

Samadhai (41) First Jhana Piti

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Hello and welcome to this next talk on this series on *samādhī*. We've spent some time now on approaching the deep immersive experience of *samādhī*. This is where *samādhī* becomes mature or full. Sometimes the language of being fully absorbed is used. Sometimes immersed, fully immersed in experience is used. In the Buddhist discussions of *samādhī*, it's to enter and abide in *jhāna*.

And I love this expression, to abide, to dwell, to rest, in these wonderful immersive states. So we enter into, and this entering, we're approaching, and at some point we enter. There's this transition. Sometimes it's a slow transition. We just find ourselves fully immersed. Sometimes it's a little bit faster.

Sometimes it can feel like we are just happily kind of settling into a body of water. For some people, it's a little bit troublesome, this image, if they had some challenging experience with water. But it's not uncommon for some meditators to feel like they're going underwater and very happy and very peaceful. When they come out of *jhāna* or out of this deeper immersion, it feels like they're coming up out of the water, the head surfaces. Then they can gently kind of let go into the *samādhī*, and they're happily going into this peaceful world.

The Buddha used the analogy of, one analogy for being so immersed in *samādhī* is underwater lotus flowers, beautiful multicolored lotus flowers, which haven't really surfaced above the water. So they're underneath the water. You see them through the clear water and they're just floating in a very peaceful, clear water, peacefully and kind of just immersed in the water, touched by the gentle water that's unmoving. So there's this idea of we enter, and for some it just feels like there's a kind of suddenly a flip, like a switch has been switched and

suddenly we're in a new state. Some people have the experience like it's suddenly a quantum leap, but it's not usually a leap. It's more like a dropping.

More like a letting go. And it's just, oh, wow, now I'm here. Sometimes it comes with a feeling like, now we're really here. Sometimes we gradually get into it and we find ourselves, the whole mind and body is not really going to leave. We're abiding. We're resting.

We're fully here with no tendency to wander off. One of the things that keeps us here now, one of the things that is a feeling of *pīti*, the Pāli word is P-I-T-I. It's a feeling of, usually it's translated as, I like to translate it as joy. Some people like to give stronger words for it because it can be stronger. Some people will use the word bliss. But it doesn't have to be strong.

It could be sometimes just delightfully sweet. But it's some feeling of, sometimes it's a little bit of a thrill. A trill. Thrill with it. I feel like, oh, this is good. I can settle biteful.

So I get a little bit energized. Oh, this is good. Now we're here. Sometimes it feels like there's a little charge through our body. There's tingling and warmth. Sometimes it's centered in certain parts of the body.

They're tingling or vibrating in a nice kind of clear way and joyful way. Kind of like you would do if you smiled. Some people, even if they don't feel joyful and happy, just simply making a gentle turning up of the lips of the corners of the mouth, something kind of travels through the face a little bit that feels like a little bit of joy or delight. But what it is, the sense of, I just like to call it well-being, a feeling of delightness, of joy. Some people, this *pīti* is experienced more as a light, like seeing a white light. Some people, it's experienced more as a pervasive feeling of joy and happiness.

The idea is it comes from this absorption, just being fully here. There is nothing which is distracting us anymore. All the different things that we have in our life that are our challenges and difficulties, our judgments, our negative conclusions, our negative bias, have gone on vacation, have taken a rest, receded into the background. There's nothing in the mind that's unwholesome. There's nothing in the mind which is troubling us in this state. So without those troubling feelings, thoughts, what's left just feels good.

It feels like a relief. It feels joy. Sometimes the analogy that Buddha uses for this is having no longer being in debt, having paid back a loan, being free of that burden, or no longer being ill, free from illness. That feels good. It feels like, oh, finally I'm not sick or not injured. Or being freed from prison.

Sometimes the mind and these difficult thoughts can feel like a prison. Sometimes he describes it as coming out of a difficult desert journey that was dangerous, and finally come out the other side and you're finally safe. So all this unwholesome, all these difficulties have kind of faded away, all the dangers have faded away, and now we're fully here and this is good. The idea is to be in harmony with that. Some people can still feel like the acquisitive mind, the appropriating mind, the desiring mind can still operate, and they try to push it and have this experience be more intense, just kind of pushing it and being it. That's usually not so useful.

What the Buddha talked about is taking the good feelings that come from being immersed, being fully here now, settled here. Take the good feelings and let it spread through your body. He used a variety of words: pervade, suffuse the body. That's really the only instruction he gives when we get into this first state, what's called the first *jhāna*, that's characterized—many people characterize it by this feeling of *pīti*, of joy, of delight, of thrill that can be, ah, this is really great, I'm here, wow, and flowing along with it. But an important thing to appreciate is that entering into these absorptive states of *jhāna* have a lot to do with letting go. In one place, the Buddha says that these are known through letting go, seen through letting go, attained through letting go, and realized through letting go.

So this kind of letting go, don't try to push anything. Don't try to make something happen. Don't try to hold on to anything. Just like you're letting go into. It's a little bit like, for those of you who have maybe done some sailing, it's a little bit like you have to let go of the sail enough so it can be filled with the wind. You have to sometimes loosen the rope that's holding the sail in tight against the side of the middle of the boat so it can feel better and better.

You have to let go so something can feel. Let go so it can bellow outwards or balloon outwards. The spirit of this is harmony. How can you stay harmonious, in harmony with the good states? We stay in harmony by not doing anything, getting caught by anything, any clinging, any attachment, any appropriation into self, any self-congratulations. So at some point, as the meditation deepens, as we settle in, what's valuable is to start feeling the sense of well-being that could be here, even before we go into immersive, absorptive states.

It's to let there be a reciprocity, a feedback loop between whatever little sense of relaxing peace, tranquility you have as a way of the gentle wind that's filling the sail of awareness. The gentle kind of encouragement, yes, stay here, stay with the breath, really be here in the present moment. Don't overemphasize the feelings of well-being. Don't at this point try to push them and make them bigger so much. It's just let them kind of fill your awareness. Let

them encourage you.

Stay here. Yes. So there's almost a feeling of yes. Let go into this. Let go into this awareness. Let go into the breathing.

Let go into now. So the Buddha said that this kind of *pīti*, this feeling of joy that can arise in immersive meditation is not something to be afraid of. It's not something to avoid. This was maybe one of the great contributions he made in the religions of his time, where there was a tremendous emphasis on asceticism, and in some places an emphasis on ordinary everyday kind of joys and delights and pleasures. He was offering something very different, something that was arising from a very deep place inside that wasn't an ordinary pleasure, but was kind of a spiritual pleasure, a deep heart pleasure or joy, a deep pleasure of being in harmony with the moment, with the experience, right here and now, so that we enter and abide in states of well-being.

So, this week we'll talk about this first *jhāna* and the different factors that come into play. For those of you, most of you, you're not going to be in the first *jhāna*. But perhaps as you listen to this, that it's relevant even in lighter states of meditation. Maybe also it's inspiring that what's possible, that we all have the human capacity for this. To know this is kind of a wonderful North Star that inspires you to just be here, to let go into now. So thank you very much, and we'll continue tomorrow.