

## Concentration (Week 3 - Part 1)

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**May 04, 2005**

**Keywords:** samādhi, jhāna, mindfulness, concentration, restlessness, effort, letting go, one-pointedness, absorption, friendliness

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ing everyone. And if you like, we could take a little bit of time for questions, because people still might be coming in. So rather than starting right away, it's a good opportunity if you have any questions about the concentration practice. And if you can use the mike if you have a question, that'll be helpful. I didn't have a chance to ask this at the last session, but well, we did the meditation in session. I got extremely fidgety, like I felt like I was just going to crawl out of my skin.

I couldn't concentrate on the breath. I couldn't concentrate on anything. I have never in years can remember a meditation that was that bad. So in the thing that occurred to me. Probably if that had happened at home, I would say, Okay, now is not the time to meditate. But usually in a group, I find it really centering.

I just don't know what was going on. It's hard for me to know. But I do know it's a very bad thing to judge meditations as being bad. That label is rather unfortunate. And a meditation can be difficult. They can be unpleasant. They can be challenging. But a bad is a kind of really an unuseful label for meditation experience. The what you're describing is not so uncommon. Some one can meditate for quite a long time and suddenly come across a bout of phenomenal restlessness.

It can feel like you're at the rodeo you spare. All you can do is kind of stay still. You're ready to bolt. And it is necessarily a sign you're going backwards, but could be assigned, could be a symptom of things are being revealed or released. When as mind of stuff that we keep bottled up or we keep kind of hidden or underground in our system. And as the mind gets concentrated, it's kind of like we're beginning to settle into the underground, or settling into the deeper aspects of our being, or we're expanding out to include much more who we are, depending how you'll use analogy.

Sometimes we're living with blinders on, and so not so much is going into unconscious. We're living with blinders on, and there's aspects of our life that we don't pay attention to. And as the concentration deepens, the awareness becomes softer and more open. We can't do. The effort of a kind of excluding thing doesn't work so well. And so then, with concentration and mindful practice, these more subconscious or deeper held things will reveal themselves or touch them.

And as we touch them. Sometimes a restlessness is that they are. And sometimes we get in contact with some deeper stuff. We can get very restless in the contact. So restless, as you know, it can happen. There is also a kind of restlessness that, restless as it can happen, that is a symptom of concentration practice itself, or an itching just before they start happening that you be feeling calmer, or you're feeling kind of agitated before it started.

I don't really remember. I don't remember feeling really agitated beforehand. So I was really surprised when it came out entering the meditation yet. So you know, it often as people get calmer in meditation, and when they have what they call what people can call some opening by this great opening. Sometimes those are followed by difficult periods. It's kind of like you wild to the great and so open in some way, but then you're open, you know, intent always stop them from pouring into that open space.

And so people sometimes quite discouraged because you can't, would you know? I was so open. What happened? My great spiritual experience not so open. Well, I didn't go away. I just got filled. And it's a good thing. It's healthy. That's a good leg get filled. Quite common for deep always. But when people have what they might call a deep spiritual experience, that sometimes it's followed by a difficult period of ISIS life.

So that happens on a small scale, on the big scale what happened. Sometimes with as the mind gets strongly concentrated, there can be a straight, unusual body. I talked to omit about usual perception of perceptual distortions last week, but there can also be a kind of related to that, may be related to this strange sensory experiences that can happen. And one of them that happen to some people is a feeling of their skin crawling, or an itching, or feeling there's insects crawling across your skin. And I've actually opened my eyes in meditation because I was convinced that there was ants or insects crawling across, and there's nothing there. And I don't know why. That's sometimes a symptom of concentration, or a consequence of concentration. But Sometimes, as a person gets concentrated, these unusual things happen in the body for a while. That can be one of them. So I don't know what it is for you.

You know what it is, but most lapse. Normalize it for you and say that sooner or later. Every one has something like that, and a sign to use kind of your term, a sign of if you're really rest-

less and it's really unpleasant and really difficult to stay there. A good meditation is simply that you didn't leave. You saw it to the end. I just simply and I sometimes it's so difficult to sit there. I mean that it takes all your effort and resolve and patience and everything just not to bolt. And the fact you didn't bolt, that's a fact to be able to work with well enough at a bolt. That's a good meditation, I suppose. Or thinking it supposed to be some infinite bliss and some great calm or something.

I don't know what was helpful. But yes, as we've been practising over these weeks, I've discovered that I can initiate a concentrated state without too much difficulty, but sustaining it is very difficult for me. So I don't. You may be talking about that tonight. You say you might talk about obstacles, but I don't know if you want to say something now, but I'd like to hear something about that. I feel like I must either. Can you describe what a concentrated state is like for you?

A: Yes, I feel my breath physically gets calmer. I'm able to really experience it in the body, and at the same time sort of get a sense of the whole body breathing as well as whatever spot seems to be the most apparent. And my mind is not bothering me very much. That feels concentrated. But when I begin to realize I'm not concentrated, I realize I've been following a stray thought. And okay, so one of the things that can happen as people get more concentrated, they tend to get calmer.

And as they get calmer in meditation, they tend it. People tend to become more complacent and kind of relax. Everything's cool, a kind of soothe ourselves in meditation. And one of the great obstacles to continuing developing continuity and practise, staining it, and when the obstacle is complacency, to kind of being lulled into a sense of Every step and school and now water, every everything is fine. And people meditated for some time, and are able to get fairly comfortable in meditation into a kind of preliminary, kind of light kind of states of concentration.

Sometimes they just put themselves to sleep. And I've done that for long periods of time. I just was nodding off my meditation because I was complacent. You know, I wasn't really. So sometimes what's needed is to kind of awaken, a kind of alertness, or arouse dedication, or more effort in the practice to bring some balance. That's one thing that can be there's many things. One of the one of the principles here is you should try to understand better what happens to you.

As it always is, if you, if you, if there's an obstacle to develop concentration, it's really important to study what the nature of that is. So it might take many meditation sessions to really get a handle on it. But to begin looking, what happens? Can you confine? What happens

just before your mind begins wandering off, and you lose that state? And maybe you might go twenty times without noticing that, but you keep trying? At some point you might see, you might see that something very interesting happens just before. And if you can see what happens just before, then it gives you information that you can use then too. You must stay with it rather than getting distracted, and it'll follow up to that.

When I have these sessions like this, then it feels like I'm doing more work than concentrating. What's work? I mean, I'm trying to pull myself back. And I guess I associate concentration with that sort of calm, clear sensation. And maybe I'm misunderstanding what concentration is. In other words, if I feel like if I'm constantly having to change what I'm doing by coming away from thought and trying to come back to breath without thinking, that doesn't feel like concentration so much as it feels like making a big effort to change something.

Well, important part of concentration is learning how to work with a distracted mind. And a lot about working with that. This is bringing it back and bringing it back until it begins to relax and get tamed and kind of lose its power over you. And so that sometimes takes a lot of bringing back. So there's a time, specially when a person you know has a distracted mind, where meditation can be at times a lot of work, a lot of manual work, and that's what's required. And then as the mind gets tamed or settled or relaxes, then at that point the effort can start switching and becomes more and more effortless.

In deep states of concentration, there's still a strong effort, but the effort feels effortless. You're not doing or making it happen. It's like if you want to go for a I've seen that if I go running, I haven't run for a while specially, and you know, the first five hundred yards, you know, I don't like it at one bit, it's unpleasant. You know, this message is coming up from my body, saying, Stop! This is ridiculous, you know? And it really feels like I kind of have to kind of keep going. And trudging along is like I have weight somehow, you know, my arms and legs, and just, It's a lot of work, you have to, and make the effort.

I can rouse myself to keep going, and then at some point, after five hundred yards, or, you know, some point, something begins happening inside, physiologically or mentally. I don't know exactly what, and I cannot get into a groove. Certain of good energy gets aroused and then becomes self sustaining, and then after a while it feels like it's almost effortless. to run. Even though I'm bringing a lot of galleries, it just kind of like it's going along really well. And meditation can be the same thing. There are times when it's like manual labor, and that's what's required, and then at some time when things click, or of then it becomes, you know, effortless, more effortless.

And a lot of people associate meditation with calm, and meditation should be concentration.

Practice should be calming. However, if we associate meditation with calm too much that's the only association we have, then people can lull them, lull themselves into too much calm. You can have excessive calm. Calm always needs to be balanced with effort, and they both need to be strong. And it's often people kind of focus on one factor rather than both together, so that it's fine to get calm. But the calmer you get, the more you need to balance that or meet that with a healthy sense of vitality and energy in the practice.

And so people think that meditation is only by getting calm And so people are so stressed out in this society of ours that they need to relax. And so the kind of pushing the relax factor in meditation, and at some point they overdo it, and then its when you get over the calm. Sometimes its really easy for the mind to drift off. Thank you. How is that? Is that any better. Can you hear now? Yes, right behind.

Every once in a while I read something about the *jhānas*, and I really don't understand what that means, and especially I've heard it said in the context of concentration meditation more so than mindfulness. And I was wondering if you had the time to explain maybe a little bit about that. There was a test of one of the main topics for next week. Yes, here in front. So I've been trying to get a feeling for, I've been trying to get concentrated. I mean, that's kind of I sit down or sit on the cushion, and it's trying to get concentrated, and I'm kind of I'm under the impression that it's sort of I've never going to be able to kind of make myself become concentrated, that it's more or less just trying to get the right tone, the right feeling, and at some point I'll be concentrated, not out of my effort.

The effort kind of get you into the vicinity, and then accidentally you become concentrated canes as a by product, almost. I mean, it's that I think it's good. I think I think it's a good way of looking at it. That's when there's a kind of qualitative shifts in concentration in meditation that it's not something we do. It's not like you can just push a button and suddenly you get concentrated. It's more like you're creating the conditions for concentration. You do it. You have to do your effort, and then but you're not responsible for the moment you get distracted, when the concentration kind of kicks in. So it's kind of a so no for if you're a person's it's kind of delicate thing to talk to, to negotiate. But if a person, if there's too much self, too much self effort, I'm the one who's going to do this, I'm going to succeed, and try to get concentrated, and you're pushing, I'm going to do angim prison, or you're probably not going to get concentrated.

So there has to be some kind of, you know, some sense that you're really doing this, you're plying yourself, but there's a sense of allowing something else, some other, as you No, it's not something mysterious or something, you know, some other aspect of the psyche to kind

of kick in and in and work. So it's kandala, the image I like of, you know, healing a wound or cut. You have to do all the work of cleaning the cut and putting a bandage over it, but you can't actually, with your small little, you know, thinking mind or engineer the healing. You just have to commit the conditions. So this amazing capacity of the body can function on its own. So in the same with concentration, it's a kind of amazing thing when the mind gets concentrated, kind of gets collected and settled and in a groove. And so we kind of do the work, and kind of shepherd along, shepherd along. And at some point, when the conditions are right, or something else happens, eat or sit, work to their doing, lets them fairly settled, and palming the breath. And it's more or less a lot of times, then, what should I be noticing or feeling or concentrating on it now? Am I don't know quite what to say.

I noticed the breath and notice the sensations in some that it seems like I should be picking out a certain thing or settling under a particular sensation. One or one of the factors that is important for concentration is a factor of one pointedness. So there has to be some sense of the mind choosing one basic one thing, usually a small object. Sometimes it could be a big one, but some place, one thing. And it's in that. The focus is going to be held there, but not fixated, not tight, but held in that one place.

So for example, with the breath, there's a variety of places you might feel the breath, but often we'll use an area just a couple of inches below my belly button, and I'll just hold my attention there, and I'll do my best so that attention doesn't waver. Just stay there. And it's kind of a dumb thing. I mean, dumb in a sense that it doesn't require a lot of intelligence, is not a lot of a exploration, and kind of understanding that, not analyzing the details of those sensations. It's just going, I'm going to be there. And of course the mind wanders, and all kinds of things goes on, but I just keep it there.

And this kind of a kind of simple faith or devotion to, Okay, just stay there, to stay there. And then eventually, and the more absorbed you can be with that very simple kind of sensation, very simple object of concentration, to get more and more absorbed, more bold, letting go of everything else. That's different from that is a lot of letting go going on, and getting absorbed, out, really set, settled on that. Sometimes you can get really concentrated, you know, properly Or sometimes we get concentrated. You have no idea you're even concentrated because you are so absorbed in that focus you're doing. And then meditation ends in you not how and I'm in an altered state. But it doesn't seem so altered when you're in it because you don't have the contrast to I see it, because you just like it, just like this one little sensation, you're staying right there.

So then it is. You can, if you want, tether or hook your attention in one place and can keep

it there the best you can. Some people do it with a whole breath, what on a wide air of the breathing, and some people choose a very precise air of the breath. Some people choose, and it's the sensations of the air going in out through the nostrils. I like to do it in usually down here, some people, in the middle of the chest, and then you want to keep it there. And it I think it's useful, in a sense, to think of it as being a dumb thing, because if you're trying to be too intelligent about it, or figuring it out, and try to analyze and try to engineer it to happen, and you know it just is too much activity and business of the mind that's going to keep you agitated.

There is some kind of simplicity is a very simple thing. Just keep your mind right there. But that doesn't mean you don't use your intelligence but you use all your intelligence for the purposes of stilling the mind, of absorbing the mind in this thing. And there is this coal quality just in keeping it there and then. So that word I may one if I said this earlier, but I think most people have some experience of getting concentrated as a means, for example, reading a really good novel. You get absorbed in a really good book. Sometimes it's moving or something. Sometimes, you know, I sometimes said sometimes that you don't need a lot of you don't need a great ability to concentrate in order to get concentrated. The amount of concentration you use to take the written exam in E. D. V. is enough not enough. That's true.

But most people, when they take that exam, you know, are just doing it, and they're focused on doing it. And I mean, it's usually not a problem. It's looking out the window, and you know, wondering what she ing do on Tuesday, and this is what they're doing, and so it's just somehow training the mind, getting the developing the wisdom of wisdom enough wisdom to be able to have the mind resting in one place all the rest of our being composed and settled on that one activity. And trusting it's okay to let go of everything else. Trust in it's okay to let go of thinking about Tuesday, thinking about the D. V. exam, thinking about anything else. that might trust things are. Just let go of everything except the simplicity of this thing happening right now.

Have you ever seen it? Was popular some years ago, these postcards or poster paintings? They were full of dots, different colours, and, you know, you just abstract dots. But then if you kind of, you know, you know, you think tika be people you do these things with your eyes, and cross legged, you go cross eyed, and you did all kind, whatever you could conis, you know. And then eventually, and suddenly, you saw this amazing three dimensional, you know, painting of a mountain, and a boat, and a, you know, pirate. And you know, all Tesu knows is at home. Much I've seen those. You know, some of those, and you know, and some

people don't get it, but some people get it. Or something takes a long time to get it. Won't you get it? You can't get it. You learn this kind of odd or odd kind of thing. You can't have to let go, and you have to do something at the same time. And It's kind like this. You know it's and just shift. Getting concentrated is a little bit like that too. It's kind of like it takes a while to get the hang of it, to learn what it's about. And won't you start getting a hang of it? Then it becomes easier and easier. But you know, how do you first learn how to do it. So it's a lot of experimentation, a lot of effort, a lot of trying, and then letting self get calm, absorbed. And then at some point, something happens, one shift happens. And if that shift happens often enough, then you begin going on learning actually a little bit more how to do that than how to relax or open up or do that. shift that keeps you right there.

OK, it's very hard to get concentrated if we feel bad about ourselves. So if we're feeling, you know, any kind of bad about ourselves, partly because feeling bad about yourself is a distraction, you know. It's good if, you know, it's a preoccupation with thoughts and opinions and ideas, and any kind In fact, you know, it is. If you spend as much act in a fusion, people think badly about themselves or feel badly about themselves. There's, you know, it's a lot of energy goes into that. If you spend the same amount of energy feeling really good about yourself, it probably is also an obstacle to meditation. But however, having a warm kind regard for yourself, having kindness or friendliness towards yourself, having some feeling. Basically, having a good disposition towards yourself, be kindly disposed to yourself, is really helpful for developing concentration.

So you out conflict with ourself, with that as fragmentation and war and fighting going on. Now, for some people, that's a tall order. It takes a lot of years of work to have a basic friendliness towards oneself. Some people can do it relatively easily, but it's really a well worth thing to develop and cultivate. And in Buddhism, you're allowed to think well about yourself. It's not automatically taking this form of egotism or selfishness. Basically, you want to treat yourself. It is with the same kindness and kind regard that you treat a neighbour or a relative or a loved one or a stranger. In some traditions, you treat yourself with, you know, a certain level of kindness and friendliness. So let's start with a er a session of meditation. Now, if you like to stand and stretch for thirty seconds or so, you're welcome to do that.