

# Samādhi (12) Settling Through Counting

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Hello, and welcome to this series on *samādhi*. We are moving slowly into *samādhi*. Sometimes I think of *samādhi* as settling, as a settledness. *Samādhi* is settledness.

When we sit down to meditate, it is often good to start with the idea of discovery, to discover how we are. How are we right now? One of the questions we can ask is, "Given how I am, what is unsettled that may be good to settle?" We may not be able to settle ideas about things in the world, something outside of ourselves, or the problems we have. But we could settle the mind's agitation and the heart's activation around things that feel unsettled.

Meditation can highlight where we are unsettled inside. Then we can ask, "How do we settle this?" There are many answers. When it is hard to stay focused on meditation, and the mind wanders off, we can become settled just knowing that this is what is happening. We can fold a distracted mind into meditation in this way. We can offer a massage to the mind. There is a natural process – a cycle of wandering off and returning, wandering off and beginning again.

That cycle provides a massage. We don't know what's being softened, kneaded, and relaxed, but we appreciate that there is a cycle. Our job is to come back. Our job is to wake up and be connected here again. We know we are going to wander off, but we relax and settle. This is a process. As soon as we notice we have wandered off, we relax and are at ease. We know, "Oh, good. Come back. Be here. Show up here again." We are going along, going along.

If we are counting the breath, the in-breath and the out-breath, we are less likely to wander off because we have a reference point. We are more likely to notice when we wander off. One of the values of counting is to notice when this massage is operating. We can be part of this more intimately, more closely.

Count one for the inhale. If we are counting two for the exhale, and we don't say two, we might be drifting off. If we are able to say two for the exhale, we might see that we are not really here. It has become mechanical. It has become automatic because now we are drifting off in thought. That gives us a clue that we are drifting sooner than normal.

If we don't catch it at all during the exhale, we might catch it on the inhale. "Oh, we have drifted off in thought." Saying *one* is the settling word. *One* or *two* is a settling word. When we count the breath or imagine we are counting, say it with a tone of voice, loudness, or energy in the mind that feels settling. It might be like someone comes to us who is really upset. They may be hurt or angry. We might change our voice to be available and soothing, "It's okay. I'm here with you. It's okay now." Then something can begin to relax and settle.

In some ways meditation is a continual process of discovering what is going on for us. We discover what can be relaxed or settled. Sometimes what is being settled is the body. Sometimes the musculatures and activity of breathing are being settled. Maybe in the exhale we are settling and relaxing those muscles that get engaged when we breathe in. Then when we breathe in, there are fewer extra muscles engaged in the process. It is an easeful process of breathing in and breathing out.

Maybe the mind is settling. Sometimes, when we count the breath, we are here with the breathing, but since the words are a bit of a mental activity, when we say the words there is a settling and expanding of the mind. The mind opens up to be wider, and bigger.

The shape of the mind is arbitrary, but if we are caught up in thoughts, or preoccupations, the mind gets tight, constricted, and sometimes shrivels. When we say these words, *ooonnnne*, the mind expands, *twwwwoooo*, the mind expands. After a while, we go back to just the breathing. Stay close to that rhythm of breathing through it all. The rhythm of breathing is the ultimate massage. It is the ultimate reference point for this process of settling, connecting, and receiving the moment's experience. Receiving the inhale. Relaxing the exhale. Settling.

One of the interesting things about counting the breath – if you are doing it, and I recommend trying it for a while – is the amount of energy, effort, or strength of that inner voice that does the counting. We must pay attention so that as we get more settled and relaxed in meditation, we might need to turn a dial in the mind. We are saying the count of one, two, in a quieter tone. If we say it too quietly before we are ready, the mind can quickly drift off. We have to adjust the volume so that it keeps us present. It helps us settle without causing agitation. As we settle, we might then have to turn the dial down to quiet even more.

I want to repeat some of the choices for counting. I apologize if I am offering too many options, and it is confusing. Different people find different things useful. I find different ways of counting helpful at different times.

Sometimes, just counting one with either the exhale or the inhale is enough. I find it very nice sometimes to just count one for the inhale and two for the exhale. Sometimes it's nice to count one for the inhale, two for the exhale, three for the next inhale, and then be quiet for the next exhale, which would normally get the count of four. This is nice because it engages us a bit more. The idea is not to say the count of four. This allows for some space for a deeper connection, or deeper relaxation and opening. Not counting on the four is a protection from the counting becoming automatic.

Sometimes I can't help myself, and in the back of my mind, I say the count of four. I find it kind of delightful if the mind still wants to say the number four. I appreciate how effortlessly it just arises by itself. Then it is refreshing to start again at one. So that's very, very simple.

Another way of counting is to count to 10. There are five inhales and five exhales, and we get to 10. Then we start over. Another way is to only count the exhales. We can count the same count for the inhale and the exhale – 1, 1, 2, 2. Probably, I shouldn't give so many options, but maybe one of them will spark your interest and keep you engaged.

We can learn a lot about ourselves by counting. We can learn about the forces of distraction. We learn how we are practicing. Sometimes the inner voice that does the counting provides the evidence that we are straining or hesitating. We see the counting as work. The whole meditation is work. It is like the meditation is a burden. We can see unnecessary attitudes through that voice. See if through the voice, we can change the attitude. Change the attitude so the experience is simpler, easier, and cleaner.

Tomorrow, we will have a bit more discussion about how this counting really supports this process of *samādhi* more deeply. May you continue with this for a while. As I said yesterday, I encourage you, if you have the time and the inclination, to add a second meditation in the day. Then you can practice this more on your own and bring that with you for the next day. This will add a bit more of a foundation and momentum to go along with what we are going to do here over time

So, thank you.