

Concentration (Week 4 - Part 1)

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For forthright a glass of the concentration class. I'd like us to begin with a short sitting. We sit together for ten minutes. And now, can I give any guided meditation? Just sit in silence, and use the silent ten minutes as a time to prepare yourself, to get yourself here intentionally with a sense of purpose, a sense of being conscientious. And being kind of mindful that you can use those ten minutes to arrive and really be here, this place, this time.

Take care of whatever distractions you might have or whatever else might be going on. And use ten minutes, a kind of work massage yourself. Find yourself settled here in this place. The best you can get yourself settled and concentrated. We'll come back to our fourth day concentration class. A very important aspect of concentration is having a non-distracted mind.

A non-distracted mind is one that then can be focused. Most people, most of the time, will find that their mind is a distracted state. Pretty much anybody sits down to meditate will discover that the mind is always kind of central forces in the mind. You've had to scatter outwards and restless, agitated. The business of the day continues in the business of the mind. The mind is tired or sleepy.

There's all these forces in the mind that keep the mind from being settled. Or being focused keeps it can easily to get distracted. When a person wants to develop *samādhi* or concentration, they have to work with that distractibility of the mind. And there are two primary ways of doing that. One is to let go of the distractibility of the mind, to let go of your certainly all the thoughts you have. Let go of them.

But more positively, letting go of the structure underneath, the let go of the impulses underneath the thoughts: the impulse to think or the impulse to be distracted. You let go, and for some people that works really well. They can let go really well, and as you let go, the mind

gets less and less distractable and more stable. The other way is to use our intentionality, to use our capacity to be directed in the mind, direct the mind, focus the mind intentionally on something like the breath or some object, and really kind of stay there. And then there's an attention in the mind between the force that wants to kind of spin you out into thoughts and that force which you are applying to keep you steady. And so there's a kind of tug of war between the two of them.

And as you develop your strength of concentration, then with time, the ability to be focused, intentional, intentionally focused becomes greater than the force of distraction. And then play back and forth, so that sometimes, for the mind is in a very distractible state. It might be that no matter how intentional and how much strong your concentration is, you can't overcome the strength of distractibility. Other times, distractibility of the mind is really low, and so you don't need a lot of concentration, a lot of effort, a lot of intentionality to get yourself focused. So two general ways: one is to let go, and one is to kind of hold the mind steady on something, so very intentional. With time, as the concentration gets stronger, becomes more natural, or becomes more second nature, or gets established, the intentional aspect of concentration falls away, and so we are not direct our effort any more to stay there.

But as the mind becomes less and less distractable, it becomes more naturally easy to stay present and just be there and eventually the intentionality disappears entirely, the directness directing the mind. We stop directing the mind, just there. But until that point arrives, then these two qualities are important: letting go and being intentional. I think when you first sit down to develop concentration practice, it's very important to sit down in a very intentional way. Be very clear, maybe by talking to yourself and saying it to yourself, Here I am. This is what I'm doing.

I'm here to get concentrated and here to sit. I'm not here to think about what happens at work or what's happening on television or something. I'm sitting here. This is where I'm going to be. And we have that intention quality of sitting. Maybe in your posture, have a feeling in your body: Here I am.

This is where I am. And I feel the solidity of your body here, the weight of it. Just feel here I am. And then whatever else you can do to kind of intentionally gather yourself together, to gather yourself, get gather your being here in this place, in this time, is useful. Then some people will find it useful to do some kind of preliminary work before sitting to meditate. I've talked about this, you know.

I may be sitting in just taking it easy, having a cup of tea for ten minutes, and that gets you in the mood so you can help you really be here. Or maybe going for a run or taking a shower.

You know, as I said, the first day, one of the supports for developing concentration is having a clean environment and having clean clothes. So it can be that intentional. You can actually go and take a shower, put on clean clothes and new clothes. That's kind of expensive, putting new clothes every day, but you don't put on new clean clothes.

And if your room is a mess, tidy it up double before you sit, and then do your sitting, so that there's order and stability around you in cleanliness, and kind of makes it give. It gives you easy, good feeling about being here. And also it creates a sense of intentionality that this is what I'm doing, and then there's a number of other things you can do. And one of the things, for example, is chanting or reciting or saying it over in your mind. If you know you have something like the *Metta Sutta*, if you memorized it, and that somehow exercises, the mind gets a kind of moving and a kind of directed way, a focused way, and kind of gets the mind kind of geared up into being focused, so that once you end the chant you're doing or the reciting you're doing, your mind is more likely to be present.

And some of the distractions, some of the distractions, have kind of faded away, or you lost their interest in me. Some people find it very helpful to connect something that's inspiring about their spiritual life before they sit down to meditate. So in order to kind of so the mind, the psychic, can kind of a little bit straightened out in terms of its priorities. So if you sit, you know, maybe to read a Dharma book, for example, some book by a Dharma teacher, and you can just be reading a paragraph for a page. Oh, yes, that's what it's about. That's this is really important.

All that concern I had about how my stocks are doing, that's incidental. That's nena. That's not really that important. What's important is this spiritual life of mine. That's what I can take with me when the stock market crashes. And so let's kind of work on what you know.

And so somehow or other, I know how it is for each of you, but somehow you inspire the mind with faith, with confidence, with a sense of, You know, this is really a wonderful and important thing to do, and it's more important than thinking about, I won't have for dinner, or, you know, all kinds of other things in the mind one. It's one to do. So all this is kind of getting yourself in the mood, getting yourself kind of ready and prepared, and doing it intentionally. Just sit down. Just kind of walk off the street, you know, and come home, and slam the door, and sit down, and come get concentrated. Maybe you can, and I'm sure it's helpful at sure a nice thing to do, and I can tell you not to do that.

But it's probably better off if you have a kind of sense of intentionality and respect and care in what you're doing, and you set yourself up to do it in a nice way. Some of you might be interested in doing it much more elaborate and involved. So some of you might, you know,

it might be too much, and you don't like all that kind of stuff. Some people do it very ritualistically, and it's almost like a ritual every day. And the repetition of a ritual also is very helpful to getting the mind geared up and for getting ready to do something. There are some times when the mind is distracted and there's nothing you can do to get concentrated.

You might have some major argument with a good friend, and maybe you are able to get good concentration for, you know, for some time, and then after this big argument you find it might take weeks and weeks before you can get yourself concentrated again, because somehow that's reverberating in your mind before delegates settled in process. So there's things that can happen that, as you go along, that might make it difficult, and you'd have to kind of work with patience and with grace with that as it happens. I heard an interesting thing this week in my son's school, there's a young girl who has some dyslexia. I pronounce it. I must be happy myself. As always, I confused the words of that word, dyslexia, and so she's having a really hard time learning how to read.

So she was sent as she went. My mother took her for a week at a special week-long workshop for children with dyslexia. Help teach them to read. And the person who's figured out this workshop figured out the people as they like. We attend to their mind works differently than people who don't have it, and they tend to be much more visually oriented and specially oriented than people who, you know, can read much with greater ease, can only read linearly. And so they do things like create sculptures of all the letters, so they have a visual image, a three-dimensional image of the letter.

And they have there's some words, like two hundred eighty-one words in English language, apparently, which don't have easy images associated with them. So the kids make these sculptures of those words, so they have an image associated with it. So that when you see that word, they see an image so that it helps them to read. But the most interesting thing in terms of concentration was the teacher. I haven't explained to the kid something like this. Imagine that you're looking at a slice of pizza, and then move around, and look at the pizza from the back side, from the crust side, and then move your mind around it, all in mind.

And imagine yourself looking at the front side, and then imagine you're looking at it from the point side, looking at the point, and move around, and look at it not. And apparently, again, dyslexics have a pretty good, apparently good ability to use the visual mind like that, and kind, and move around. It's in the mental space, and kind of looking at different angles at them. You know it, that's going on. And then the teacher said, OK, so then imagine that you go behind that pizza crust, and look that to the wide side of the wedge, and it's behind your head, and you're kind of there behind your head, and the point of the pizza is going straight

ahead. And imagine that you're there, and you're kind of following that point and looking straight ahead into what you're focusing on.

And the mother who was with the daughter the whole time said it was really amazing to watch my daughter learning this skill. I couldn't make any sense of it myself, but my daughter, you could see I can see her now. She can get into an nial mode, and she gets kind of focused in a way. She had never seen her focus before. This image and this idea of kind of being behind her head a little bit and looking down at something was what helped her to be concentrated. So I say that because every one, each of us, has our own particular, unique mind, how it works.

And sometimes having some sense of how to work our mind can be helpful. Some people I know who've used a visualization to get themselves concentrated. So because a kind of visualization image is kind of really is captivating for the minds, really interesting for some people. I know one person who used the image of herself as a soaring eagle, and she is imagining some kind of soaring. And somehow that image of her soaring kanha helped her cannot really be present in the moment and get concentrated. And here's a variety of things you might use as an image.

I know one person, or the person who had the idea of also a bird image where she imagined she was a hawk high, high up in the sky, and an owl has great vision. So she imagines she has great vision. She's kind of to see what was there. I like the image in you sometimes of the ocean waves washing back and forth across the beach. And so imagine the breath is like the ocean, washing across the beach, the in breath and the out breath. Somehow that image kind of gets me connected to the breath.

And generally, when people do mindfulness practice, it's not a good idea to do visualization like that. It's a very different process. But for developing concentration, visualization can be quite helpful. And so if there's a simple thing that you can do then you can do the visualization as a way of getting started. And when you feel yourself getting started, your present can calm down. Then if you can let go the visualization, and then focus on the breath or whatever the object is.

So, you know, part of this, in America, play with the mind, experiment with the mind in different ways, and see if there's ways in which you can begin working the mind in different ways, and the normal mind is used, and maybe that's helpful to get concentrated. It's almost like, in what way? Unity, from a kind of physiological point of view, concentration practice is kind of working our brain waves in biochemistry in different ways, and readjusting and changing. It's settling it. And so, you know, we kind of learning how all the different buttons in the

mind work and the brain work for learning, you know, the different factors in how to play them. And both the mind and the brain is three-dimensional.

And I would suggest, I know if it's true, I should. Most people work on a like a two-dimensional model of their mind. And so to begin kind of getting a three-dimensional quality of the mind, and begin kind of playing of how it would be like to focus on the breath from that part of the mind, or from that part of the body, or from this angle, or like this. You know, can I find out what it takes at what works for you to get concentrated. So there's an intentional quality that's necessary, and some people want to develop strength and intentionality, want to hang in their resolve. And if you resolved, and you have developed a capacity to resolve, This is what I'm doing.

I'm in doing this. I'm following my breath. When I was in Burma, it was observed that when the Burmese teacher told the Burmese to follow the breath, they did. You know, it's patriarchal culture, and if the patriarch of the family tells you what to do, you do it. And so he's the model of the Buddhist teacher. In Burma is the Buddhist teacher as he is the king, the father, figure father tells you what to do, you follow your breath. You do it.

Westerners, Americans, when they came to Burma and had his father figure tell them to follow your breath, well, there was a lot of confusion about that. And you know, all these issues about their father and their mother. And you know, in autonomy, and you know, being independent, and you know, it was not so easy, as you know, just to call a breath, but you don't often. You now said very easy for many of the Burmese to follow a breath, compared to the Westerners who struggled for months sometimes. So this capacity to can just settle down, be resolved. And here I am. This is what I'm doing. It's very important.

So it would be very nice this evening if someone would recite the *Metta Sutta*. They are supposed to have memorized it. Merely anybody would like to do it. And now again, would you mind doing it? Other might service remark, bother 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 support, 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 at 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 let no one despise another or deceive. Let no one deceive another or despise anyone anywhere.

Let no one through anger or aversion wish for others to suffer. As a mother would risk her own life to protect her child, her only child. So toward all beings should we cultivate a boundless heart with loving kindness. For the whole world should we cultivate a boundless heart, above, below, and all around, without obstruction, without hate, and without ill will. Standing or walking, sitting or lying down, whenever we are awake, may we stay with 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.

Thank you very much. Nice. So what I'd like us to do now is, at a moment, is for everyone to recite it together the best you can, and then we'll do another sitting. But if you say, If you like to stretch a little bit, thirty seconds or so, you welcome to stand and do that. So let's all do it together to reach the state of peace. One skilled in the good should be capable and not bright, straightforward and easy to speak to, gentle and not proud, contented and easy to order, living lightly and with few duties, wise and with senses calmed, not arrogant, sports heroes.

And she replied: May all be happy and secure. May all these unhappy her. All the is, whether short or strong, all our in or short, or be seen or unseen, near or distant, one or to be born. May all be happy. No one to see another, the size in be no one on the anger or aversion. As for ease, soil, sati or only child, so well these on a i o the ice of the world, sooty tai love we all around it abstraction I see. On seeing or lying down he is awake and see is a fear a whose its a iii the ones or So then, and being gentle, at ease with yourself, set yourself in an intentional posture for meditation.

The intentional side of meditation does not need to be forced or hard. Be at ease with yourself, but then carefully, conscientiously gather yourself together in your body and mind. Here we want our body and mind to be together in the same place at the same time you're thinking about yesterday or tomorrow, then your mind is in a different time and place than your body, which is here. Of bringing your mind here, you might even start thinking about here, thinking about your body, feeling it, exploring it, letting your mind suffuse your body with awareness. If it helps you arrive here and be settled, it can be helpful to think about the preciousness of human life, of the lived life, of being alive now, right now. Your experience, your lived experience, is important as precious.

An image which I use sometimes as the image of lowering myself into a refreshing pool of water, lowering the body into it, in the same way, can you imagine your awareness, yourself, your being lowering itself into the body. You become more embodied, more here, like you're

lowering yourself into a refreshing pool of water. I beware to settle through the body. If you feel any tension anywhere as you exhale, maybe you can imagine it dissolving as you let go, or soften with it dissolving in the water. And then take a few moments to see if you can find a good feeling in your body, in your being, something it feels kind of nice or comfortable, feeling contentment or ease, pleasure. Or if it's easy, you can evoke a sense of contentment or ease.

Maybe even delight, peaceful delight for being here in this body this time. Then in tuning in to the breath, then making a choice and intentional choice now to direct the attention on the breath. You might begin by taking a few deeper breaths than usual, so that there is an intentional quality to breathing that helps the intentionality of your awareness connecting the breath with the awareness, feeling the breath more fully, more sensations of the breath by breathing more deeply, feeling the breath more deeply, so the mind more easily begins to turn itself to focus on the breath, to be familiar with it. And then slowly let the breath return to normal feeling the breath. And then notice if you can adjust your breathing within the normal range of breath and natural range, so the breath is more comfortable, more enjoyable, and more contentment as you breathe. Relaxing as you breathe out perhaps.

So you breathe out more fully, breathing in a tiny bit more fully. Maybe it's breathing into the rib cage, or laying the diaphragm more relaxed, to the belly softer. Or maybe it's enjoying that very brief pause between breathing out and breathing in. And it's not always possible. But when possible, see if you can tune into something which is pleasant or enjoyable about the breathing, the sensations of breathing, where there is the whole breath body expanding and contracting, a particular spot, a particular phase in the cycle. And then make a resolve, be resolved even, to stay with the breath, one breath after the other, letting go of whatever interferes with that, applying a little bit of strength to hang in there with each breath.

And if it helps, you can count. Stay there with a breath. The breath becomes the centre of your universe. Most important thing going on right now: just breathing in an enjoyable way. There's no need to judge: How are you doing? Whatever energy or effort you have in judging what's going on, use that energy instead for staying with the breath, or focusing, letting yourself sink into the breath.

And it's sometimes instructed to make a very small, little, tiny little smile in the corner of your mouth. And as you smile, either arises or happens to be feelings of pleasure or well being that arises because of that. See if, for some way, if there's that pleasure or good feeling comes from smiling can encourage you to stay with the breath, and that, in turn, staying with the breath kind of helps that good feeling to grow or spread. Sometimes having a sense of

the stillness around you, or the stillness around the breathing, can help you help a person stay with the breath more easily, will help the mind becomes stiller in its focus. If there's any tendency to think about how poorly it's going, don't bother with that. If instead, it might be more useful to focus on how it is working, to focus on the softness, stillness, breathing in and breathing out.

Perhaps you can imagine that the awareness is like a hand that's placed on the sensations of breathing, and the normal at the hand put away the kai. So throughout the whole cycle of breathing in and out, and between the beginning of the in breath, the end of the out breath, the awareness just rests there, stays there, in touch with the breathing. And then in the last minutes of the sitting, let go of the breath, and then review the sittings. Take a minute or so to review what was like for you. Review the quality of your effort. What happened now that you review it?

Could you imagine that you could have been all more resolved or intentional, or could you let go of things faster or more willingly, or be so? The more stress we have, the more tension we carry with us, the more likely it is for the mind to spin out in thoughts, to be preoccupied with thoughts and concerns. The more calm we are, more settled and relaxed we are, the more likely it is able to actually stay present, because no can be so much fuel for having the mind wander off and spin around. So an important part of getting concentrated is to get calm. You can get too calm, so that we watched for that. So you may keep a good effort and energy going.

At the same time, the process of getting concentrated is described sometimes as a process of unification, of bringing all the different aspects of the body and mind in harmony working together. As that begins to happen, and as the hindrances we talked about last week no longer are grabbing us, or different thoughts don't grab us. We're not compelled or seduced into going off into different thoughts and concerns, and we can just stay there. The mind can stay there on the breath without being distracted. Then it's said that we've arrived at a stage called access concentration, or is sometimes called neighbourhood concentration. Where the access point or the threshold for going into a whole other realm of consciousness or other dimension of meditation.

And as a person gets into this access concentration and there is very little tendency to be distracted any more, the hindrances are put to rest. You're not so easily pulled aside. Then the practice continues. Is to be focused oneself, one-pointedly as best you can on whatever the object of attention is. Be one-pointed on the breath, for example. And that at this point, it generally tends to be good to choose a very small area of the breath.

What's really precise focus at this point doesn't have to be, but I think that's often doing best with the breath. And then and just stay there. And some teachers will encourage meditators to spend a lot of time in access concentration. Don't be in a hurry to go deeper. There are deep in these deeper states, but there's one approach to developing meditation is to develop deeper states of meditation slowly, so you get familiar with each of the different levels you can go in, and so you get stabilized in it, and you get integrated in it, and you get to develop it kind of institute for a fuller capacity. It's possible to go kind of quickly through different stages of meditation, and it's got a reward, and you go deeper, but it's going not so stable each time you go.

And a lot of the benefits and integration of our psychophysical being that can happen doesn't really happen if we kind of go through deeper and deeper very fast. So some teachers will say, It's really good when you get to access concentration. Okay, let's just, we won't give you any more instructions and won't go further. Let's just kind of get you to go a go stay and stay there longer. Let's you know, That was great. You're able to stay there for five minutes or one minute. That was great. Now, let's see if we can make ten minutes or fifteen minutes. Can you really kind of stretch how long you stay there? And can you begin exploring the little bit of terrain and what's going on in access concentration.

What are some of the different factors of different psychophysical or mental factors that come into play? In particular, what you teachers are like to kind of keep a person in access concentration for some time, there is some investigation that can happen there, and sometimes that the person encouraged to investigate or notice the presence of five different mental factors. There's a lot of different mental factors that can come into play, but there's five which are really helpful for the process of going deeper. And the first one is the initial, what's called, in a slightly awkward way, the initial application of mind, the initial kind of bringing the mind to focus on the breath or focus the beginning, you know, the first intention in placing the mind there. The second is what's called the sustained application of mind, or a direction of mind. That's where you sustain the attention on the object.

We talked overlay that last week. If you now like polishing the bowl, you put the cloth on the bowl. That's the initial effort, and then the sustained effort is to in to rub the bowl. So you said noticing a little bit that ability of the mind to do that. It's not always easy to do that. I've had some trouble or trouble with this particular one. But even though I'm doing it, I know I'm doing it. It seems obvious I'm doing it. But little it. It's not strange in that is able to actually, for me, to kind of identify it. Other people have an easy time. Sometimes it's easier to, Well, that's the whole story, but then.

So there these two factors, the initial and the sustained application of attention. The next one is to notice joy. And joy can be very subtle, and it can be really powerful. But to start noticing the presence of joy or delight, or sometimes they call it rapture. I like the word joy, and it's the third one. And then the fourth one is to notice the presence of happiness. And the difference between joy and happiness is that joy is a little more energetic. Are then happiness? A joy is a happiness tends to be much more settled and a peaceful feeling than joy. The image that's given is as if someone is in the desert, really thirsty, and they see a pond of drinking water in the distance.