

Samādhi (3 of 5) Unification of Mind

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

samādhi, settling, gathering, mind, unification, one-pointed, fragmented, magnet, whispering, disparate, conflict, hold, teacher, peaceful, include, palms, calm, this too, *samāhita*, *ekodi*, *samahāda*

Gil Fronsdal

The theme of this week is concentration or *samādhi*. The word *samādhi* is more or less a noun. It is related to two verbs: *samahāda* and *samāhita*. These two words, which are more the activity than what *samādhi* speaks to, have the meaning of placing something together, bringing together, unifying, gathering together.

Samādhi is not a laser focus of the mind, but gathering together, bringing together. I like the word 'compose.' Everything gets composed. All of who we are, gets composed together – ends up coming into harmony, into unity. One of the words related to *samādhi* is *ekodi*, sometimes translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi as 'unified,' and by another monk, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, as 'unity.' The idea of unification, of bringing into harmony, is a very different feeling for *samādhi* than the idea of a laser focus of the mind.

The dictionary definition of *samādhi* has two meanings. One meaning is, "the action or power of focusing one's attention, or mental effort." The other meaning is, "a close gathering of people or things – the action of gathering together closely." Both of these meanings are related to what *samādhi* means in the Buddhist tradition.

One of the ways that this comes together is that we're building on the idea of settling the mind, or settling our experience, settling *into* our experience. Rather than a laser focus, it's that everything settles to the bottom, like marbles in a bowl. The marbles settle into the bottom of the bowl, and sit there at rest – settling, gathering together all the disparate parts of who we are.

It's very easy to end up living a life that's fragmented. For example, if I tripped this morning and injured my foot in the dark, part of my body sitting here could be feeling the mild trauma of this, or the fear of falling. Another part of me might be sitting here feeling delighted to be together with all of you in this way, sharing the Dharma. My mind might be thinking about what's for lunch, and wondering what I'll find in the refrigerator. Then I might be with a conversation I had yesterday, and the challenges or the delights of that conversation. Then I'm wondering about this and that. My intention is to try to be focused on my breathing.

All these different things are going on almost at once, kind of swimming around, bouncing around – the mind is fragmented, divided, agitated, spinning around. The process of *samādhi* is settling and gathering together, so that all the disparate parts of ourselves are no longer fragmented, but are gathered together and work together.

Our attention, our intention – our physicality (the physical sensations of our body), our emotionality (our emotional experience), our cognitive experience (the thoughts we might be having) – are all gathered together for the same purpose in meditation.

For example, if we're concentrating on breathing, all these different parts of us are coming together, being gathered together, to hold the experience of breathing, or to be together with experience of breathing, to be in harmony – this gathering together.

Now you don't have to work too hard at this. It's enough that we're trying to overcome any sense of conflict with anything when we meditate. There's nothing that is considered wrong or something to be gotten rid of. It's just something else to be held: "You too come here. Come here and let me hold you. Let me include you here." Not including that we're going to keep thinking! But the thinking mind just relaxes: "It's okay. Be here."

When my older son was quite young – probably three years old – he went to a preschool with marvelous teachers. They were kind of my heroes – the goodness they brought to the children was one of the best things going. I felt like these are the people who are creating the foundations for a wonderful society. They were kind, generous, and wise.

There was one thing that I really loved to watch when I sometimes visited the classroom. These three- or four-year-old kids were playing, running around like crazy, yelling and screaming, doing what three-year-olds do. When it was time for something different to happen, one of the teachers would stand tall in the middle of the classroom, and begin to whisper. They were not trying to stop the kids from playing or anything. They just stood there, whispering.

The kids nearby would notice, and they would come and sit in front of the teacher. Slowly other kids, and then the whole class would hear the whispering. They'd all gather together and sit around the teacher, and then the teacher would sit down and tell the story.

It's possible the kids knew what was coming (a story). But the idea of not forcing the kids to be quiet, or to stop what they're doing – and instead to harmonize, and gather together in this peaceful way. The whole classroom got settled and quiet.

It's a bit like when I was in elementary school. I remember having a little red U-shaped magnet. I would pull it across the sand in the sand box. There were little metallic iron flint particles in the sand. If I'd go back and forth in a straight line, the little iron pieces would arrange themselves in a line. This is like the idea is of coming back to the breathing – let the breathing be the whispering, or the magnet – and everything begins to settle. Everything gathers together – settling, and holding together.

Earlier in the week I talked about settling and centering the mind. As the attention gets centered, steadied, and settled, it becomes the gathering place, the magnet and support – *if* we don't keep giving the energy of our mind to distractions and other things in the wrong way. The consequence of this gathering together, settling, unification, and harmony is – for the Buddha – that we become peaceful. The direction that *samādhi* takes us towards is peace.

One sense of peace is the lack of conflict. If you find yourself in conflict with anything at all when you're meditating, you might want to see if there's some other perspective with which to hold it.

Maybe this matter will be forever – so then just hold it and include it. Maybe there's a way of not being in conflict with it, but also not caught up with or involved in it. You make room for it. You hold it in the palms of awareness: "This too is included. This too."

I like the image of the palms holding something – the palms themselves are silent – without words or ideas. To let something be held in the palms of awareness is to allow things to settle into quiet stillness. My mind might still be thinking, but I'm not living in the thoughts. I'm not identified with the thoughts, or so interested in the thoughts.

I'm interested in holding everything, and everything coming together, settling in. To have that happen with something like the breathing does become a kind of one-pointedness. But it's one-pointedness of everything coming together into one place – as opposed to forcing the mind.

What meditation, concentration, *samādhi* has to do is letting go, relaxation. The movement of applying oneself and then sustaining attention is like coming back to rest in awareness, and then staying there for a while. Open. Include everything.

Finally, the idea of, "This too," instead of having conflict with anything. This too in some way should be included. This too is held in awareness. This too is brought together into harmonizing, gathering together, becoming composed and unified in the present moment. *Samādhi* as the unification of mind.

As I've said before, most of the time we are beginners. Just keep coming back and letting go. Center yourself over and over again on your experience. Once you can do that a little bit, then you can move into connecting and sustaining attention. As that continues over and over again, connecting and sustaining – and the sustaining becomes longer – then it naturally begins to be like a magnet that pulls everything else together. Things settle, let go, and come together. Over time, with *samādhi*, you'll experience more and more really being here and settled.

One word for unification of mind, which may be more meaningful for some of you, is calming the mind. Everything becomes calm.

The Buddha said that the support for deepening concentration is happiness. That will be the topic for tomorrow.

I hope the ideas of unification, "This too," and including everything also point towards a way of being in the world where your presence promotes non-conflict, and supports everyone else to find some peace and settledness.

May all beings be peaceful! Thank you.