

Dharma *Samādhi* (5 of 5) Concentration

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Dharma *samādhi* is concentration. The word “*samādhi*” probably means something closer to “unification” or “gathering together” than “concentration.” Unification is one of the aspects of concentration. I think of it as becoming whole. The movement towards this gathering together and unification means including everything – “This too.” If we’re practicing the Dharma, we get a wonderful lesson – when things don’t work, this too gets to be included.

Practice Notes:

To be awake, you don’t actually have to do anything special or change anything that is going on. You can bring a wakeful presence to whatever is going on. There is something very profound about starting with exactly where you are. Then, ask yourself the question, “If the movement of practice is to be inclusive, what needs to be included right now so that you’re more fully present? What needs to be included so you’re not resisting anything or having the idea that this shouldn’t be happening?” (If only this wasn’t happening, then I could meditate.)

If the idea of being inclusive in practice begins with your body, you might see if you can have a global awareness of your body where everything is allowed to be included – that which is pleasant and comfortable, and that which is unpleasant or uncomfortable. There can be a space of global awareness where there is safety, and an acceptance of all of it, here.

This global awareness can also be inclusive of your emotions, how you’re feeling, and the mood that you’re in. It can be inclusive of what’s happening in your thinking mind. You don’t have to get involved with them, but in a sense, you can be bigger, wider, and more global than anything you might think about. Imagine that this global awareness of all of what you are, with nothing excluded is like a big round ball. At the center of the ball is your breathing, maybe in some particular location where the breathing is most clearly felt in your body.

From the center of the globe, you rest. You are aware, with open boundaries, open space. Sitting at the center. With no edges to this globe. Sitting at the center where it’s quiet, there is the quiet breathing. It is quiet, in that breathing itself is not thinking. Thoughts and feelings are in the orbit of the globe, but they’re not at the center. Letting go into the breathing. Letting go into the center of all things. Everything else is allowed to be perceived by the gentle rhythm of breathing in and breathing out at the center.

Appreciate that things did not unfold as expected or as planned today. This is the nature of the world – things often don’t unfold the way they’re planned. What is it like to take care of what needs to be taken care of in a simple way while the mind stays free and at ease? Perhaps it is not necessary to sacrifice the mind’s ease as often as people do. The important thing is to take care of what we can take care of and to stay close to our freedom, our ease, our love, our kindness, and our generosity.

We have wonderful capacities within us. We have capacities for generosity, friendliness, love, ease, and peace within. We have capacities for calm, wisdom, and clarity. As we do Dharma practice, some of these capacities become clear and we start to feel more acutely and more clearly some of the potentials we have. That gives us an opportunity to make choices of whether or not to value those capacities, whether or not to give some priority to them, and whether or not to avoid sacrificing them.

As Dharma practice deepens, there’s more and more the sense that if we’re in touch with something good, losing it is a sacrifice. We are giving up something, and we have some choice about this. We can choose not to pick up the reactivity. We will be reactive, but we can just let it be.

This is where learning how to develop concentration can be helpful – if concentration is understood not as a deep, absorbed focus of the mind (which it can be sometimes), but rather, as a movement towards “This too – This too I’ll include. This too I’ll include, but I don’t have to pick it up. I don’t have to become it. It’s just part of the periphery. It’s part of the big picture, but I don’t have to be identified with it.”

We might be impatient, but the impatience doesn’t have to be who we are. We can see the impatience. We don’t have to be impatient with the impatience. This too gets included, but including it doesn’t mean we become it. It doesn’t mean that we become experts at enacting impatience. It means that the impatience is just there in the global awareness where we can hold all things.

So we use concentration practice partly as a teacher of how to be inclusive. When we use concentration practice to get a narrow focus, to really zero in – which is possible and quite nice sometimes – it’s too easy to get the idea that we’re supposed to be one way and not another way. There can be resistance or even hostility towards all kinds of aspects of who we are, such as distracted thoughts or feelings of agitation.

The movement we’re going in the Dharma is toward learning not to be agitated by anything, not to be aversive or hostile towards anything – to be inclusive. This is not an inclusivity where we accept everything as if we’re supposed to just continue barreling ahead being an awful person, angry or mean. This is an inclusivity that allows everything to be in the wider field of global awareness, but we don’t pick up what is not useful, not skillful. We let things be.

Somehow it feels a little bit incomplete to end this Dharma *samādhi* series with this approach to concentration. But that’s the way it is sometimes. Things don’t turn out how we want them to be or how they should be. Sometimes we’re left unsatisfied and incomplete. If being incomplete is not part of the completion of this wholeness, then we’re in trouble. Maybe it’s better we didn’t do it just right because now you’re getting a better sense of what Dharma can be about, and what freedom can be about than if we had done it just right. If I had given a really profound teaching on concentration that just wowed you, that would have been a disaster. Then you would have thought that this is what it’s about. But now because it didn’t work out right, this is what it’s about – you are learning to be at ease with this as well. Thank you.