

Samadhi (44) Five Jhanic Factors

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So, welcome back to this ongoing series on *samādhī*, and we're now this week covering the first *jhāna*, the first level of absorptive, immersive meditation. One of the great aspects of this stage of meditation, this area of meditation, is that we're allowed to give ourselves over to being happy. We're allowed the ability to trust joy and well-being; it's okay to give ourselves to it. And one of the reasons—there's a number of reasons—why it's okay. More than okay, it's actually beneficial and a very important part of the Buddhist path. One is that the happier you can be in a genuine, peaceful, meaningful way, the more you know that this is a possibility for others.

And the more you can support others and see people's potential for well-being, the more I think it inspires care and love for others. Perhaps also it's a gift we bring others. Our happiness is a gift. It's also a gift to ourselves because there's something about a peaceful, healthy happiness that's embodied and present that helps the mind get organized, helps the mind become whole or be fully here, be immersed in this experience. And what immersed means in part, it means we're not distracted, we're not divided, we're not fragmented. We're not caught in any attachments or clinging.

This full embodied happiness, there's a movement in it to spread out through our whole being and bump up against the places where we're restricted, where we're tight, where we're holding, where we're afraid. It's a loving happiness that can gently kind of touch the places that are hard for us, hold them, care for them, accompany them so that we're not over-identified with our challenges, with our pains, our emotional difficulties. We don't over-identify, so we're subtly reinforcing them or, you know, picking the scab in a sense, but we're loving them. We're caring for them. We're offering them something profound:

nourishment of attention and care that comes in the form of well-being and trust and confidence, and allows us to then continue on the path of being settled.

So, in the teachings of the *jhānas*, it's quite common to provide a listing of what *jhānic* factors are present in each of the four *jhānas*. In the first *jhāna*, there's five factors. Then as we go along into the deeper *jhānas*, certain ones of these factors fall away, and so there's a shorter list then. Sometimes the ways that these *jhānas* are taught is that there's a kind of quantum steps of letting go, of deepening, of releasing as we go through this. What gets released is what's more coarse, what has more energy and more activation to it. So that we let go of those so that we can drop into the more subtle factors that are much more sublime and more peaceful.

There's a movement from coarser to more refined, from more activated or energetic to less and less, to more and more peaceful and quiet. Some people emphasize these stages as being the four stages: the first, second, third, and fourth *jhāna*. There can definitely be a feeling of kind of taking a big step, a quantum kind of sudden dropping, going further, opening further. But it doesn't have to be that way. Sometimes there's an overemphasis and attachment and expectation and drive to go from one to the other. If instead what we do is we don't focus so much on the stages as being these, you know, reified kind of states that we go into, I find it sometimes much more useful to just learn to recognize the primary factors that characterize the deepening of practice.

So these five first *jhānic* factors are useful to recognize. So I'll go through them. There is the initial application of attention. There's a sustained attention. It means placing our attention someplace and keeping it there for a while, then doing it again, like a massage or kneading dough. Then there's joy.

And I'll talk a little more about joy tomorrow because it's such an important part of the beginning stage here. But there's joy and rapture. The fourth factor is happiness, *sukha*. Some people will call it bliss. Some people will call it, because it's kind of deeply embodied. Some people call it even pleasure. But that doesn't quite give it justice because it's so sublime, so satisfying, such a contentment that comes with it that I prefer to use the word happiness. Then there's becoming one, the unification, the one-pointedness that I talked about yesterday.

So these are the initial application of attention, the sustained attention, joy, happiness, and becoming one. These are the five that are at play. It's nice to recognize them. The one that seems most important at this stage is they're kind of in order. Initially, we need some kind

of subtle way, intentionality, subtle continuation of some gentle effort to stay present. We're pretty much locked in.

We're pretty much not going anywhere. It feels like the mind's not going to wander off. There's no discursive thinking. It's very peaceful. But there still needs to be a little bit of kind of staying here, stay here, be here. Yes, I like the word yes, yes, with this kneading of our attention into this present moment.

So it's very subtle, very slight, but it's kind of stay here, stay here. And there can start being this joy. The joy, compared to happiness, is said to be, even though it's going to be a lot of manifestation of joyful energies in the body—tingling, thrill—it is understood to be more of a mental activity. The mind is a little bit excited, a little bit delighted. Like when I say, yes, this is good, it's a little bit more that yes in the mind than it is to be as deep contentment, that the mind is hardly involved. It's almost like the body, the breath is involved in saying, ah, this exhale, ah. The happiness is that deep place of ah.

So the joy is a little bit like a yes. But whatever this is, both of them are present. So it's not that important at the moment to distinguish them initially. But the instruction the Buddha gives when this joy and happiness arises from really being in the moment, in the flow of the present moment, is to relax with it, open with it, let it pervade, suffuse, and spread. The Buddha uses a series of words like this: spread through the body.

There's a tendency in the body to be, through body and mind, to hold things in check, to hold things in place. There's tension in our body. There's tension in our mind. There's attachment to what's happening. There's many ways in which we bound things up to keep it limited. The opportunity here is to soften the body, soften the attention, open to a receptivity in the body and mind.

As we do this blowing on the fire, as we do this kneading of the dough, as we do this yes, it's almost like, sometimes I've thought of it as ironing out the wrinkles on a sheet of paper, just kind of spreading it out, spreading it out until the sheet is completely flat with no wrinkles at all. Sometimes it's just more like a gentle heater that's heating up from inside and spreading out in all directions. Some people like the image of light. There's a light that's spreading, a golden light that's spreading through the body and beyond. Some people are much more physically oriented. It's actually the physical sensations of that joy, the physical warmth, glow, tingling, vibration of it, that pleasure of it that begins to flow outwards.

The pleasure is actually quite useful as an object at this point. We're letting that pleasure

spread and spread and spread. So it's not kept bounded. It's almost like a letting go around it or with it. So there's nothing holding it from spreading out beyond us, beyond the edges of our body. Some people will just focus on the pleasure itself, like become one with that pleasure. I prefer to have the pleasure and the breath be coterminous.

The pleasure, the well-being, the joy, to be intimately associated with the breathing. Almost like the pleasure, the joy, and the breathing are holding hands, or they have become one. And so this wonderful rhythm of breathing is what supports the spreading, the letting go, the opening of that well-being through everywhere. So this can't of course be done too easily or just sit down, plop down, and do this. This becomes the instruction when we finally arrive in the present moment, we feel like, oh, now I'm really here, this is good. And that's, you know, as I've said a number of times now, don't expect that often.

What you'd expect often is that you're always a beginner, and that is incredibly profound—to always be a beginner and be content to practice with how you are at any given time. But if you do practice regularly every day, every day that slowly the tendency to go into deeper meditation becomes easier and easier. There'll still be ups and downs through the days and weeks depending on what's happening in your life, but you're predisposing yourself to be able to go further and further over time. And for this *samādhi* series, as I've said, this is a time in the series where I want to encourage you again to consider meditating more, maybe twice a day—I mean, once with this YouTube offering, maybe one time on your own. Or if you really need support, would like to support, you can listen to the guided meditation again a second time. But really kind of make this more part of your life.

As you go through your daily life today, look again for the pleasure, look for the times of well-being. For most people, there's a lot more pleasure, a lot more things that are joyful that are available to us than we avail ourselves of, that we take time to experience. The weather, it's springtime here in the northern hemisphere, maybe there's delightful colors of green or flowers or new life being born, or maybe there's a delightful animal running around that brings you a lot of pleasure. You see someone smiling. Whatever it might be, the small pleasures of life, take time to feel those. Your ability to let go and feel the small pleasures might support you to feel those pleasures in meditation as well. May you be happy. Thank you.