

Insight (2) Foundation of Knowing and Sensing

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So welcome to this second talk on insight, what the insight is of insight meditation, with it following the series on *samādhī*, and that insight is much more effective, much more penetrating or much more wise when it's partnered with an ability to be focused, stable, settled, where all of us is included in a kind of gathered simplicity of attention. So that when we are attending to something with our attention, with our mindfulness, it's not a simplistic or a very narrow kind of attention, but it's something that's wide or full, and it's rich with so much of who we are coming along to be present. So part of the joy of breath meditation, being mindful of breathing, it doesn't exactly come from the experience of breathing itself, but it comes from the way in which we have this calm, stable, settled ability to really gather ourselves, really get absorbed in the experience of breathing. And then there's a wonderful feedback loop between the breathing and how we're aware of it. And at some point in that feedback loop, in the interface between breathing and awareness, a wonderful feeling of well-being, joy, delight, a richness, a sweetness arises from the experience of breathing, or maybe in that interface. And so to bring together *samādhī* and mindfulness.

And then it's very important to understand the basic building blocks of mindfulness that we're going to be using in order to have insight. And the simplest of these building blocks is the building blocks of attention. And the simplest building blocks are knowing and sensing, knowing and feeling, feeling the experience experientially in the body. And knowing can be nonverbal. Knowing can be very, very simple, quiet in the mind verbally. Knowing can be a little bit more wholehearted when people use mental notes, a label for the experience.

Saying in as we breathe in, out as we breathe out. And so breathing in, breathing out, with really feeling like it's known well completely. Sometimes if it's nonverbal, it's a kind of knowing where you really are present for it. So if later someone asks you, what was your breathing

like? You would have something to say. You can describe some of the details of that experience because you are so present for it.

If you're sensing it, that helps. The sensing gives a lot of information for the knowing mind to sense all the different sensations that come into play as we're breathing. And the reason why sensing and knowing are so important, or how they become important, is when they're able to support us together with the *samādhi* to stay in the present moment, to stay in the present moment experience of things as close as we can. And because the insight we're looking for in insight meditation arises from present moment experience. There are insights, important insights we can have about our life, our psychology, the reasons why things are the way they are in our life, that can be really big aha moments. And we might in ordinary English call those insights.

And meditation practice can support these personal insights. But the insights we're looking for in insight meditation are not uniquely personal to oneself because of one's own life experience, but rather they're called universal experiences, universal things that we can have insight about, that we can understand and see, that are so universal that they really touch some of the more fundamental, maybe we can say universal, aspects of how we operate and how we live that is deeper and more the foundation from which we have our personal experience in our life. And so the art of Buddhist practice is to know when we are addressing personal issues that need to be addressed and when it's useful to not mix them up with Buddhist practice too much. Maybe they're treated elsewhere, in reflections, journaling, talking with friends, a therapist or someone. But to really put aside using meditation as a place to navigate and negotiate our personal psychology and the details of our emotional life, the stories of our emotional lives, in order to get quiet enough and still enough to begin to feel what's underneath that personal level of our life, the level we all have in common that is kind of the fundamental building blocks for even our personal stories and experience.

So the art of this is knowing how to attend, what needs to be attended to and how. And sometimes when we have to attend to the influence or the powerful experiences in the present moment that are related to our life story or life events, then what we try to do in mindfulness meditation when it's a Buddhist practice, when we want to have insight about it, which means, again, staying in the present moment with it, making room for it, allowing it, and having the art of really being present, of knowing and sensing, with sometimes the analogy that it's kind of like listening, listening deeply to a friend who needs someone to debrief with, needs someone to talk with about what's going on, and what they need most from their friend is just being a good listener. And so sometimes we provide that for ourselves. We're not ex-

actually listening to the story we tell, but we're knowing what's actually going on in the present moment. We're sensing what's happening, accompanying ourselves in a deep way.

So when the shift happens from *samādhi* to insight or when we're trying to bring these together, *samādhi* doesn't necessarily mean we're becoming attuned to the details of the present moment. It's almost the details and how things shift and change. Maybe it's not so important for *samādhi* as it is the gathering and quieting of attention itself so that we get absorbed in the experience. With insight, the details of the experience become important. Not to be studied and investigated, but to bring into focus. And as the kind of experiences we have in the present moment change, the focus can be, the aperture can be changed.

Sometimes with breathing, the focus can be very precise in a small little area. And sometimes what's nice is to have a wide-angle lens. Both of them we allow ourselves to know and feel in the present moment, but sometimes it's a small little area of breathing. Sometimes it's the whole breath body breathing. So it's different things for different times. And so with mindfulness meditation, we're kind of learning how to discover what is the aperture, what is the focus that's useful to help us stay present for the experience in a way that's appropriate for what's happening in the moment.

And how we measure this by is what helps us to stay in the present moment, stay with the experience, helps us get more settled, helps *samādhi* to grow as we do the insight. And we're learning how to know and sense in a richer way, in a rich way and in a calm way. And a calm knowing, calm sensing. In the classic teachings of the Buddha on mindfulness, he first talks about knowing and sensing. And when sensing, he talks about sensing the whole body. And then he says, calming, calming the body.

And as we calm the body, that has an influence on the mind, in our inner life so that the knowing becomes calmer, the sensing can become calmer. And there's a wonderful reciprocal relationship with knowing and sensing supporting calm and calm supporting a more present moment, sensing and knowing. So sensing and knowing, this is the more we are in this world of sensing and knowing. And the knowing, and again, is the very simple recognition of what's happening in the present. The simplest recognition we can have, almost like one word, rather than an understanding of what's happening, where we know, you know, the big picture of why something's happening, the history of it and where it's going, what's going to happen next. It's very, very simple.

And so you might try that through the day. You might find situations where you can center yourself into the present moment and try to keep yourself here with your experience as you're

living it, as you're doing it, and know and sense. A place that I do this a lot is with driving, from driving, is that mostly I try to let driving be very simple. And I put aside a lot of my stories and a lot of my thinking and just try to be in the experience of knowing and sensing with a focus on the driving. And there's a kind of a peacefulness that sometimes sets in because I'm not being distracted and caught up with my preoccupations, my thoughts and concerns of my day. And I become a more active driver, but I also feel more gathered and more kind of here for the experience of driving, almost like I've entered into a slight *samādhi* or a slight harmony with the driving itself.

And in a very nice way, I'm looking at the rearview mirror, looking left and right. I'm kind of sensing and feeling and knowing as I go along. And sometimes if I do this, I arrive where I'm going calmer than I was when I started. So the idea of using sensing and knowing as a way of staying in our present experience in a useful way and not being caught up in the stress of past, futures, and fantasy. So you might try it. You might thrive in different activities that you do today.

So thank you very much. And we'll continue this week with this introduction to insight. Until the next week, we'll start talking about the specific insights themselves. Thank you. Thank you.