

Samadhi (58) Deepening By Releasing

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So, good morning and welcome to this series on *samādhi*. I think we're now on the 58th talk, and discussing the fourth *jhāna*. To step back to have a little bit of a different orientation to understanding this whole process of *samādhi*, sometimes it's said to be a continuous process of letting go. That's what's required in attaining a deep *samādhi*. Another way that is similar is that *samādhi* has a lot to do with relaxing or letting up on all the ways in which attention has been hijacked or harnessed into our attachments, into pressure, into subtle ways that the mind grabs onto or pushes along its thoughts.

There are subtle ways in which we're reacting to our feelings and how we are, subtle ways, maybe not so subtle ways, in which we're very involved with kind of pressure or contraction or tightness or leaning into whatever attention is directed towards. If it's directed towards thinking, there can be a lot of it. That process of becoming sensitive to that holding, that pressure, that push, that preoccupation around anything at all, the way attention zeroes in, is important. Sometimes it's innocent enough. If you've lost your keys, then there's some part of the mind that's now intent on finding the keys, looking for the keys. There might be a subtle kind of tautness, intentionality in the mind.

Or there might be fear and anxiety and desperation, so now the mind has really gotten tight, really gotten narrow, holding on. There can be a healthy tautness, a healthy kind of engagement. Or there can be all this extra stuff. This meditation is a place to become very sensitive to the tension, the pressure, the strain that we add. Sometimes it's pretty soft. In ordinary mind states, we don't see the tension.

But as the mind gets quieter in meditation, we start noticing what wasn't noticed before because now we're quiet enough to start feeling more deeply what's happening. We're not preoccupied, we're not caught up in the thoughts and ideas. Then we start feeling the cost, feeling the tightness, the tension, the strain. Sometimes with mindfulness, just feeling it carefully is enough for it to begin to soften and dissolve. The process of *samādhi*, whether it's feeling the tension letting it dissolve or whether it's staying on the breath, focusing on the breath wholeheartedly so the attention doesn't go into that tension, doesn't go into the preoccupations and they kind of fade away on their own, both are happening in *samādhi*.

In one way or the other, the tensions of the mind are calming down and quieting. When they quiet down enough that we really feel like we're in the present moment, we've arrived, and we're not leaving, we're just now at rest, at ease. It can start feeling like a delight. It can be a relief. It can be happiness. Then we go further.

There can be the four stages of the four *jhānas*, which are a progressive calming of the tensions and activation of the mind. Sometimes it's just enough to feel, recognize the tension or the disturbance or the unnecessary activation that happens in each state. In each *jhāna*, if you hang out long enough, get to know it, suffuse it, feel it, really enter into it, then sooner or later your system will recognize, oh, this is where there's still some kind of tension. That releases and we can move into the next *jhāna* and the next *jhāna*. The third *jhāna* for some people is the most satisfying in some ways because of the sublime happiness that's there, but even there there's a kind of attention, a little bit of something extra, activation.

It feels so good to find that which is calmer still, more peaceful, which is the fourth *jhāna*. Now, because the mind is not oriented towards anything, it's not oriented towards the happiness, gathered around for the happiness, there's very little sense of the body going on. There's no pain and pleasure in the state. Sometimes breathing gets very, very quiet. Some people report that breathing seemingly stops because we don't experience any breathing in and out. Whether we are still breathing a little bit or whether the need for oxygen is so diminished that there's some kind of cycling of oxygen and carbon dioxide in some kind of way that doesn't quite require active breathing, exactly what's going on, we don't know.

I don't know. But it can be quite... The first time I thought I stopped breathing, I was so deeply calm and peaceful and unpreoccupied by anything until I noticed I wasn't breathing. Then I gasped and said to myself, I'm going to die. Then I was back up in my thinking mind. Over time I learned to trust this and how I wasn't going to die in deep meditation when I could no longer feel any breath.

Some of that is that the quiet, peaceful mind that has so little mental activity doesn't need a lot of oxygen. One of the primary consumers of oxygen in the body is the brain because we're so busy there. So with the fourth *jhāna*, there is no real involvement with anything outside of the state of awareness itself. That's kind of described as an equanimous awareness or a clear mind, clean mind, pure mind. If anything, there's a kind of feeling of this is what there is. There's the unification, the one-pointedness.

It's just with what's left, which is this equanimous, clear awareness mind that we're here. This involves the phenomenal absence of tension, activation, that's so deeply satisfying. I wanted to emphasize this today because the balance in practice, some balance between being focused with attention, staying with the breathing or the object of attention, and relaxing and softening, is important. You can get somewhat concentrated by only focusing. But there are not a few people who do that, who don't notice the strain by which they're focusing. Then their *samādhi* gets a little bit out of kilter.

Their *samādhi* gets a little bit off in some ways, or very much off. A lot of the strain, tension builds this kind of energy that's not a healthy energy to have. If we're only focusing on relaxing and letting go, it might not really allow the kind of unification, the kind of quieting or centering that allows for the deeper *samādhi* to emerge. Where we find the balance is somewhere between the two. Some people want to emphasize more the letting go, the relaxing. Some people more the focus.

Different times, more one or the other. But ideally they're working together and they're working harmoniously, almost as if they're the same thing. That becomes a protection from the problems that can happen with *samādhi* if we're trying too hard to get into *samādhi*, if we're straining, pushing, gung-ho. I've known people who have been a little bit too idealistic, a little bit too striving around *samādhi*, and they've gotten into trouble because the tension builds so much in their body, in their mind, and they got headaches, for example, or strange kind of activation of energies happen in their body. So it's very important to see the process of *samādhi* to be a sensitivity to tension, sensitivity to holding, to pressure, to contraction, to clinging.

In all the many variations it can be there. To be sensitive to it so we know how to let go, we know how to relax. This is valuable at any stage of mind, of practice. If we're in ordinary states of consciousness, of mind, then maybe some of that holding is fairly coarse. As we get deeper in meditation, it's more and more subtle. Subtle doesn't mean it's unimportant.

It becomes what's the next, maybe the next doorway to go further and further. So the progressive stilling, softening, evaporating of tension, clinging, holding, pressure. Then we come to the fourth *jhāna*. When a person has kind of come to the fourth *jhāna* and is well able, established in it, then they can be relatively smooth and quick to move between the *jhānas*. The mind becomes malleable, the mind becomes workable. Sometimes there's a sense of mastery, of just being able to move in and out of this state because there's no clinging, no tension that interferes with that movement.

It's almost like you blow on dust and the dust kind of floats away. So you just blow in the direction in these concentration states and you kind of move between them because there's so little clinging. The idea is not to necessarily develop mastery of the *jhānas*, but rather how the deeper the *jhāna*, the less holding there is in the mind, less clinging. The more and more prone we become to a deeper and deeper letting go that the mind does on its own. That is a miracle. That is a delight, when the mind lets go of itself.

So thank you. We have two more days on this fourth *jhāna*. I appreciate very much this chance to be able to offer you these teachings. Peace.