

Samadhi (42) Applied And Sustained Attention

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So, hello and welcome to this next talk on *samādhi*. We have now reached the point of immersive *samādhi*, which in Pāli is *jhāna*. There is some idea that the etymology of *jhāna* might be connected to the word for a flame. If that's the case, then it's a candle flame which is completely out of any kind of wind. The flame is completely still, but it's luminous and dynamic. This luminosity and dynamism of *samādhi* comes when things are really completely still.

We're kind of entering almost a kind of stillness that has dynamism in it. The full stillness is partly fully in the present moment, fully just here. Think of it as fully in the subjective experience, not the subjective interpretation of this experience, not the subjective opinion about the experience, but the subjective sensations of it, the feelings, the direct experience of it. You could watch someone go for a nice dip in a peaceful, quiet, safe lake, and you can just appreciate that they seem to be just luxuriating in the cool lake on a day when it's really hot, or a warm lake on a day when it's cold. But it's out there; it's kind of objective. It's very different to go into the lake oneself and feel how subjectively, ah, this is good.

The subjective experience comes with a feeling, ah, this is good. Now I'm here. This really feels nice. The feeling of niceness, of goodness, is very subjective and it's very kind of embodied. It's not a thought. It's not an opinion. It's not a conclusion. It's something that's deeper than that, and that's one of the reasons why to go into deep absorption the thinking mind gets very, very quiet. Eventually, in deeper states of concentration, the thinking mind seems to stop entirely, almost entirely.

But to go into the first *jhāna*, what stops is discursive thinking. There's no more telling stories, no more coming to conclusions and having opinions. There's no more thoughts about the past and the future. These are all story-making mind, the discursive mind. That level of

the mind, which takes a lot of energy, takes a lot of abstraction and ideas and brings them together into kind of a story, into a conversation, that becomes quiet. What happens instead is there might be still very simple thinking, but it's thinking just about being here.

It's almost like we're telling ourselves, good, stay here. Oh, this is good. At some point, there's this transition where the ordinary discursive mind becomes quiet. Sometimes that can happen kind of quickly, kind of suddenly we feel as something shifts or changes or turns upside down or settles in the mind, and now that mind, the thinking mind, is no longer there, the discursive mind. Sometimes it's some inner feeling of being kind of arriving—boom, we're here. There's no doubt about it, then the mind doesn't want to wander off. We've entered and abided.

In the first *jhāna*, this arrival here still is dynamic in some ways. The important qualities that are present are something called *vitakka* and *vicāra*, which, as we talked about earlier, has to do with one way of understanding it as applied attention and sustained attention. Entering and abiding. Applying, stay right here. It's kind of like the movement you do with kneading water into flour, massaging something. It's kind of the movement of a bird that's lifting itself up off the ground by gently, maybe a very big bird, flapping its wings calmly and fully, powerfully.

It needs to do that flapping. It needs to lift and push down. There is a kind of connecting and sustaining, a kind of, you know, placing yourself on the slide and then sliding down, placing yourself in the waves and being carried by the wave. Kind of entering into and then abiding there. So there is a kind of very gentle, and if there's any thinking involved, it's the thought of stay here, go here, be here. Some people think that these two qualities, *vitakka* and *vicāra*, are a little bit more thoughtful with thoughts that are a little bit more evaluating.

More like, oh yeah, here, this is where to be. Ah, this is good. This feels nice. It's kind of like we're really getting close and into this experience of *samādhi* and kind of becoming, without trying to attain anything, get anything, just a very gentle kind of being present, feeling it. One analogy is like taking a cloth to polish a brass bowl, a bronze bowl, and then touching it and then gently kind of rubbing it. The ancient analogy is that of a bee that is kind of just, comes to the edge of a flower and then walks around the top of the flower looking for the nectar, kind of getting to know it, or just flying around it.

So connecting or being and circling around. Stay here. Enter and abide. In particular, what supports this is the joy, the thrill, the goodness, the pleasure of the pleasantness, something that we enjoy about the meditation itself. Sometimes this initial *jhāna*, that enjoyment, the

joy, the enjoyment, the pleasure, is kind of dynamic. It feels a little bit like the flame that is completely still, but still there's a kind of, you know, inside the flame there's this wonderful movement of the heat.

There is this kind of feeling of this applied and sustaining. It's a little bit like blowing on the flames sometimes, like a bellow or blowing and the flames get stronger. Then you stop blowing and it gets quieter. There's a kind of dynamic relationship between now staying there with the experience, staying with the pleasure, and the pleasure kind of gets a little bit stronger or fuller because we feel it, we sense it, we make room for it. As that happens, what's very useful to do and maybe even important to do is to let that pleasure, let the joy, spread through your body.

Some people in this *jhāna* are tight, they're a little bit concentrating too hard. There's a kind of narrowness of focus, kind of one-pointedness of focus, that the mind has gotten tight, and maybe even the eyes have gotten tight a little bit. Something's gotten kind of contracted. The ability for the body to be unified and whole and things flowing through it gets limited. It can feel like some of this dynamism of the good energy is blocked and it's stuck someplace. Some people, it's in the forehead. There can be kind of a tightness and tingling that's quite strong. Sometimes it's in the spine. Sometimes it's other places.

The idea is to keep softening, keep letting it spread, just gently. Don't make it—this shouldn't be a project. So don't be looking to do anything or make anything happen. There's an art to just kind of being with it, entering and abiding, connecting and sustaining. This abiding, this resting is what spreads, spreading it out, spreading it out. It's kind of maybe like you are blowing on a flame. The flame gets larger and you feel the warmth spread further out into your body. The warmth that spreads because it's warm, not because you're making it spread.

It's a wonderful world. It's maybe a little bit unimaginable for people who don't get close into this state that this is what's going on. But it feels really right. It can feel, as we enter into this first *jhāna*, that the alternative of coming out of it and getting back involved with the usual preoccupations, with the usual kind of hindrances of the mind—desire and aversion, doubts, anxieties—that doesn't feel as healthy or as good or as satisfying or as meaningful as really being here fully. Now we've entered our life in a complete way. There's a sense of vitality or aliveness or goodness. This is satisfying.

We can't wish ourselves into this exactly. We can't force ourselves into it. But if we sit with sincerity, then from time to time, this is what we begin dropping into. The instructions here

are not meant that now you're able to actually do this, but it may be, hopefully, to give you a feeling for it, a sense of it, so that it's kind of a little bit a sense of showing you the landmarks of what's up ahead. Then if you come to that place, you see the landmarks, you say, oh, now I know where I am, this is a good thing. It may be easier to be here.

There's not a few people who drop into the first *jhāna* and they get so excited, they pop out, they come out. They say, well, this is really great. So stay calm. Enter and abide in the deep calm and peace of being immersed in this here and now practice. So thank you very much, and we'll continue. I'll continue talking a little bit more about the first *jhāna* for the rest of this week. Thank you.