

## Concentration (Week 2 - Part 1)

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Well, come back to our second class of our concentration series. I'm feeling somewhat happy to be with you and that some of you came back. It's very nice. I don't know what to expect. Our capacity to get concentrated is meant to be a happy capacity. Sometimes, in distinguishing the path of concentration from the path of mindfulness or *vipassanā*, mindfulness is called the dry path, and concentration is called the wet path.

Mindfulness is dry because that doesn't have the joy and the happiness of concentration as its partners, comes along with it. And whereas concentration is wet, in that it's saturated with experiences of joy, happiness, well-being, sometimes rapture, ecstasies can be quite strong. And so we're talking about developing a capacity that involves happiness and well-being. It's both the result of concentration practice, at least even temporary happiness while you're concentrated, but also it's the foundation for concentration practice. One of the conditions for getting concentrated, one of the aides of support, is feeling happy. Now some people feel that a little bit has it backwards, because the reason that we're going to meditate is to get happy because we're so unhappy.

So then you're told you be happy first, to get concentrated. Oh, don't worry about it. But as you do the practice, the purification forces, forces of change that happen, and the sense of well-being will come. Every human being has the capacity for concentration. What we're doing in this Buddhist practice of concentration practice is taking and developing a very common human capacity. Buddhists find it very useful to do that, and it's beneficial for the Buddhist path.

Many people are interested in concentration because it helps them in their daily lives. Usually we notice that the absence of concentration is a source of difficulty in our lives, of some sort or other. Some people who have a scattered life, scattered minds in daily life, need to look at

their life and see if their life isn't too fragmented in order for the mind to get settled enough or concentrated. To add concentration meditation on top of a very fragmented life maybe just makes things worse. Sometimes doing more Dharma activity is unhealthy, because it just begins filling up more and more activities. Even though it's supposed to be good for you, if you do too much, it's not healthy anyway.

Concentration practice is a path that involves happiness and well-being. It's nice for me to be reminded of that, and sit here with you and think about it. That is what we are addressing and looking at here. One of the descriptions of the joy or the happiness of concentration is that it's a happiness which is very different from many places, many of the ways people normally get happy, or associate with happiness, or what they seek for in order to get happy. For example, the happiness of concentration practice is said not to be the same happiness as the happiness of sensual pleasures. Getting a massage, or eating good food, or all the things that can be sensual pleasure.

Sometimes scientists, thinkers, have great, wonderful ideas, and part of the attraction for them is the joy, the delight they feel in the mind, a kind of sensual pleasure that comes from seeing or figuring out or negotiating these wonderful ideas. Sometimes it involves a mental kind of sensual pleasure, so that the pleasure of concentration is not meant to come out of sensual pleasure. The senses are not being stimulated, in other words, by something external that makes us happy. It's also not the happiness of ego in a sense that our ego, our sense of self, isn't being pumped up in some way or praised or validated in some way that makes us happy. On the surface, happiness of concentration is a happiness that, in a sense, arises on its own. Some people say it arises from with no cause at all.

It doesn't, in a sense, have normal causes—nothing external, not good events or good situations have stimulated it. Rather, it's a product of concentration itself. It's a product of the mind itself settled on itself. As the mind gets quieter, more relaxed, and settled on itself, composed on itself, it seems to generate a sense of feelings of well-being, of happiness and joy. That sense of having a capacity for happiness which is independent of what happens in the world around us, independent of things we normally seek for to get happiness, is very educational for the mind. Concentration practice is often described as a re-education of the mind, where the mind breaks its habit—sometimes its addiction—of looking externally, outside of itself, for happiness as a reliable happiness, as the only place we know that happiness is available.

If we only think that happiness is available externally by things in the world, kind of organizing themselves a certain way, or from sensual pleasure, then you are at the whims of the

world and the changes of the world. That's quite fragile at times. But if you have some sense of happiness that can be born from inside, that in a sense is kind of natural, or a kind of inherent, or just arises from the deep integration of the mind that concentration does, then a person doesn't feel so much at the whims or at the mercy of all the different forces of the world as they go up and down. So in talking about happiness as being an element of concentration practice, or a sense of well-being or joy, I say that now at the beginning, to remind you that I'm in order to become happy. Or if you feel a sense of well-being, you can't be grim. I've known some people who try to get concentrated by being grim, you know.

They take it really seriously. They get the concentration practice so serious, you know, this is so important. Sometimes they judge other people. Or, you know, someone comes in and is merely noisy, sits down next to them. They get so upset: "How could you disturb my *samādhi* and business?" They're just so wrapped in themselves and rapt in the grimness of their endeavors. It turns out that it's a lot easier to develop a healthy sense of concentration if you're kind of light-hearted about it.

Maybe you can be really serious in a certain sense, really intent, really see this is extremely important and significant. Be highly motivated to get concentrated, develop concentration, but without any sense of heaviness or grimness, or, "I've got to do it now." You can be very light about it, serious and light at the same time. It's a nice way. And then also what I say, underscore to nine parts out of the ten things you need to do to develop concentration—nine parts, whatever—nine parts of concentration is patience. Now, maybe it would be more useful to have a five-week class on patience, as a way of getting concentrated.

But just to tell you, patience is really essential. If you're getting impatient, lighten up. It's a sign that maybe you're taking it too seriously. Lighten up. It takes a lot of patience in order to work with the mind and develop a really, really important skill. Spiritual skills is learning to listen to silence.

So if you could turn that up, the silence up, please. They are really loud. Is that any better? Sake, did anybody memorize the *Metta Sutta* this week? Would you like to volunteer to recite it? One of you, or you would like to try?

Okay, please. Oh, maybe if you don't mind using this, and the way to use it is you hold it kind of vertically this way, because somehow that goes into the microphone better than this. The reason to use it is primarily for the people with hearing assistant devices, and also other people—everybody here—but then there are some people who wouldn't hear otherwise.

## **Mettāśutta**

To reach the state of peace

One skilled in the good should be capable and upright, straightforward and easy to speak to, gentle and not proud, contented and easily supported, living lightly and with few duties, wise and with senses calmed, not arrogant, and without greed for supporters, and should not do the least thing that the wise would criticize.

One should reflect: May all be happy and secure, may all beings be happy.

Of heart, all living beings, whether weak or strong, tall, large, medium, or short, tiny or big, seen or unseen, near or distant, born or to be born: May they all be happy.

Let no one deceive another or despise anyone anywhere.

Let no one through anger or aversion wish for anyone to suffer.

As a mother would risk her own life to rescue her child, her only child.

So toward all beings should one cultivate a boundless heart, with loving kindness.

For the whole world should one cultivate a boundless heart, without obstruction, without hate, and without ill will.

Standing or walking, sitting or lying down, whenever one is awake, may one remember this recollection.

This is called a sublime abiding here and Now, one who is virtuous, endowed with vision, not taken by views, and having overcome all greed for sensual pleasure will not be reborn again.

If you take, keep to keep the—make a moment, and then did you learn anything about your mind and how to work in memorizing that? Well, I learned I need to tie those various lines together. What did I require? What I require meant, what did it require mentally of you to hold that in mind, to learn that in the mind, to bring it into the mind so it stays there? Well, I really had to focus on each line and figure out how to tie them together. Certain I wouldn't forget. Good, thank you.

Anybody else has any comments about what they learned about their mind and how they—your mind. In order to develop, memorize a text like this, someone over here said, so I'd again, you find—no, anybody want to say anything? What I took—I'm not particularly good with the concentration, so for me it just takes sheer repetition. So repeat it. So I tape it and make a tape of it, and then I play it in the car over and over and over, and then I start saying it with the tape, and then I get to where I can say it without the tape, and then I just keep saying it over and over and over five hundred times. So nine parts: patience, repetition, not perseverance.

Over here I decided to take it slowly. So I found out if I do about three lines a day, then it sticks. And it's true you have to tie it together. You tie the last line with the next first line. But I did find as the week went by it got easier. It didn't take as many. It didn't take five hundred repetitions. Maybe it only took, you know, fifty. But I also found there's a great pleasure in memorizing something which I had forgotten about, I think, more. But that pleasure, as well, I actually began to experience it in Shila Catherine's Udāna class because she asks us to memorize a shorter verse, usually four to eight lines.

And just as you said, the last time, I found that what I had memorized would pop up in some appropriate situation, and I'll never forget the ones I've memorized because they apply so well. I expect the same will happen with this one. Certainly when I first began memorizing it, I began to think, "Well, you know, you could aspire to be this way." It's not just a lovely description. It could be an aspiration, and it's—so it does work down through levels, and there is something—I don't know what the magic about memorizing is, but it does become a part of your thinking, rather than just a rote piece. It begins to sort of inform your thinking. In that way, I could sense it could inform your behaviour. Also beautiful. So I think we should be careful what we memorize.

And the other comments about following the back. Pibati found it easy if I wrote it out over and over again, and I found that my visual memory—it's a little easier for me to do it visually than mentally. You know, it is well spoken, and I also thought it was a very enjoyable experience. I'm so glad you asked us to memorize this with my sixty-three-year-old brain. I have

thought for a while I couldn't do this anymore, and I've got into the place where I factor in stupid time, you know, for what I can't do cognitively that I used to be able to do. I was utterly amazed that I could do this. So that was very, very wonderful.

The way that it worked for me was I found that I could remember what the words looked like on the line, and as I walked or ran or I just, you know, did daily things, I would repeat and just did it stanza by stanza, and it made sense. I would be able to memorize because certain things fit together, like, "Well, if I lived lightly and had few duties, maybe I would be wise," you know, that sort of thing. So thank you for the assignment. Thank you so much. Did you notice that—a little louder—did you notice that you needed to be somewhat intent in order to memorize? Had to be some intentness in the mind. Did you notice that? Did you notice that there had to be perseverance to memorize? Anybody memorized without some degree of perseverance? Did you notice there had to be effort? Did you make effort?

Did you notice that maybe a little different perseverance, that you had to kind of apply yourself first to what you're going to—the phrases—and then you have to somehow bring the phrase up, and then somehow hold it? There has to be some kind of sense of holding in the mind. Even hold this here, the part of the focus that makes sense, the word, holding it there, because what would the mind do on its own if you were—what it would go off? So there's a different definition of mental, different mental factors that come into play when you are trying to memorize something. These same factors need to come into play when you develop concentration practice. Some people are somewhat passive about concentration, thinking, "Oh, I just sit back and by just kind of focus in some abstract, kind of vague way, somehow it'll happen." But these different qualities of the mind somehow have to be aroused.

So there's an arousing of the mind, or an alerting of the mind, arousing and energizing of the mind. Different factors of the mind that are required to get concentrated. So there has to be effort. Without effort, there is probably not—can get concentrated. There has to be perseverance. There has to be intent. You have to be intent a part. Maybe it's still, but different in intent, maybe not. There also, I think, has to be some sense of desire. You have to want to do this?

Did you feel that wanting to memorize it was a useful thing to have when you're trying to memorize? Did any of you really not want to? It would be good if someone said that. Say you said you didn't want to. Now, in not wanting to, do you think that made it harder to do it? That was a little obstacle, like, "I don't want to do this." I mean, it made it harder. You find that too made it harder. So I think it really helps if you want to do it, if you have a desire, a desire. Having a desire and wanting to doesn't mean you're good at it, but it really helps to

have a desire. Yes, I want to do this.

That's a little bit different in the message that some Buddhists receive. Buddhist teachers sometimes give where you think you're not supposed to have desire. If you're a Buddhist practitioner, desire's the problem somehow. Somehow you're supposed to do this without having a desire. Desire is actually a very important part of the path, but you need to have the appropriate desire and a healthy desire. The desire to get concentrated can be healthy. Sometimes a desire to get concentrated is mixed up with ego and ambition and, you know, escapism and other things. So then it's not healthy. But there needs to be some kind of desire—"Yes, I want, I want to do this"—and hopefully that's open-handed, without demand or expectation: "Yes, I really want to do this." Desire can be inspiring: "Oh, yes," it gives energy.

Then there has to be the applying of attention to whatever you can do, to the object of concentration. Then you have to hold your attention there. That's be—or I like the expression, "hang in there," get a hang in there with it, just like you have to hold those phrases, hold your mind engaged with the memorizing so it doesn't drift off. So there's this arousing, energizing aspect of practice. At the same time, there also has to be a relaxation. Arousing or energizing without some relaxation will just probably get you agitated. If you only practise relaxation, you probably go to sleep and you won't develop clarity. You won't actually develop the power of concentration that's available. So relaxation and engagement and effort have to be a kind of balancing work together. Part of what a person is developing in concentration is monitoring themselves, monitoring their subjective experience, monitoring what's going on within them as they do this practice, and then beginning to some degree adjusting themselves so that they become more favorable and helpful for the process of getting concentrated.

If you really don't want to get concentrated—lack of desire for it—then maybe you need to look at that and work that little bit. Inspire yourself in some different ways. Try to figure out why the lack of desire is there, and see if you can find out some way that you feel inspired and you really want to do this. If there isn't the intent, what gets in the way of that? If there's a mind, is the factor of perseverance adequate or patience, or is the effort a good effort or continuous effort? What is going on in the mind? Can you arouse something and engage yourself more actively? It may be the same way you have to engage yourself if you really want to memorize something. So part of developing concentration practice is developing the ability to monitor your subjective state, monitor the different qualities and aspects of your mind, mental factors, and a little bit I'll try to explain what some of those are. A lot of it will

be that as you develop concentration, you begin—part of what you do is you begin learning and studying: What is going on here? What's going on in my own mind here, in my own inner life? How can I bring a line that so that it helps me to get more concentrated, helps develop concentration?

This is very important, because some people, when they try to develop meditation factors of concentration practice, leave out the self-monitoring, I suspect, and just kind of hold up their attention on the breath, and one goes away. The whole in-breath, and it's kind of like maybe almost like brute force. That's kind of mechanical thinking or magical thinking: "If I just kind of lock myself on the breath, everything else will follow." Occasionally that can be the case. But I think more realistically, you want to be able to have this monitoring. You're watching and seeing. Then, as it becomes more second nature to monitor yourself and know this—it's called riding a bicycle—and after a while you can do it without your hands, because you know all the things, you know, you kind of—you don't have to think about riding a bicycle anymore, because you figure it all out just kind of in your body. Then at some point, you can actually drop—as the concentration builds up, you drop some of the things. You might even drop the monitoring at some point. But initially, when you first begin, you've got to be engaged in the process of developing concentration, and you want to engage as much of who you are, as much of your capacities as you can in this process.

Can I engage in this in a way that's helpful? Some of the engagement is relaxing certain things, and the other part of the engagement is arousing certain factors. So monitoring yourself, engaging, adjusting a little bit what's going on, is part of the process. In a few minutes, I'd like us to do a meditation practice, and I'd like to convey one more concentration teaching, and I'll do this with a little bit of the notes, the word play, a little bit of the richness of the English word concentration. To concentrate—one of the meanings of concentration—if you take a liquid, for example, like orange juice, you can concentrate it and get—by—you can buy concentrated orange juice, right? A lot of the water's taken out, and it's really the essence, the juice, the flavor, sweetness is really concentrated. Then in order to drink it, you add water and dilute it again.

So part of concentration is to condense something, to concentrate fluid to its essential qualities. One of the ways this is done in the Buddhist idea of concentration is through a word called seclusion. It's a very important word in Buddhism for developing concentration, that the concentrated mind is a mind that is a secluded mind. Usually when we talk about mindfulness, we talk about a mind which is inclusive, that's open, expansive, that includes everything, ready to be attentive to everything. A mind that's developing concentration is a mind



that's developing a certain degree of seclusion from all the different sensory input and all the different activities of the mind that can normally go on. A little bit, it's done physically, if you can, where you go into a room and close a door so you don't hear a lot of noises around you.

You go someplace where it's quiet, so you don't have a lot of auditory impact coming in. Some people like to close their eyes when they meditate, so you don't get a lot of visual input coming in. So including your visual field a little bit. Some people like to meditate in a room or situation where the temperature is not too hot, not too cold, so that the temperature doesn't create sensations in your body. There's some attempt to limit the amount of sensory input coming in, so that the mind is not going out in all kinds of directions. Another way I'm saying that is you're beginning to seclude yourself from everything else, so that your attention, your concentration, your mental monitoring engagement is getting concentrated, getting condensed.

You are not diminishing yourself in the sense that you're becoming less of who you are, but in a sense you're allowing yourself to become more concentrated, more condensed where you are. The essence of you, the fullness of yourself, is not being diluted by all the different places the mind can go and be scattered and engaged in all these different things, but is beginning to get concentrated so we get more the essence of your fullness of who we are. One of the ways of seclusion is we begin secluding the mind or separating the mind from a lot of its normal thinking, everyday kind of thinking. This is very important to understand, that this is essential in order to develop concentration. If you sit down to meditate and are still really motivated, consciously or unconsciously, to solve your life's problems by thinking them out, you might—maybe you'll be successful this particular sitting, finally get it, and so that's good. But you're not able to get concentrated if you want to develop concentration.

If that's what you want to do, you have to be willing to at least be interested, to feel it, have the intention, have the desire, have the wisdom to let go of your concern, your preoccupation with thinking about problems, thinking about life, thinking about things and anything else but what you're doing at that moment. No matter how important it might seem to you, you don't—you realize right now this is not the time and place for thinking about things which are not having to do with meditation practice. Now, that's in some ways quite obvious, but it's not obvious to the little mind, and the mind thinks that it's really important to think about things. But if you kind of get it, can grow the idea that that's not what you're doing here, that's not the purpose of what you're doing here, then maybe you're more willing to temporarily put those things on hold, to seclude your mind from those kinds of mental considerations and

thoughts. A lot of people are not going to be very successful at first at secluding your mind from all the different thoughts they were thinking about. That's OK. The really important part of developing concentration practice is learning to let go of our thoughts.

Okay, let all this go. Even if you just let go for half a second before the things can come back, you still were exercising that muscle of letting go. The more you can exercise it, in a sense, the stronger the muscle gets, and the more—the softer that muscle gets, it gets easier and easier to do it. If, totally, you'll find it easier and easier. As other factors are there in the mental factors that support concentration get stronger, they'll all work together to help you develop *samādhi*. So what we're doing is secluding, but not to lie, not to diminish who we are, but actually feeling condensing who we are. Condensing means in my mind also that everything's included still, so that the feeling of—when I translated *samādhi* last week as composure—is that we only want to be composed on ourself the best we can.

In the initial stages of developing concentration, we still have a kind of full, open awareness of our physical and mental world, but we're not interested in the world outside of that. It's a kind of an alertness to monitoring what's going on, feeling what's going on, to take in what's going on. So secluding the mind, being willing to seclude. Another word, or another way of saying the word seclusion—the Pāli word is *viveka*—and a word that works a bit better in American culture, that would inspire us better and feel like that's right. Seclusion, if people have it, what is a seclusion thing? Is it denying stuff, is it repression? Is it like turning away from the world or something?

Another way that may be more American is, rather than calling it seclusion, secluding the mind, or seclusion, we call it independence. We're helping the mind to become independent from its preoccupation with the world and sounds and things around there. As the mind gets more concentrated, then there's a natural process of that seclusion getting stronger and stronger, so strong that people in strong states of concentration sometimes don't really hear anything around them, or the sounds around them are really not being registered because they're so secluded, because the concentration is so focused. Key. A lot of ideas. So key so far. So if you'd like to stand for a minute and stretch, and then we'll do a sitting. A lot of ideas. So key so far. So if you'd like to stand for a minute and stretch, and then we'll do a sitting.