

Samadhi (32) Connecting and Sustaining

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So, hello and welcome to this now 32nd talk on *samādhi*. This week the orientation is a little bit of a review. Part of the way of presenting this is that when you're practicing meditation, especially *samādhi*, but really anything, it's valuable to always think of yourself as starting over as a beginner. Don't come with a lot of expectations that you know what to do, you know how to meditate, and you're going to just sit down and do your thing. It better not come with any expectations. Maybe realize that we're often just beginning again.

We're all beginners. Sometimes it's the beginning steps of meditation that we have to repeat over and over again. It's invaluable to do that. We're actually transforming ourselves, changing ourselves in the background by just starting over and over again. It's like getting a massage. Something's being worked and relaxing and opening.

Learn to be gracious. Learn to be relaxed and willing to be a beginner over and over again; this is how we can be an experienced beginner. One of the little secrets of an experienced beginner is that it's expressed in this little saying: the fastest way from A to B is to be fully at A. So just to really be willing to be here with how you are is a way. It turns out that we're not going anywhere in meditation. We're going from A to A, but we're really going, almost like we're going deeper into A.

We're just really being here. So we start where we are and allow that deeper settling to happen. A very important part of the kind of beginning of really starting to enter into the world of *samādhi* is that the attention starts to be continuous in the present moment. With some kind of place that it's the nest, it's the home base, it's the primary place where we really stay connected. Classically, that's the breathing. There can be other objects.

Practicing loving-kindness and the feelings of love that come up can be another alternative one. But with breathing, the idea is to be able to sustain attention over time. You can't really just kind of lock in as we start in the beginning. The idea is that there's a gentleness where we persist, we sustain the attention there. Part of that is this massage, this rhythm of connecting and sustaining. Connecting and sustaining.

Maybe it's like a bird that only has to flap its wings once to catch the updraft and soars, and then does it again and soars. Maybe it's like a bee that lands in a flower and just walks around looking for where the nectar is. There's this classic metaphor of taking a cloth to polish a bowl: you connect the cloth to the bowl and then you gently rub it. Then you do it again in different parts. So this sustaining, this connecting and sustaining. I've offered you in that meditation a lot of different metaphors for that.

I apologize if the metaphors are too many. The idea, hopefully, is that one of those will work well for you. Sometimes a metaphor in the imagination helps the imagination, helps connect more to the practice. The Buddha used a lot of metaphors to help the mind really feel or sense how to enter into the world of meditation. Then the idea is to sustain. I suggested in the meditation that connecting with the beginning of the inhale and then sustaining it through the whole cycle of breathing in and breathing out.

Sometimes that's too long. Sometimes what works better is to connect to the inhale, ride it, really stay there, sustaining the attention however long it is, the inhale, and then do it again, connecting to the beginning of the exhale and riding all that all the way out. One interesting way to help the sustaining and connecting, connecting and sustaining with the breathing is, and you have to do this very gingerly, very carefully, gently, just enough, not too much, maybe slightly, you know, less than. That is to, at the end of the exhale, let there be a little pause that allows the exhale to maybe relax further or the whole body to relax into the experience. Because you're pausing at the end of the exhale, there's a little bit in the body that gets interested, like where's the next inhale? I should be breathing, but not with any distress, just a gentle kind of, oh, I'm waking up almost.

Okay, relax it. The pause allows us to relax, to let go. Maybe it wouldn't do that if we go immediately to the inhale. Also, you could do that sometimes at the end of the inhale: just pause and let there be a relaxing, an opening. Then release into the exhale. So this is like the massage.

This is kind of the working; the classic metaphor is kneading, kneading a kind of powder with water, making it moist. We're working the breath in a very light, soft, relaxed way, no

strain in the attention, but just enough. In the muscles, there's a difference between tense muscles and taut muscles. The tautness of a muscle—many of the muscles are taut. That's what their nature is, to be taut, the muscles holding up the back, for example. But they're relaxed enough.

So kind of a simple tautness or commitment or interest—just stay interested, or love or inspiration, something. Stay there. Stay with the whole flow. If you sit down to meditate, sometimes the breathing can be quite fast, and it's just really quick breathing in and out. That idea of sustaining, you're not really ready for it. But as we settle and get calmer and calmer, and the breathing begins slowing down, and the inhale and exhale become longer, that's when it starts to work better and better to just stay with the whole thing.

Sometimes it's the awareness that's connecting and sustaining, and sometimes you can turn it around and feel it's the breathing that's doing the work of meditation. The breathing is connecting to awareness and sustaining it. The sensations of breathing and the sensing of those sensations are one and the same thing. So whether you're the one who's staying there sensing, or whether it's the sensations that are coming into the sensing, it's just a kind of, it's a little bit hard to separate them out, so you can say it either way. Sometimes the attitude that the breathing is coming into awareness, the breathing is what's connecting and sustaining, can make it lighter. It can take the habit of being the doer, the one who's trying to make something happen, and let that take a rest.

So the idea is play with it. Play with your attention. Find the lightness. Find the sustaining and connecting, really kind of settle in, and then to feel the pleasure of it, if there's any, even the slightest sense of pleasant, to take that in as well. Once you start feeling some of the pleasantness, the sweetness that comes with meditation, then it might be easier to let go of your thinking so that there's more relaxation, the thinking mind, and let go of the thoughts so that the mind itself, the space in the mind becomes larger and can somehow receive or take in or share in some of the pleasure of the meditation. A quieter mind is a mind that can feel more pleasant.

So I hope all this gives some of you some— all the ideas of today are too many, but maybe there's a few of them that really help you be an experienced beginner here. As I said yesterday, if at all you're able to meditate a second time today, even 10, 20 minutes, I think that, and then maybe without guided meditation, trying to do some of this on your own and be very accepting of however you are and however easy or difficult it is. Assuming just sitting and meditating is enough. Don't be too measuring how well you're doing. So thank you and look

forward to being here tomorrow.