

Insight (10) Samadhi of Three Characteristics

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Hello and welcome to this series on insight, the kind of insight that we emphasize in insight meditation. This is the end of this week's topic that covers the five different areas that we can call "insight," that we might define or describe as having insight into something. The way that it unfolds, the way that this week has been discussed, is that one way of understanding that is, "I got distracted, someone came here," that it unfolds kind of as a process. There's an unfolding here, just like *samādhi* is an unfolding. One of the reasons to give this whole series on *samādhi* before insight is so we can understand better, appreciate better, how the unfolding of insight, the deepening of insight, is a form of *samādhi* itself. Some of the qualities and characteristics of *samādhi* come into play as we go along here.

The first insight from Monday, the personal insight, is very valuable to have. But from the point of view of the *samādhi* of insight, it's settling personal issues enough that we can give ourselves over to the process of meditation. We don't have to be concerned about fixing something or healing anything in ourselves. Because now we can kind of settle enough on ourselves that we can kind of go into this process. As we go deeper into it, part of this is to get quiet enough, calm enough, that we can see the distinction between appearances and the recognition of them, the mental knowing of them.

The simple way of saying it is the sense experience we have, which belongs to direct experience, and to the names we have, the concepts, the recognition we have for it. So we tease those apart for the purpose of being able to see even more clearly each thing. We don't have everything kind of lumped together in one big general conceptual way. That allows us to see conditionality. That's invaluable because then we see that it makes a difference how we are. We do condition ourselves.

If we get caught up in thoughts and hostility or greed, that has an effect on us that is not so

beneficial. If we let go and are settled and open up more fully there in a kind, supportive way, that has a beneficial effect on us. So conditionality helps us to see that how we engage is beneficial. A lot of it has to do with appreciating how powerful it is, meaningful it is, to not be caught, to not be tight around or resisting or having attitudes of aversion or judgments or despair or all kinds of things that are added on top of our experience.

As we move on further, we start seeing much more appreciation of how things are always changing. The idea of self doesn't have to be so applied to it, projected onto all our experiences, that they all are my experience or they all have some reference back to me. There's a beginning to an understanding of how changeable things are, how things flow and are impermanent and constant. It's possible to be in that world without a lot of self-preoccupation, self-consciousness. Self doesn't have to be defining everything in its own terms. To do so is unsatisfactory, brings more suffering.

As we move along here with insight, at some point we enter into the approach stage that we have with *samādhi*, approaching into *jhāna*. As we keep going here, there's a feeling of an onward leading movement. This is good. This is the right place to be. Some of the *jhānic* factors come into play. There starts to be some joy, the happiness in the mindfulness practice itself, in the clear seeing, being there present for experience in this more direct way that is so direct and so immediate.

It's much more of an observation, a seeing, a sensing, a receiving than sometimes it is when people practice mindfulness, where the mindfulness does involve kind of a higher order level of recognition. Now the recognition or the knowing is really simple, really immediate, and not a wider understanding that this applies to all of life. We start entering into a very direct experience, experiential sensing, feeling, knowing, observing, of how all the building blocks of all the concepts, building blocks of sensations that we have, that they're all coming and going. They're inconstant. They're constantly a flow of change, of arising and passing. That's a classic language as we enter into the stage of things just arising and passing.

In this stage, in this approach stage, it enters into something that's comparable to the first *jhāna*, in that the mind is not really going to wander off anymore. It's not a lot of work to be present. It doesn't get to keep coming back, keep coming back. Now we're in the flow of the *samādhi*. We're in it. You might wander off a little bit, but you're coming back easily. Coming back easily. Just here. It's like this massage of going away and coming back and being here.

Rather than being absorbed in a *samādhi*, in like joy or something, there might be joy, there

might be happiness, there might be many of the factors that happen in *samādhi*. But it's very clear that we're observing, that we're present for the shifting and changing nature of reality, of our direct experience of it. Now we're entering into the world of what classically is called the three characteristics. That is the big emphasis, the insight meditation for *vipassanā*. The capital "I" insight is a deep seeing, a deep experiencing, a deep direct sensing of the arising and passing of sensations, the rising and passing of thoughts, the rising and passing of everything.

We just see it comes and goes and comes and goes. That's the characteristic of all experiences: impermanent. The second is that in all this direct, immediate experience of sensations, we cannot find a self. Sometimes it's called the characteristic of not-self. The third is *dukkha*. There's some profound form of suffering, of unsatisfactoriness in any movement of the mind to hold on, to resist, to want, anything to do with all these sensations that are moving through. So there's a higher sensitivity.

Now, in the modern Theravāda, it's called the three characteristics. In the time of the Buddha, these were called the three perceptions, or the three recognitions, and *saññā*. That makes a huge difference because when it started becoming called characteristics, then the three characteristics, there was a tendency to make into a kind of Buddhist metaphysics, philosophy, that now we're seeing the true characteristics of everything in the universe. All things, everything in the universe is impermanent and constant. Everything is not-self. Everything is suffering. That kind of universalization of these three characteristics is not useful for deepening the practice.

Maybe not even, you know, it's going in a different direction than the Buddha really wanted us to go. If we come back and understand them as the three perceptions, the three characteristics, the three recognitions, the focus is not on the nature of what's out there, but rather the nature of how we perceive it. So if I hold this bell and I tell you, "Wow, this bell is impermanent and constant. It's constantly shifting and changing and coming and going. This bell is not-self. This bell is suffering." You'd probably think I was a little crazy.

But what's inconstant is that my perception of the bell turns out that yes, the bell has a certain constancy, but the mental activity of perceiving, of recognizing the bell is a shifting and changing flow of sand and flow of river. The idea that this is my bell, that's a mental concept as well. That's a mental perception and recognition. Seeing that idea of this is my bell, seeing it come and go and it arises out of conditions, there's no-self that makes that thought that this is my bell. It's just this thought that arises and so there's no-self in that thought, exactly.

There's no-self that I'm projecting now onto the bell.

Then there's the suffering when I say, "It's my bell. I want this bell. I should have it." So we perceive the suffering in relationship to it. There's these three very profound ways of perceiving or recognizing the movements of the mind that take things as being permanent or constant, take things as me, myself, and mine, that take things as this is a source of happiness if I just hold on to it and cling to it. Rather than that, there's in this kind of *samādhi* state, as we go deeper into this, almost *jhānic* state.

So remember, we're going into a deeper state. This is where we start perceiving in a deep, deep way. We observe in a deep way. It's so satisfying because we're in this nice state. It's an onward leading state. We see that everything, the flow of change, the river of change, everything, that all perception, all sensing, all acts of knowing, all those are shifting and changing and moving and coming and going. Whether or not there's a bell out here which has some constancy, that is besides the point. The world of freedom belongs to this world of not making this into a permanent thing. Not taking the perception of the mind and making this mine. Not suffering because I want to cling to it and want it.

The mind activities are inconstant. In a certain kind of way, the mind's individual activities is not self. There's no self in those activities. It's suffering to cling. You can see the suffering of how we relate to it, if we look deeply into the mind. But in this fifth insight, to really have it as deep inside itself, it is a kind of deep *samādhi* where we've cleared the veils of perception so that we can really see deeply into the mind and see what the mind does. That it projects permanence, projects self, and in a kind of certain way, not doesn't project, but creates suffering. In the deep *samādhi*, then we start seeing the opposite.

We see, yes, we're sensing the inconstant nature of perception or recognition. The inconstant nature of the not-self nature of perception. We see that there's suffering in how we relate to it and how we can let go. This letting go, this not participating in this deep way, allows for a deeper and deeper entering into a deeper, deeper *samādhi*. My teacher in Burma sometimes called this *vipassanā jhāna*, in this deeper way. In understanding, appreciating there's *samādhi* here, you might understand that the thinking mind has gotten really quiet. The filters of concepts by which we see is dropped away.

These are the five areas which insight comes into play as we do this mindfulness practice. For the next two weeks, I'll be away on retreat. I'll pick this up again when I come back, I think on the 16th of June. We'll do a week on each of these three perceptions, called three characteristics in the modern world. Appreciate kind of a deepening process that happens

with each of these three perceptions, these three insights. So thank you very much and I look forward to coming back in a couple of weeks.