

Samadhi (35) Onward Leading Attention

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Hello and welcome to the 35th talk of this *Samādhi* series. As the mind relaxes, as our ability to be centered and be more fully present here, there is this amazing feeling that to be here fully and completely is not a static thing, but there's an onward leading nature to it. There's something that wants to move through us, something that wants to express itself, something that wants to be for us. That can be many things, but in terms of *samādhi*, when we're giving ourselves over to this one primary activity of just being present here, for example, for the breathing, that starts to kind of become the place that the whole mind and body gathers, enters into. The goodness of the rightness of it, yes, the feeling of yes, this is where I want to be, this is healthy, this is appropriate, begins to stand out and highlight. We start realizing that to be caught up in our thoughts, caught up in our plans, our worries, our memories, our regrets, our irritations, or complaints, that is not as healthy as being really here fully.

Being here in the deep *samādhi* is almost like entering into a deep vacation, a deep rest, a deep healthy alternative to the usual way in which the mind is stressful, what it does. It feels good to be there. It body. There's a kind of feeling of yes to this. That feeling of yes has a kind of feeling of there's an onward leading nature. It's similar to being on the top of a slide, and you maybe slid a little bit down the slide, and then hold on to the side so you don't go any further.

But you can feel the tug, the pull of gravity that wants to kind of pull you down, if you just let go. So the same thing, there's a kind of a slide or a kind of a movement that we can feel that is not, that is kind of like the pull of the heart's gravity or the gravity of the inner life, that is not willful, it's not a desire from the usual self that wants and expects and demands and is disappointed. It's almost as if it's a kind of a biological feeling that is deeper than any

mental movement of the mind. To appreciate that to be fully present is not static, but it's to join a kind of momentum, to join the living stream of life that now is kind of going along into more and more presence, more and more just here, just with this experience. Certainly there are times in ordinary life where we get absorbed in a particular activity and just feel so good. Some people say they feel lost in the activity, and they just can't wait to go back into it, they might get pulled out.

Sometimes it's interesting to see how being pulled out of activity we're absorbed in, their part of the mind just wants to come back. It's like the momentum is there. Then as soon as we let go of the other thing that has to be taken care of, it feels so good to be back in the groove. This is the way to go. This is the way to move forward. So it's actually very useful for the purpose of *samādhī* to not just be willfully trying, not at all to be kind of willfully kind of pushing and straining, concentrated, but a lot of it is letting go, but just letting go at some point into the onward leading nature, into this way in which our system wants to move forward by stepping into the experience more deeply, give ourselves over to the experience more deeply.

Sometimes this onward leader nature can take the form that we feel, just as a subtle feeling that says, oh, this is where the attention should be. It might be, if it's connected to the breathing, it might be this part of the body where attention should be. Having attention rest there like a hand resting maybe on your thigh. Now the hand of awareness is resting on some place in the body where breathing is felt. Sometimes that shifts and changes as we develop the practice. I've often had the experience of I stay, I'm often centered on my belly as I breathe, feeling the movements of my belly as I breathe.

But then sometimes as the mind, as the breathing gets quieter and quieter, sometimes the place that feels like this is where the attention should be moves up to the middle of the chest. I feel this little movement in the chest there. Then sometimes it moves again. Sometimes it moves back to just a little point, a pressure, a little point of sensation, deep somehow, deep in the belly, below the belly button somehow. It's just like that, this is where the attention should be. There might be almost no movement if I'm really still and quiet, but there's a feeling, oh, this is where the attention wants to be. This is onward leading, or this is where the request is. This is where the, where it feels the yes is there.

This yes, this onward leading nature, can also be related to a number of other things. One of them is it can be related to faith. Faith, *saddhā* in Pāli, is kind of a desire, a healthy desire, that says, yes, this is where it's right to be. This is what wants to happen. This is what I have faith in. This is what I have confidence in. Again, it's not I, even though I say I. It's something deeper

inside that's not really the control tower, the control self. This is the place where there's a natural system operating. The natural system has this faith, has this confidence, has this yes, has this desire.

Just stay here, be with this, but don't push it, don't, if you feel the onward leading nature, let go into it, participate in it, but don't bring the control self, the control desires to bear, like okay, now I'm going to do it really well, I can feel it, and now I'm going to really push against it or, you know. But it's more like be soft. Ease into it. Trust it. The faith is the, can also can be a trust. Trust this experience and trust to go along with it.

This is particularly important for *samādhi* because any degree of concentration that we have always has a lifetime. Concentration, you can't just get into a state of *samādhi* and stay there forever. It always has a lifetime where it peaks, and then it's going to fade away. So if you're coming with your kind of control desires to want to get concentrated, then you might be overriding the wave of *samādhi* that's going through. Part of the art of *samādhi* is also to appreciate when the peak of whatever degree of subtleness you have has passed. Partly you know that because the thinking mind begins to start up again. It's not wrong that the concentration wanes. It's just a natural part.

What part of a healthy kind of relationship to *samādhi* and concentration is to learn to recognize when the concentration fades, starting to fade, and then be gracious about that. Just continue the practice for a while, but not with any idea that it should be any different, that it's not supposed to fade. Maybe switch to mindfulness more than concentration. Don't fight it. Don't try to override it, that fading away when that time comes. If that fading away happens before the end of your normal meditation, then just continue with the practice the best you can, but don't have a high standard. It's not going to look that great as your concentration wanes, but the effort to continue with the practice is building the muscle of practice, the strength of practice, that then will support you at other times.

So, the onward leading nature. This becomes important for what we'll do next week, which is go into a little bit more detail or in a different way, the approach stage of going into deep *samādhi*, deep absorption, and becoming skilled a little bit in the approach stage is helpful, which is where we really kind of start feeling that we're in the approach where the momentum is starting to kick in and to learning how to ride that is important. So the other thing, next Friday, after this 7 a.m., I think it starts at 9 or 9.30, I'm teaching an online day-long for the *Insight Retreat Center* that will be on Zoom. It's on mindfulness of emotions. So it's a different topic than *samādhi*, but certainly the more we're mindful of emotions and are wise about

it, the more that actually supports *samādhi*. Because in a certain kind of way, *samādhi* is emotional. It belongs to deep, deep emotions, profound emotions of well-being, of peace, of confidence, of joy, of equanimity. So learning how to be with emotions can be supportive. If you're interested in doing that, you need to register. It's in the *Insight Retreat Center* website. So thank you all very much. I look forward to our approach next week.