peace.