

# 2014-08-31 Samadhi Concentration

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mind, samadhi, concentration, people, agitated, feeling, thinking, concentrated, world, clarity, called, develop, monastery, happening, attention, thoughts, ability, capacity, desire, choose

## SPEAKERS

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So this morning I'd like to talk a bit about concentration Samadhi. I like the word Samadhi. In my mind coming out of the Indian religions, the word Samadhi is as has connotations of the sacred whereas concentration has a connotations of my teacher is telling me Gil concentrated and Samadhi is really central to the whole unfolding of Buddhist practice and how Buddhist practice can really be a support for our lives. And it's Samadhi or concentration is a doorway to a tremendous reservoir of Inner Wealth that sits there for you and a sense of waiting for you. As a part of the introduction to this topic of concentration, I'd like to offer a little saying, the saying is that for a mind, for a mind, which is, which has the habit of being dissatisfied. There's never anything that is enough. For a mind that has a habit of dissatisfaction. Nothing is ever satisfactory. So concentration. So, in Buddhism the word Samadhi is closely associated with calm with tranquility or serenity. I think of it as an an agitated mind. So rather than giving a definition of you know, one pointed focus on something, I prefer to see it as an an agitated mind. Some people define it as an undistracted mind. It's a mind which is at peace with itself or at home with itself. And it's a mind which is composed, collected, centered steady. There's a lot of qualities associated with the mind of Samadhi. It's a mind which is said to be soft, malleable, workable receptive, expansive, open spacious. Steady there's many qualities that come along with this the mind gets more and more concentrated. And also it has a mind has a greater capacity then because it's settled and stable to really stay directed at wherever we choose to keep it directed. If you have some of you may be have seen little babies as I did when I was raising my kids. I was kind of amazed watching my little babies on the changing table with their backs up seeing how completely uncoordinated their hands were and arms were arms and legs were just like flailing around. And I would look at these hands and ask will they ever be able to work properly. You know, this is yet you know, it's said they'll never. And then slowly over time they kind of I guess children, so babies learn enough that they have hands. And then slowly they learn how to use their hands until at some point in growing up, humans have this tremendous dexterity, tremendous ability to refine work with their fingers and have tremendous control over fingers that focus and attention and really use it. But when I was like amazed at this flailing around babies so the same thing is true for our minds. Our minds are just kind of flailing around. And it takes a while for some people to even learn that they have a mind. That's operating and, and that's the beginning of once you know you have a mind the beginning of learning to use the mind and training the mind. And until learn greater greater control of the mind different functions of the mind until the mind begins to have a finer and finer precision and workability. And it becomes a tool just like the fingers can work better and better. So the mind can work better and better, with with control with choice with ability.

And some of this happens naturally as the children grow and develop, there are now studies and developmental stages of children's mental capacities. And what I've read is that when babies are quite young, that they think there's some theory some controversy exactly how much but some people think that babies have almost have none or almost no ability to control their attention. And their entire

attention just goes to whatever's happening in the environment that's loudest and focused and so they kind of wander mind wanders around, and slowly over time, as they grow up, they get the ability to filter out what's going on in the environment to choose and direct their attention on particular tasks, and then to be more more focused and, and that keeps growing that capacity right up into the 20s. That would be the ability to choose and focus and directed on one thing, and not to be distracted by all the things that are distractible in the world, all the things going on. But not just in the world around us but also in the world inside. There's all these thoughts and impulses and desires that go on. And many young age children have very little self control over their impulses and desires. And but as they get older and older, this gets more and more control and capacity for that. And now I have a 16 year old at home. And I'm been in awe of his sense of discipline and capacity to stay focused on task and working. He works very hard at school and, and probably he works with more focus and concentrate At home at least than I do when I do my work at home now it's quite impressive to see you know where he came from from a flailing arms it had no control at all. So, part of meditation practice is to continue the strengthening and developing our capacity for what is modern psychology or I don't know. neurobiology is called executive functioning. I don't know if I like that term for my mind. But this ability to have to monitor the mind knows what's going on and be able to have some control over the functioning of what's happening our mind our thoughts, our emotions, our feelings, so that we're not just being pushed around by the winds of the mind winds of the world around us. Whatever is has a lot loudest call, we direct our attention there. And in fact, what I think what's awesome being shown as people have within psychology is also called an attentional bias. So, we do have the ability to bring our attention to certain things and hold it there. But some people have very deep seated bias about what they bring their attention to, and what they keep their attention to. Some people have a bias to look at all the dangers and all the fears. Some people have a bias to look at their desires, look at certain kinds of thoughts. And there's many reasons for the so called bias preference, preference by focus on some things, but we take our ability to executive function of attention of concentration and direct it. You know, there's some choice behind it. But often that choice isn't is not beneficial for us. And the more active the mind is, the more the mind thinks a lot and is lost in the swirl of thinking and there's no self awareness of the thinking patterns of what's going on. The chances are fairly high. That the thinking that we're doing is not nourishing us is not benefiting us not not enhancing our inner well being. Because the less attention we have to our inner life, that Miss space, we have to know what's going on there. The less choice we have and the less choice we have of what's going on. They're more likely impulses which are part of the kind of, you know, the bias or operating. So part of Buddhist practice is to learn to discover that you have a mind and then to being as and it's a radical thing to really know you're never mind, never mind.

Some people will complain that Buddhism is too internal to focusing inward and should be in the world and open up in a sense, but it's just like, you know, if I may use the analogy of the baby with learning to use its hands, the baby's first has to kind of focus on itself. In order to learn how to use the hands, and then once they really learn that skill, then the hands can be used for brain surgery and all kinds of things when they grow up to be an adult. So the same thing with our mind that there's a movement inward, to learn, we have a mind and learn the work, the ecology of our mind, what goes on in the mind. And as we become more and more familiar with our mind, understand it, then to be able to be wise about how the mind operates and what we choose to do with the mind. And one of the things that happens then is that we go inward, and then with time, then it comes out into the world in a whole different way, in a way that benefits everyone that is connected to the world. One of the primary functions of concentration practice, there's many functions but one of them is to create clarity in the mind. And to be able to think clearly experience it clearly see clearly. Field clearly, to have space in the mind for clarity and A lot of things go better when there's clarity in the mind. And so if we able to go in and clear the mind, then we come out to see the world and be in the world we do so with clarity, rather than continued, you know, confusion or veils that keep us from seeing clearly. So one of the things that the Buddhist tradition puts a lot of emphasis on in terms of developing Samadhi or this clarity or stable

mind is certainly become to get to know your mind, start getting interested in it. So it's a world of difference between thinking and knowing that you're thinking it's a world of difference and having a desire and knowing you have the desire does that secondary second level knowing second, stepping back and seeing what goes on, that is the, the, the, the, the means by which we begin to train the mind or develop the mind or Find the freedom of the mind. So what are the things we discover is the things they get that agitate the mind. And we're we're asked in this practice to become experts on all the ways in which we the mind agitates itself. And, or that all the ways in which the mind gets distracted, or all the minds away from the wisdom of the mind gets covered over and the word the, there's a word that in Pali Buddhist language is called the coverings and things that cover the wisdom of the mind, or the because they distract the mind or keep it agitated. And it's maybe a little unfortunate that in English, we've translated these, the term the five coverings, as the five hindrances. They hinder awareness but somehow people who hear the word hindrance, they think there's something bad in them, you know, that they somehow These Buddhists are critical of what goes on in the mind. But if you see it as the function, the function of these five hindrances, their function where their function is they they obscure the obscure the clarity, they obscure seeing clearly, and they agitate the mind in a way that's actually painful, then we understand that this is actually part of important area to begin to get a handle of, is to be looking at this because there can be no freedom there can be no clarity, there can be no poignant wisdom, while the mind is agitated.

So Buddhism puts a lot of emphasis then on meditation practice and Samadhi practice, to calm down the mind to calm down this agitation. And so Samadhi concentration is crucial. It's very important to this enterprise. Sometimes people associate Samadhi with all states of consciousness, higher states of consciousness that I think in my, in my mind, I don't think that it's very, I think maybe a little bit unfortunate to call it altered states of consciousness that happened in, in meditation practice they're certainly different than ordinary street consciousness with the mind being scattered and chasing after thoughts and jumping around and all this however I don't think it's I don't think of them as altered states of consciousness, I see it that the mind is becoming more and more itself more natural or some people call it pure you leaving the mind alone so it no longer agitated so you get you get the simplicity of the mind operating in and of itself a clear mind a pure mind.

It's the mind left alone so it's an analogy I think many of you know is that of a of a muddy pond, which sails and the mud settles in the pond is clear. That clear pond has always been there. And it's the nature of a pond I guess to be clear, if there's no nothing that stirs up the mud. So it's the nature of our mind to be clear if nothing stirs it up. And so we're kind of Samadhi is a way of returning some people call it a returning to our natural state or returning to what say Nate or returning to you know, something like that. So it's so it's not it's not altered in that sense. It's, it's who you really are, in a sense if you just leave yourself alone and don't have all this agitation going on. So as we get to know the mind, we have to know the distractions of the mind that is the hindrances. These are things like desire, aversion, ill will hostility, sloth and torpor, restlessness and doubt.

Last week, I saw a teacher named Brian Lewis Sage gave a wonderful analogy. A visible analogy for this, a mind which is at home in itself. Mind in Samadhi is a mind that's like this city held his hand, his arm in front of his chest, you know, parallel to the ground, his hands straight, so it's really still and that this is a mind that's in Samadhi. A mind that's caught in desire is a mind that's like this active working mind that's hostile. And it's not totally different what he said but it's like, you know, like this, either going way back away, pulling away or going forward and striking or something, but, you know, it's like this act of doing and mine that's his sloth and torpor is just sinking down. collapsing, and a mind which is restless and has it restlessness and regrets and agitation is a mind that just kind of flapping or you know, kind of lifting up and energized and maybe flapping around. And the amount of mind that has dealt in it is everything's just kind of you know, waving around and not knowing where to go and what's

going on. So, but the mind that still is quiet, mine is still it's like the arm that's unwavering, unmoving. And in fact, that the, often an analogy is often given for a mind that's concentrated is that of a telescope on a tripod, the tripod, it's stable, and then you can use a tripod well to see something far away. But if you're, you know, trying to look through a telescope, while you're, you know, riding a train or something, you know, you know, you it's gonna you can't hold it still enough to to see clearly. So we so how do we develop this? How do we develop Mind of Samadhi mind of calm. I think one of the most important things that I've learned is certainly to know you have a mind to be and be interested in what goes on in your mind to track what's happening. And then, and then bring greater interest to what's happening for you greater interest to your practice, then, than the mind's interest in anything else. So, do you have any ability to choose what you're interested in? If you're doing if the mind chooses for you watch out. But, but part of the mindfulness practice and concentration practice is to start getting interested in what's happening so that the interest is so great, that in a kind of way, you're not in meshed in what's happening. You're a little bit like step back and observing it the observational capacity of the mind the monitoring capacity, because I'm stronger than our involvement with what we're thinking about or what we're wanting. And so rather than thinking you have to kind of focus harder, look more carefully or be more, you know, maybe what's needed is to is to tune up to turn up the volume of your interest in what's happening, what's happening now.

So to be interested in if you're really interested in your thinking, not not thinking about your thinking but really interested to see and to feel and experience it. And recognize I'm thinking you're not feeding your thinking anymore. You feed your thinking by being lost anything keep thinking about it. But that ability to step back and to look and do not be in meshed but to look and observe and be interested is, is a skill that can be developed slowly over time. Slowly, slowly with the mind that gets stronger and stronger. And one of the simple ways of doing that is to use mental notes. Some people find that making a little note and then the mind thinking thinking or whatever is going on. But to use it say the note maybe stayed long enough. So you begin feeling yourself stepping back enough. So you're not inexperienced, not being perpetuating not getting lost. See, this is what's going on. And then, as we become more interested in the mind, then is are there ways of studying the mind? And one of the ways to study it is to recognize when it's unsteady to notice, it's really fascinating to watch the mind jump around and chasing after thoughts one thought after the other. Even if it's focused on one thing, it's like the mind that wants or the mind that's kind of in a reactive mode to what's going on. Is it possible then to somehow relax the one of the primary means for developing Samadhi In fact, to relax, you can't strain yourself into a concentrated state in Buddhism. You can't strain yourself into the natural state of the mind. It's a lot about letting go letting go relaxing, softening. And so what is it in your system psychophysical system that can be softened and relaxed, so the mind becomes clear mind becomes more steady. The other thing that helps it I found is not to take too much responsibility for your Samadhi you have to offer your effort to be concentrated be present. But some of the equanimity shifts that happen in the mind as you develop concentration, I don't think really, we could take credit for exactly, except that we created the conditions for it. So some of you probably have the experience that maybe you sit for 45 minutes, and you're, you're coming, your mind wanders off, you come back to the breath, the mind winners are to come back to the breath, you do it over and over again. And then maybe For different people's different lengths of time, but after a certain period of time, 2030 minutes, there's suddenly something settles, or let's go or releases. And you feel that now you're more settled. And you're here, you know, so mine is not so inclined to think so much, or you kind of turn a corner in the mind. And it becomes so glaringly obvious that it's not so interesting to keep thinking. You know, I've been thinking for this for you know, for a long time, it's nothing like this, this is kind of diminishes me or to go back into that world of thinking narrows me rather than keeps opening, opening me up. And so there's a choice and I don't have to do that anymore. And you can't necessarily, you know, willfully say, I don't want to do it, but as you develop the concentration as you develop the subtleness and relaxing, you come to a point where that juncture occurs and there is something releases by itself. There may be

some start seeing there is a little bit of choice now. You don't have to pick things up anymore. Here's an interesting one that I've in recent years, I find this very interesting about my mind.

The more and more I realized that there's activities of the mind that I don't have to know where the mind is working, if the mind is it used to work, work, mind works, thinking and to realize, but I don't have to work all the time with the mind. I don't have to get involved in certain activities in the mind, you just let things be so one of the things that I've learned is that I find very interesting that if someone does something that maybe hasn't affected me per se, but someone does something which I think is a little dramatic, unethical. Are they doing something unethical than life? I I'm not, I'm not ignoring the fact that it's unethical. I'm not going to be irresponsible about what they've done. But I have comply, I'm more and more disinterested in having my mind working around their unethical behavior. Why should my mind get busy? Because they're being unethical? Why should I get busy and judging them and being critical of them and being horrified by them? And, you know, it's a lot of work for my mind. Why should I, you know, why should I kind of get all agitated because what they do, and so I find myself functionally looking like a much more accepting of people than I used to be. Because I don't want to just a lot of work to do it, you know, to be non accepting. And when a more accepting of people are more or less agitated and worked up Then there's more clarity about the situation there's more capacity for kindness in the situation which is more often useful than not so I find that interesting I hope you don't horrified by me now. You know, but but this idea of why should I Why should I get all worked up you know about something that I guess I can say present and find my way through something without getting worked up. So this is an example of as you become more aware of our mind, and become more understanding of our choices we make that we can choose to let go of things that before work seemed automatic seems like this is just, of course mean you didn't even you know, just it was obvious and obvious, but just like then it seemed like a natural thing to get upset at something and you realize, no, you have a choice. And then you leave it alone. As we have more choice as we have more ability to be interested in user attention. To take control of our attention and apply it, then it's possible to apply attention on particular objects of attention and keep it there, keep it rested in that on there, or keep bringing it back to there and, and that's one of the one of the ways in which Samadhi is developed. So, for me, one of the primary places I put my attention to develop concentration is on the breathing, I come back when I meditate to come back to the breath, come back to the breath, and be there and then stay there, stay with breaths over time, first a few at a time and more and more. And as I do that, the mind becomes or the psychophysical system becomes collected. One of the wonderful words associated with concentration synonym for concentration is unification. Things become unified, collected, we become collected, we gather ourselves together around the being scattered all that around And it's one of the ways reasons I think people feel a lot of integrity in states of concentration because they feel whole, they feel connected, they feel collected. It's a very nice feeling. And then as we get more settled in ourselves and more collected and we're able to stay focused on an object of attention, the mind becomes simpler and simpler, it becomes less and less agile or say differently, maybe you don't have a simple mind. It becomes less and less agitated, and more and more peaceful.

And a peaceful mind is a mind that has made space, the capacity for some of our goodness, concentrated goodness concentration, practice concentrates, goodness, concentration, concentration, practice, releases and opens us to our inner goodness. And there's maybe two reasons for this. One reason is that as we get more mindful and we're concentrated more Still, we able to choose what tendencies of the mind we follow. So rather than choosing to go continue to go with anger continue to go with fear. We can choose to go with generosity choose to go with the wisdom choose to go with mindfulness attention to it all instead. And as we choose, as most people will attend to choose what is beneficial, what is helpful, they choose that which is less agitating. anger, fear and thoughts and desires are agitating. And so you know, to choose that which is less agitating, and the goodness inside of us,

my experience arises and moves through this through us without any agitation. So there's more choice. The other reason why goodness begins to surface more when we get concentrated. Is that There is a lot more clarity. In our psychophysical system, there's more space for these relatively shy movements of the heart to come forth and to show themselves, we have more time and space to notice, our goodness, which is there. Notice that we have a tendency for kindness, or generosity or wisdom or patience or love, many things that are there, and which tend to get covered over if we're agitated. And one of the reasons why they're covered over when they're agitated. As I think that generally an agitated mind, even if the restlessness comes out of our, our bodies, a restless mind is caught up in its thoughts. And thoughts are coverings thoughts. If we're too much in our world of our thinking, then we're not feeling the deeper wellsprings of our heart to be the wellspring of our goodness, which Don't really come out of thinking but come out of maybe biological feelings, instincts, genetics, something deeper inside of us. And so, as the as we have this greater clarity and calmness and, and space between our thoughts, it allows for something deeper to happen. If we're only negotiating our, our life through our thinking, then the analogy for me is, is like being stuck on a you know, these four leaf clover freeway on ramps off ramps, that goes this, that's, you know, that's, you know, never you never get off, this kind of goes around and around, you know, you're stuck and just kind of spinning and spinning on this freeway and sometimes it's rush hour traffic and that freeway, but that's the world of thinking, but to, you know, to be able to step out of the world of thinking is to be able to be on some space Just country road or get out of your car and be able to walk in the park. The so Samadhi creates clarity, calm, it creates a mind which is soft and workable bind that has choice about it. And it correct and it connects us to a feeling a sense inside. That is some of the most beautiful sense of wholeness and connectedness that the person I think can experience. And so I'll end with two kind of stories from my own life that maybe speaks to some of you, or maybe not. The when I started meditating regularly, I started remembering things that I had forgotten from my childhood. And that's a common phenomena sometimes it's unpleasant memories, sometimes it's very pleasant memories that we remember any any of those calls for a different kind of way of paying attention to. But one of the things I started remembering was all these really good feelings I had as a child. I mean, not all it wasn't like I had a lot often but, but these good feelings I had that nourished me at the time. And were a reference point for me as I started meditating. So yes, this is good, these feelings, this is a good direction, this is a good thing to have happen.

And one of them was taking a big bed sheet and putting it over the dining room table or a table over so you make, like I said, guess it's called a fork, right? But I don't know what's I don't have that much of a fork. But and, but so these white sheets and you know, dangle over the side and so you don't you know, down to the floor and you go Inside under the table, and this is very nice light coming through the white sheet, and it feels still in very safe and very kind of cozy and very, like you're just kind of contained and held in a very safe place and the world out there is, you know, out there. And I remember I started meditating I remember remember this feeling of being under the table and that kind of way and, and how nice it was. And then many years later, I read that in Buddhist texts that they one of the images used for Samadhi is a person covered with a very clean white cloth. And so they didn't make forts back in the Buddhist time, but they covered themselves with white cloth. So that was one thing I remembered was a good feeling of simplest very simple feeling and kind of being safe and held and quiet and calm. And then as I became a teenager, I started having some awareness of Catholic monasteries. And I don't know why I had this feeling what the connection was, but there was a visceral body feeling inside of me of feeling calm, hole. connected, warm, it kind of kind of a sacred feeling that kind of radiated from kind of my chest out into the world as a feeling. And I had somehow or other in my travels around Europe for I grew up where I grew up, connecting to monasteries there or something being around them or something. That was the only place in the world where I knew that met or resonated with this feeling I had inside. And so I had this fantasy that I was going to become a Catholic monk. As an atheist I would either not to either not tell them or maybe they wouldn't care. The because it was that feeling

that was there that was in fact, when I was 18, I went to an old old monastery in France and the oldest little chapel there, Center, the monastery was I don't know, from the eight hundreds or something. And when I entered, I wasn't planning it, you know, it was not planned thing. I entered into this little stone, chapel and everything completely still. Just like you know, and there was that sacred feeling, right, something enough for you enough for you to believe in God. But then I discovered Buddhism. And I discovered that through Buddhism, I began to understand the nature of these feelings of Samadhi the nature of the practices nature of how the mind works. And one of the great things about Buddhist practice that these experiences became something that I could cultivate, develop, enhance, grow from the inside out. I didn't need to create a fort. And I didn't need to go to a monastery. Isn't that great? Maybe not. I think I still think monasteries are great. And but I'm happy not to be sitting under the table. So I hope what i what i hope this talk has done is conveyed is hopefully in a welcoming way. That the practice of concentration, the states of concentration, are not something foreign to you, but they're there waiting for you, as kind of an almost like a natural state when the mind is not agitated. And that it's really the doorway, or the space the room in which some of the very best qualities are are being can come forth can show itself and for living a wise life constantly, Buddhism's says over and over again that there's no wisdom without concentration without this clarity and stability of mind. And that ultimately, that if you need a very stable and agitated mind, still in mind, to really experience liberation and freedom.

And it's kind of like, as the mind gets very, very quiet and still peaceful, that a lot of space in the mind, a lot of time, a lot of space and a sense in the mind for things to occur. And rather than being kind of overwhelmed by a lot of things happening at once, or many crowded mind, there's space, and thoughts arise and they go away and there's a pause. Feelings arise in the pass away and there's a pause between them. sensations, sounds, sites, they occur and they disappear or they disappear and there's a pause or a gap. And as you get a sense that things are not so fixed and solid, as we usually take them to be because we're writing so close with our thoughts, that these gaps these these pauses is arising and passing a phenomenon. At some point, you might step into one of those gaps. And that's a great place to just let go. So, okay, I hope that that was okay. And it is the potluck day, today and we ending a few minutes early. So I think it'd be very nice if we use this occasion to if you would all welcome some neighbor near sitting near you. To this morning here, even if this is your first time here ever, we're all hitting it together. So just you can welcome the person next to even if they've been here for years. And, but it's also especially nice for the new people to be welcomed and say hello and then you can go home or please stay for the potluck. It's nice to be together. Thank you