

## Concentration (Week 2 - Part 3)

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In the world of Buddhist psychology and the teachings of Buddhist psychology, they teach that in order to get it, get really well concentrated with the mind, there is something like thirty-five or thirty-eight different mental functionings or factors that come into play. Now, don't get discouraged by that. You don't have to know all those or even engage all of those. But it's interesting, as so many different things come into play, as if you don't act, get activated, in order for this process to develop and happen. Two of the ones that are important, among the many I've talked about so far, are what's called the initial application of mind, the initial application of attention, and then the sustained application of attention. That's kind of technical language, but the first: applying yourself to the object concentration, like the breath.

I cannot apply myself. And then, once you're there, sustaining the attention, hanging in there. It's two different mental qualities or factors: the initial attention and the sustained attention. Some people are really good at one and not at the other. Some people are really good and okay, I can connect you with the breath, but as soon as I connect with the breath, the mind is ready to go off again, something else. They kind of drift away very quickly.

Some people don't have the ability to really even, nor the motivation or the strengthening to really make the initial application. But some people, once they get there, finally can stay there, but they have just trouble getting there, and if they do wander away, it takes a long time to come back. But both qualities are needed. And it might be a little interesting for you to give you two images or some analogies for these two factors of the mind. One is at one of them polishing the bowl, which I gave you—there's placing the cloth on the bowl, and then there's the rubbing of it. If you rub too hard, I'm sorry, not good for the bowl.

I don't know. But if you rub too lightly, nothing happens. You have to have just the right pressure, because only keep it there. If you kind of lose contact with the bowl and you keep

rubbing the cloth, nothing happens, right? Yet they maintain the connection. Another image is that of a bird taking off for flight.

You've seen these big ducks or geese or something, you know, and they're pretty clumsy. If it's the big, you know, and they're getting off the water, right? They're running along the water, they're flapping like crazy. But once they kind of up and get lifted, they can soar, and they can let their arms out, and just let the updrafts carry them. So the initial application is the effort. It takes the kind of a be there, arrived there, and then hanging in there.

The sustaining attention is said to be like the bird, which is kind of caught the updraft, and you're kind of soaring. And the last one is that of a bee. A bee approaches a flower is the kind of application of attention, and then once it's near the flower, begins circling. The flower stays right there, the flower and smelling in what they do, flying around it. But an oft-used analogy is given as they fly around the flower. So it's going towards the breath.

And then once you're there at the breath, it's staying in its environment. It's staying with it, being present for it, studying it, being with it. Is hanging in there? Takes a lot of wisdom to hang in there. Wisdom, but that it's important to do. It's useful.

That's that it's worth a while to let go of the other concerns you might have temporarily, at least while you're doing this particular thing. It takes a lot of wisdom about how to be patient and forgiving and accepting of how difficult it is. It takes a lot of understanding about the tricks the mind has, about how it gets tricked and gets pulled away into other things or into judgments, or into aversions or criticisms, or into lethargy or resistance or doubt that might arise. So it requires some monitoring of all this, what's going on. So you can't just kind of lock on to the breath, and that's it—became a kind of put the attention there, and then begin monitoring to see: what is it that support is helpful?

They kind of corral. Is that right—a corral? Or what if, when cowboys are gathering all the cattle up, do they corral them before they put them in the corral, right? They kind of the kind of herding them together. Maybe herding them together, like they're beginning to kind of lovingly herd together all the different factors of your mind. You ought to get them all lined up and kind of engage in the same thing.

You like that. Sometimes I say that to trying to get the kids ready for the school in the morning is like, you know, I less—other people have said this too, but do you know it's a herding cats? Sometimes our mind is like trying to herd cats. So a little bit. Some comments about that meditation session. Anybody, what you notice, what you learn about your mind, and how it functions, and how to engage it, and how to relax it, and get a balance of these different

factors?

That's anything you learn there. Anybody on mind using—I noticed when I used that I would tend to lose focus, on the out breath. As yet, I would finish that. It starts to get boring. And as the in breath is more interesting and so attended to, am I to go wandering somewhere like in the middle of the out breath? I am great.

That's a great thing to notice. It's really important, useful, where the breath meditation is, to notice in the whole cycle of breathing in and breathing out. Or is your attention even throughout? Or does it waver at some point, and some people waver at the end of the out breath? Sometimes people at the end in breath, some people in between. They get in a loss between the transition.

Some people, the breath gets kind of vague in some parts, or sometimes there's a number of different kind of interesting things can happen in our relationship. We connect at different points in that cycle, in, out, in, out. You might not initially, if you get new to all this and kind of just getting your bearings, it might be hard to notice that. But as you start getting settled into in concentration, then you probably start getting your breath starts getting slower, more relaxed, a little bit more, and you start noticing a little. But your relationship to the different parts of the breath. And if there's some part of the breath where you tend to not be so connected, or it's kind of vague, or not so clear to the mind, that's where you're most likely to have the mind wander off into thought.

An idle mind gets in trouble. So if the idle mind is so you don't have something that it's connected to, then the mind drifts off and you'll find something else to do. And so if you notice a pattern in part of the cycle of the breath, it's always the out breath. If you wander away, or out breath that's vague, then you might think, give yourself a little extra effort, a little umph, to get over that hump, to get through that out breath, to stay there. One noticed a little strength there at that point, and you could relax in the in breath, for example, a little bit more. I also found the modeling really helpful to help me.

I also notice that when I liked that, I tended to start to wander when the breath, we like the rhythm of the breath, would become uncomfortable, or there'd be like a tightness in my throat, or when I could feel my brow getting really tight, that when I started, that when I get uncomfortable, that my—I'm less motivated to want to stay with it. I am not sure if the right thing is to kind of trudge through that uncomfortableness, or to stop and try, and to stop watching the breath, and to more try, like breathe in such a way, to bring that comfort back. I think that they in different circumstances. But either one is—one or the other might be the appropriate thing, and you could always try to. It could be a symptom just trying too

hard, for example, and using it to relax. And maybe by us kind of trying to relax the breath, you kind of relax.

So you can experiment with and of coming back, finding a comfortable breath again. But if it keeps recurring, then maybe something else in you to understand and look at. And sometimes, if there's something uncomfortable happening, you have to be patient with it. This process is not always comfortable. So sometimes when it's uncomfortable, part of it just persistence and patience in hanging in there. Even when it's uncomfortable, and as long as you can stay there, you're developing concentration.

Another thing is that if there is some kind of difficulty that's arising, sometimes I need to understand what that is. Hence, if you let go of it or change your state too quickly, you might not understand why it's there in the first place. So you might know. So you have a number of options, and hopefully you're meditating on long enough that you can try the different options out different times. Thank you. Anybody else want to say something?

Yes, please. I just noticed that applying a little of effort to keeping my mind on track made a very big difference for me. A very different thing. You had a very big difference for me. I remember that the first week you had said you'd mention letting go, and I guess I was really hung up on that. I was really trying to let go and hope that it would all just come effortlessly.

But applying a little bit of effort, going, a big difference. And sometimes you have to apply a lot of effort. I mean, sometimes the mind is like a wild bronco. I mean, you know some, you've noticed that already, and you know you're on to stay on the bronco. You have to, you know, you have to put in a lot of effort. And it's appropriate sometimes to put a lot of effort and to really stay there when you know you have to come and meet the energy of the mind with mind.

Sometimes it's more useful to relax. And with a bronco, sometimes it really—I can. I'm going to hang on there. Some people who associate meditation so strongly, but just relaxing and letting go, that they don't feel like it's not okay to go. I really try hard and really be, you know, engage. Occasionally it's really be useful to engage very, very like a bronco, you know, until it's tamed or wild stallion or something.

So part of all this is learning a variety of skills, a variety of different approaches, and then learning to use it in different ways. You use different approaches, use it. So you begin getting a sense of what's useful at different times. There's not a one approach fits all situations kind of thing. So you're learning, you're learning a series of skills. You learn skills how to work with different things, just like someone working with wood.

They say so much carving wood. You don't just learn one thing about wood and just carve away. You often learn the different kinds of wood. Different kinds of densities and strengths require a different kind of push, strength of pushing and chipping or whatever, where different knots you have to work around at you, at the kind of work with what you have, but different techniques and tools in order to do the concentration. Sometimes of effort, the more scattered the mind is, in a sense, the more effort we have to make at times, at some point, as the concentration develops, it's said that the effort becomes effortless. And there's a wonderful way in which it switches from being effortful effort to being effortless effort.

But because at some point it can be effortless doesn't mean that you jump the gun. And so it's supposed to be effortless. I must ing to sit here and let something happen, you know. You have to kind of get that running start, you know. The bird has to flap its wings enough to get up there, to get the, you know, to get the updraft. And then it's effortless, in a sense, right?

So I don't try to be, you know. Don't try to get the updraft when you're still standing on the ground. Anybody else? Yes, it took me a long time to stop flapping toward the end, and it was helpful about the rubbing and sn of the breath. Then I got to a place where it was like I was the breath. I mean, it was so pleasurable, but then I wanted more of that, and of course then it went away.

And then at the end, as you, we were coming out, that I was back in that place, and I didn't want to come back out. And I thought, Well, somehow it's. It feels really good. But somehow I didn't think that I was well doing it right. Meaning that now I wanted—I mean, I was like wanting to stay in that place and trying to—I mean, I wasn't even breathing. The end of the breath went away.

I couldn't. I couldn't. I wasn't in touch with even an end to the breath. It was. So did the breath come back again? Something—well, at some point my mind said, Where did it go? And I took a breath. And then I mean, it was more—it—I want. I didn't know where the breath went. It just seemed like it was forever. I'm sure it was just a short, but it felt like it was just—I just kept going.

I've had the experience where when I was new to meditation, relatively new, the early years of the breath kind of going out with the out breath and just going and going, and then I've got die. I got—you got a breath. And eventually I learn that kind of stopping of the breath, you don't die. So, you know, you can actually, it's a choice to go with it or not going to die. You know, there's the breath, the breath slow down dynamically into concentrated states, and strong enough concentration didn't use a lot of oxygen. We talk about that last week, right?

Don't you? A lot oxygen. Now, we can talk about that anyway. When the mind is really concentrated, strongly concentrated, it seems like that the metabolism or the activity—mind doesn't need. The brain uses a lot of oxygen. Normally, always thinking and worrying and everything, and it seems when the mind gets really concentrated and still, then I don't think it needs as much, and so you don't need to breathe as much.

And so sometimes the breath gets really subtle, and sometimes it seems like it disappears entirely. So if that happens in meditation, don't worry. Now, the thing about the pleasure happens sometimes in meditation. Take it as a good sign. Not everyone can experience pleasure when it gets concentrated, so don't. That does not be the measure for your concentration.

But when it does happen, wanting it and getting excited about it by it can pop you out of it. But wanting doesn't have to pop you out about it. So rather than rejecting all wanting, saying, Oh, wanting is bad. Having desire is bad, which sometimes a Buddhist kind of problem. We—all desire is bad. There are different kinds of desires, and so it's okay to want to develop the pleasure, the enjoyment, and actually let it become stronger.

That can be an appropriate desire. You just have to know how to hold that desire in the right way. So it's not greedy, so there isn't a kind of expectation or ambition or clinging around it, but so it's got more open-ended and relaxed. It would be nice, you know, you know, we're not Christian, but our Christians say, God willing, you know, Dharma willing or something. And then with that desire, you can actually start working that pleasure and letting it become more—strengthening it, developing it, beginning to suffuse your body spirit, spread it through your body, that pleasure, so it kind of extends out into your body more and more fully. So just because the desire this time screwed you up, don't reject all desire.

It means you have to kind of refine your desire, so it's a healthier kind. Yes, please. I'm relatively new to meditating—only about a year. And this last week I've noticed in trying to concentration practice I can go about five or ten minutes and then I think I go to sleep. I don't fall over, but my mind—I don't recall anything I've been thinking about except maybe my brain was spinning little stories and nonsense, and now there's not any emotion there, just, I think I need something to activate my brain. So a few things about that.

One is that some people are associating concentration. Concentration by itself is a relaxing factor of the mind, so if all you did was concentrate, you would actually get really tranquil and eventually go to sleep. So you can't only rely on concentration. You have to also have these arousing factors together with it, so you can keep a good balance of energy. Some people have such a strong association with meditation, such a strong association of meditation with relaxation, or some people have such a strong need for relaxation in their life. They're so, you

know, worked up that they're pushing the relaxation factor when they're doing meditation, and for a while they're getting a lot of benefits.

It's really great. I'm getting more relaxed. It's great. But then at some point, they go over that crossed line where they don't actually need to get more relaxed until they can get more energized. At the same time, you can get more deeply relaxed in deep concentration than you can in ordinary states of mind. So your deepest state of relaxation will happen in concentration.

However, if you are only trying to relax without having the energetic aspects also there, you won't reach your full capacity for relaxation. That may make sense. What I'm saying to follow people follows. So if you want to go as far as you can in getting relaxed, make sure you're properly aroused. Also, be alert. So that could be—that's one possibility.

Another possibility that's somewhat connected to that is that you're sleeping. Maybe you sleep deprived, and so, or maybe you're overworked at work, and kind of over stressed. And so, as you begin relaxing, you could actually go further but because you're going to relax to such a strong need for sleep, that takes over at some point. Another situation that happens is that a concentration practice, as we begin disengaging ourselves with our normal mental preoccupations and thoughts, the surface chatter of our mind, the surface chatter of mind kind, functions as a lid, you know, on the pot in the popcorn, you know. And so if you take the lid off, sometimes the popcorn goes flying out, you know. Sometimes all this stuff shows itself.

You can reveal itself. And so sometimes, as the surface chatter dies away, the material that's beneath there is troubling for the mind. And so one of the protective mechanisms the mind has is to go asleep, and now it's like babies. Whether I over stimulate an environment or go asleep is a protection. So adults have that capacity of meditation sometimes. And that could also be something, if something's about happening, that you, Okay, I'd rather go asleep and look at this.

I don't know which of these it is for you. You've to kind of figure out for yourself. But if you know there's a pattern after five or ten minutes this happens, be particularly alert just before it starts happening to see if you start noticing what is actually happening. You can discover for yourself what is happening if you pay enough attention. You might have to do it a dozen times before you begin teasing apart and noticing, Oh, that's what's happening now. I know I can see what it's like just before that this happens.

And when I can see that cue, then next time I can know what to do. So I do to cross that line.

Make sense. Last one here, please. Just a very obvious observation that if you know already that you're sleepy at what I found out is I cannot do concentration practice in a state of real sleepiness. It just doesn't happen.

And so I learned, I have to do this at a different time of day. That's very wise. So doing a different time a day when you're not sleepy, I think it's best when you're doing concentration practice. Or don't rely on the concentration practice to take care of relaxing your everyday stress. Rather, try to create an environment just before you meditate so that you're sufficiently relaxed. Go for a walk, have some tea, kind of make some space in your life as you come to the meditation a lot more relaxed.

But also choose a time of day where the various factors are most supportive of you. So when you're alert if you can. Some people find it best early in the morning, some people other times. Some people don't have much choice, you know, when they do it, because they're working when they're most alert, and you know it at a job, so they have to do other times. But what you said, it's—in some monasteries in Asia, sometimes in Buddhist monasteries, they have these really intense retreats, sometimes where you get very little sleep and up. And sometimes you'll be nights when you don't go to sleep at all.

And I know I've heard of Koreans and monasteries. Sometimes they go seven days without anybody sleeping. So normally that's kind of problematic, causes all kinds of problems here. They say sarcosis can happen and all that. But in order to manage this, first of all, when you go on long retreats, your sleep needs drop, just like your oxygen thing drops. And some people, it depends a little bit on the person.

The person varies. But I found that on long retreats. I do really well on four and a half hours a night, and so I can just do that for weeks and weeks on end, four and a half hours. And when I ended a three month retreat, and went to visit my wife, my girlfriend, then. And after a couple of days out of the retreat, I think I slept five and a half hours or six hours, and I will come in. Something's wrong. I'm sleeping. I'm sleeping too much. I'm sleeping too much. You know, he thought I was crazy.

And some people will go down to two hours at night, and some people will go even less for periods of time. And it's quite—does no psychosis. It's quite because you don't need to sleep so much. But in the Zen core thing, when we can sleep deprived in order to survive that kind of environment, you have to arouse a tremendous zeal or strength of effort. That's where this strength with the concentration is coupled with so much energy, so much effort. And applying that, that's what keeps you focused and present, and capable.



So there is that the mind has a tremendous capacity to arouse itself. Jack Kornfield's teacher, when he had a lot of sleepiness in meditation, told him to go to sleep, to sleep, to go meditate on the edge of a well. Or a friend of mine who was at trouble asleep admitted sleeping. He went and got some kind of bowl, and that somehow would fit on top of his head, and then fill the bowl with marbles. And he sat there because he thought that if he fell asleep and the marbles fell on the meditation hall floor, he'd get so embarrassed everybody here, two heroes, that it would keep him awake. You don't have to do those extremes but it's possible to arouse oneself, you know?

And so everyone has difficulty with concentration at some point. Some people have more than others. As I wanted to emphasize last time, the same thing I emphasized from last time, some people get tremendous benefit from trying to develop concentration, but who never get concentrated. So just because you have trouble getting concentrated, it doesn't mean that it's not beneficial for you to try or to be engaged in that process of doing it. Everyone has a different way of going through this process, different ways it benefits. If you hear stories from one person who talks about this tremendous bliss and you haven't had that ever, there's no need to compare yourself, you know, or be concerned.

Each person has their own way, and your job is to monitor and be content with your way, and see what you can learn, and what you can explore, and what is helpful for you in this whole process. As you're monitoring yourself, you also start noticing what happens to you if you do start getting concentrated, what some of the physical and mental symptoms are of developing concentration, and it is our shifts that happen. So some of the shifts might be, for example, you feel the body gets lighter, or the mind starts get feeling lighter, both in terms of weight, occasionally in terms of actually colour. Light is like the mind gets a bit clearer. Lighter lights up. In some ways, the visual field lights up.

Sometimes the opposite happens, where as people get concentrated they feel heavier. Some people, as they get concentrated, feel warmer in their hands or warmer in the body. I've had the situation of meditating in a cold room and had so much heat coming off that I do just peel off my shirts, my sweater, my shirts, and down to my T-shirt, and with us come like a furnace. And as soon as I enter in meditation, I got cold so fast I fall back on. And sometimes people actually get cold when they get concentrated. And sometimes I've seen people covered up. I've done that. I also covered myself with blankets when they get concentrated, because somehow there's not enough inner heat. Being so there are different symptoms, different manifestations of this. Sometimes there's tingling all over the skin that can happen.

Sometimes aches and pains can surface as you get concentrated. As the body relaxes, the

surface tensions of the body relax. The deeper tensions that are usually hidden show themselves, and those deeper tensions people will say, Oh, my meditation practice is going backwards because now I'm, you know, so tense. And it's not to be getting tense. It's you're actually getting more relaxed. But the deeper underlying tension is showing itself, and you know that, Oh, I'm getting tense. Good, it's working. That can happen, right? And there can be changes in your breathing pattern as you get concentrated. So one of things you can engage with in a monitor is how your breathing changes.

Does it get slow down? Does it get more faint? Does it move a little bit while your center of gravity is for breathing? Sometimes I'll feel it in my belly at first, and then as I get more concentrated, this centre of ground where I feel my breath changes up to my center of my chest. Occasionally people will have other symptoms like the eyes or water, or sometimes to get a lot of saliva temporarily. Sometimes people I see colors or images arise. It's best to not get involved in those colors and images. I'll just continue with the breath, continue with your object of concentration. But just know that happens sometimes, and you may be to take it as cheerleaders. Yes, you're on track, but don't pay attention to me.

Occasionally people will have treasury distortions when they get concentrated, and getting concentrated, and perceptual distortions. I mean kind of things. And that is, I understand in this way that perceptions are seldom pure perceptions, but perceptions are usually, am I usually involved, a fair degree of conceptualization. So if I see someone here and I see you as a man, I mean, that's a concept, and it's pretty innocent because I think you are. But you know, it's still a concept going on at applying to seeing this form and shape there. As the mind gets relaxed, the conceptualization of the mind begins to relax also.

But it is a transition, sometimes a transition period where we're still receiving sensory input, but the creation of the sensory input into a perception, into a concept is still—the mind still trying to do it, but it'll do it in a little bit kind of odd ways. And it isn't that you're hallucinating. It's more like something that suddenly someone or sitting there, and you start—your body suddenly feels amazingly squat. If you feel some, or your neck, or your body feels suddenly so long, you feel touch the ceiling, and open to open your eyes, and make sure that no nothing strange, or your hands get really big or small, or something, or something of that kind of little distortions happen. And so that's also a sign of getting concentrated in content. It'll pass with time.

There's other things that can happen as you get concentrated. That's—but this is probably enough for now. But in other words, in other words, one of things you study or just beginning relaxed, this feeling relaxed and calm and tranquil, is a nice symptom of it all. Sometimes feel-

ing clear, greater clarity arises. So as you monitor and study this, you can notice the changes, how things change. And as you notice the changes, the more you can notice the change, the more it actually helps you to find your way in the future into concentrated states: Oh, this is the way. This is what's helpful. This is what I did to get there. This is what is required. So it's a lot of learning that happens with concentration.

So it's not a dumb thing. Just hold your mind like that and everything's going to follow. There was a lot of information given today. Let yourself take in what you take in and just keep doing the practice. And some of it will be useful. Some of it won't be useful. Some of it you'll remember in ten years, and all you know now is it's useful, and just you know it's your engagement with a process of that's really going to be the primary teacher for you, a teaching for you, and what you'll learn from your own experience.

So the requirements for the class is sitting every day for forty-five minutes. Sitting in the class doesn't count. You can make up for it tomorrow if you need, make up some Eric or time. Forty-five minutes doesn't have to be all at one time, but three fifteen-minute sessions. In fact, if you're new to all this, it might be better for you to do short periods rather than one long period. On Memorizing the Metta Sutta—meaning a Discourse or say differently, engage in the process of trying to memorize it in a serious, sincere way.

Whether you memorize it or not, that's, you know, I don't know, different people of different abilities. Doesn't matter if you succeed in it. It matters that you try, even if you just memorize one line. That's all you can do that's beneficial and helpful in this process of learning. If you have memorized the sutta, then notice that if you don't keep it up, if you don't do it, practice it regularly, you'll lose it, probably. So you have to maintain it.

Same with meditation. You have to do it every day. The continuity is really important. And if you've memorized it, it might be nice for you to recite it silently or out loud before every sitting, both to get you into a nice mood and also to begin the process of concentrating the mind. Next week I'm going to talk about the obstacles to concentration for all the rest of you. I need that all of us in understanding the obstacles, the difficulties of concentrated is a really important part of the process of learning how to get concentrated. So next—that's for next week, Roque. Thank you very much.