

Samādhi (14) Opening to Space

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Hello, and welcome to this next talk on *samādhi*. One of the things to appreciate is that *samādhi* is not a practice per se. It is a state.

The practices we do are steadying and focusing the mind, being attentive to breathing, and letting go of thoughts. There are a lot of things we might be doing, but that is not *samādhi*. That is the practice we do to enter into *samādhi*. *Samādhi* is a state. It is various states of mind, heart, and body. It is a wholeness that we can experience. It is important to appreciate that the practice, or the instructions for meditation, can be state-specific.

There is a strong orientation for people to use as their reference point: me, myself, and mine. They refer to how I am now, how this is benefiting me, or if it is good for me. Do I like this, or does it work for me, or not? There is value in that to some degree, but we can get stuck in that kind of orientation as well. Meditation practice is meant to be something that helps us step out of that excessive self-orientation, self-referencing. One way to do that is to appreciate that when we practice meditation, we must adjust our practice according to the states that we are in.

As we go through these teachings about *samādhi*, I will be talking about things that may not be immediately relevant for many of us. If you are aware of yourself, it is appropriate to practice in an earlier phase of the instructions given here. Often, the right place to be is as a beginner. You may have your own practice for how to get settled and started in meditation. You are welcome to use that as well.

Often, it can be like a pyramid as we practice. We spend a lot of time creating the foundation. Even very experienced meditators start at the beginning, laying the foundation. Then slowly, over time, the building of that pyramid may go faster and faster, but we don't spend a lot of time in the higher states of *samādhi*. Just be aware that you may have to adapt to how I am teaching.

Remember to participate with your imagination. If it is not directly what you are experiencing, maybe it is evocative enough for you to imagine. I will be offering landmarks that will become available as we keep practicing. You might be better able to see the landmarks in the distance after receiving these teachings. You will become familiar with what is coming. You will be ready to recognize what is useful to take in and where the path is, rather than just being in a big territory, not knowing, and not seeing the path. We are just kind of wandering around. It might be beautiful terrain, but we are still wandering, maybe wandering in circles.

Today, I am offering, opening to spaciousness. This is very important for the deepening or the expansion of *samādhi*. Many of us have an amazing capacity as human beings for spatial awareness. I am sure that there is a range for how much capacity for spatial awareness exists in different people. To some degree, it is a capacity that can be developed. Some of us haven't spent much time developing this.

For example, when you are in a room, close your eyes. Using imagination, imagine the size of the room. Imagine the distance to the walls. If you are sitting outdoors, close your eyes and imagine the expansive outdoors. If you're sitting on top of a hill or a mountain, close your eyes, and remember how expansive the whole vista is in your mind. This is the idea that the mind has spatial awareness. We have a sense of what is to the left, to the right, and maybe even behind us.

We can have a sense of distance between us and other people. Some of this is a deep functioning of the mind.

If we are going to toss a beanbag to a friend, some calculation goes on deep in the mind for how strongly to throw that beanbag. The mind calculates how high, how fast, the angle, and the direction to throw it. All this incorporates a sense of space, distance, and other things that go into our spatial awareness.

Sometimes we can close our eyes and have a sense of spaciousness around us. In very deep meditation, some people have a sense of infinite space. The space that they are sitting in has no edges or limits. Edges are a concept the mind makes of space. You can sit with your eyes closed and be aware, imagining the room you're in. There is a limit to that – the walls. If you are sitting on top of a mountain, there is no limit going upwards out into space. The sense of limitlessness can be breathtaking or inspiring. It opens something up wide. If we are in a claustrophobic space, this tends to support a claustrophobic preoccupation with ourselves, our thoughts, and our concerns.

There might be a time sitting in meditation with the eyes closed, and we are settled, still, steady, and simple enough that we can start feeling the space. We can sense the spaciousness in the mind and the body. There is a sense that there is room for things. The mind is not filled with thinking. According to the Buddha, thinking, desires, and aversions are what create the limitations and the smallness of the mind. Without the limitations of thoughts, concerns, preoccupations, desires, and aversions, the mind of awareness becomes expansive.

As we get more settled, we begin to become aware of the spaciousness that is here. We are not riding the breath, latching on, or zeroing in with a tight laser focus. Rather, awareness itself starts becoming integrated or integral to the spaciousness. The mind itself, or the awareness, almost feels a part of the spaciousness. As the sensations of breathing come and go, it feels like they are coming and going within the atmosphere, the weather, or the context of spaciousness.

This spacious awareness is not something we can fixate our mind on. If we look at the space in the room we are in, or the outdoors, it doesn't work to try to stare down the space, to really focus and zero in at the heart of it, to let the space know that we see it. That one-pointed focus might work for someone we are angry with, and we are letting them know through our stare, but it doesn't work with the space around us. We are almost better off not trying to look at the space as a point for the central focus of the eyes. It's more like we relax.

When some people are looking at the space in any place at all, the natural tendency in the mind is for the eyes to roam. The gentle, soft movement of the eyes roaming is where we have some inner sense with peripheral awareness of the space in the room. So, rather than having a central focus, we have this peripheral focus of awareness. Like with eyesight, there can be a central focus and peripheral awareness. Peripheral awareness is always there, but it's hard to focus on it in the way we can when we zero in on the central focus.

The same thing can occur as we sit and meditate. The center of attention could be the breathing. At the same time, we're aware of this peripheral space around it. Both are going on at the same time. There are two different systems of awareness operating. They can both be mutually supportive, operating at the same time. But to do this, the mind must be quiet, still, and settled enough. That is the work of developing the settledness that allows the spaciousness to start to come.

The Buddha sometimes called this an expansive mind, *Mahācitta*. It is expansive because the mind itself starts to create lots of room, rather than the mind being caught and preoccupied by something. The mind that is not caught opens and relaxes into this expansive state. As we settle and steady on the breathing, this spacious, peripheral awareness makes possible the state of *samādhi* that is going to arise.

Tomorrow I'll talk a little about what begins to become possible with settling and focusing on breathing. It becomes possible as we start opening to this spaciousness. In the meantime, until tomorrow, I'd encourage you to look for occasions where you can settle back and appreciate the spaciousness, the wide space around you. It probably works better outdoors, but some places, like here at IMC, have a really high ceiling. That sense of just looking up toward the space, your ceiling, does something to the mind if you can appreciate it.

Take time. Have tea. Look around, and open to the spaciousness. If you're lucky enough to live in a place where there is wide open space, maybe a city park or a hilltop, spend the day specializing in becoming aware of open space all around you. This might help you to find that in meditation as well.

So thank you all very much, and I look forward to tomorrow.