

Samadhi (22) Signs Of Samadhi

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Hello and welcome to this next talk on *samādhī*. This time I want to discuss the topic of the evidence of *samādhī*, the evidence of becoming more settled, calm, absorbed, and connected to the meditation process. In the language of the Buddha, there was a word for this evidence, the symptoms. It is *nimitta*, N-I-M-I-T-T-A. And it's one A, two A's, two T's, maybe it's one T, but *nimitta*.

Nimitta has sometimes come down into the present times and the meditation traditions of Buddhism to refer to only one example of the symptom of meditation. I'm not going to bother you with what that one example is, because it's really an example of what comes out of a very particular way of practicing meditation. In the ancient world, there were just lots of symptoms, evidence for what happens as we meditate. Whatever the symptoms are, what shifts and changes, is meant to support the practice. One of the words that I associate with this is beauty.

The Buddha talked about becoming skilled in the beauty of *samādhī* because these symptoms that we have, this evidence, have a beauty to them or a pleasure to them or a rightness or a goodness to them. Sometimes they feel healthy. There's a healthiness that comes along with them. The idea is to be sensitive to them and include them as part of the range of what we're aware of as we meditate. Generally, what I suggest is not to take them as the focus of meditation.

Don't get preoccupied or caught in them, and even though they feel good, some people are pumping them up trying to make this stronger. But the idea is the symptoms: I feel calmer, more settled. Often it's associated as we get deeper in *samādhī* with different sensations,

feelings, emotions even, that are quite pleasant, like joy and happiness. There's a lot of pleasure, a physical kind of sense of pleasure that flows or radiates from the meditation itself. Rather than focusing on them or being preoccupied with them or drawing conclusions from them or congratulating yourself for them being there, the idea is to take them as cheerleaders that say, continue what you're doing.

What you're doing is good. Let them be there on the edges supporting you, guiding you. Sometimes what you can feel is that as, like with the breathing, with the rhythm of breathing, you can feel that as you kind of follow that rhythm and get more absorbed and more intimate with it, you can feel that it has a growing effect on the evidence, on the *nimitta*, on the wider effect that it has on your body, mind, and heart. There can be tingling in the body. There can be a sense of wonderful, delightful humming or vibration.

There can be a feeling of the body becoming lighter and softer, translucent. The body seems to become—the inside of the body can start feeling like it's a vast, wonderful kind of cavern or great space. Feeling more and more space is one of these evidence of the mind entering *samādhi*. Sometimes some people will feel that the mind seems to become quite expansive. The narrow mind, the contracted mind, is often a sign of preoccupation, being caught in something.

As we're less caught, the mind starts feeling more expansive. That's the evidence, the sign. Sometimes people use the word sign quite a bit for what I'm talking about: the symptom, the sign, the evidence. Sometimes there can be a strong sensation flow of pleasure. Sometimes it has a flowing feeling in the body.

Sometimes it has a pulsing feeling in the body, and sometimes in intense ways it can feel like a cascading waterfall or breaking waves of pleasure that rushes through the body. So it can be strong, but it doesn't have to be strong. In some ways it can be more useful if it's not so strong. Some people push it and try to make these things strong. But just well enough that it supports the mind to get quieter, supports a seeing or following the trail that's opening up in front of us as we meditate, of a trail or an onward leading to a feeling of—each person can choose their own word to describe this—a feeling of coming home, a feeling of intimacy, a feeling of being deeply calm and at ease, a feeling of being peaceful, a feeling of kind of being absorbed.

We're gathering together and being really here in a wholehearted way, in a whole-body way, in a whole-minded way. This feeling of being complete and whole, right, with our experience. Sometimes the symptom can be the inner eye or the eyes—it can seem like—sees light.

Sometimes it can be a white light. Some people will see different colored lights.

Sometimes the lights or colored lights are shifting and changing in different kinds of patterns or something. Again, it's best not to get focused on those things that can be quite entertaining or interesting if it's colors. The idea is to always let these things, these symptoms, be in the periphery as saying—it's almost like encouragement—yes, this is a sign that the meditation is going well. Let's not get involved with the signs. Let's not get preoccupied with them.

Let's just hold the course. Hold the course. Don't get distracted by them. Some of the signs and symptoms will settle away over time and disappear to be replaced by others. Some might get stronger before they settle away and disappear.

Generally, the momentum and movement of *samādhi* is a movement towards more calm, more peace, more simplicity, greater and greater simplicity that feels very, very satisfying to have. These signs, symptoms, can start occurring at the very beginning when you first sit down, especially if you're used to—you have a familiar and comfortable posture to sit down into when you meditate. The familiarity, the regularity of assuming this posture means that almost immediately we can start feeling something is beginning to shift, shift in a good way. With a little calmer, the body softens and relaxes. There's a feeling of the body not being aligned.

Some people don't really live in a really good aligned posture in ordinary life, but in meditation it can feel so good to kind of take that kind of a posture that's upright and aligned. Anything that feels good about the posture, then about relaxing, centering oneself from the breathing, kind of resting in the settling place, the grounding place. Any way in which it feels good for the mind to be attentive. This is where the art of *samādhi* has a lot to do with the art of learning how to use our attention in a way that we enjoy, that feels nice. If we're jerking the mind around, if we're pouncing on ourselves because we've wandered off and that's not good, and we're straining and bearing down, it's like we're desperate to be concentrated.

That's not a beautiful, that's not an enjoyable, that's not a pleasant way of being aware. But to find a way that's pleasant to be aware, so the mind wants to be aware in the present moment, so the mind is more interested in being attentive to the present than it is to be preoccupied in thoughts. All of what I'm describing can be understood as being the symptoms and signs that the meditation is beginning to create a good context, a good feeling within. Sometimes it could be subtler than some of the difficult feelings that we have. It isn't that we want to push the difficult feelings away or condemn them or something, but to feel any of these subtler signs of calm or subtleness or goodness or receptivity that's there, that becomes a way to

hold what's difficult.

That's a way to relate to it. That's a way of caring for it in a nice kind of container, in a nice attitude, so that it itself, the difficulties we have, are being tended, being cared for, being nurtured by love, by care, by kindness, by spaciousness, by allowing them to be there in a soft, accepting way. There's a kind of a sense of the beauty of it or the calm or the pleasure of meditation kind of maybe allows what's difficult to soften by itself, to be felt in a different context so we're not so caught in it or troubled by it. So the signs of meditation, the *nimitta*, the evidence of it, of what's happening, there's an art to learning how to gently, modestly, use them to support the gathering together, the unification, the settling, the onward leading nature of meditation as we start entering into the world of *samādhi*, where we're entering into kind of a new space, a new way of being for the duration of *samādhi*. So thank you very much, and may you...

I'm very fond of this idea of the word whisperer, like a horse whisperer. So may you be the whisperer of your *samādhi*. May you respectfully care and listen and sense to the things that are often overlooked so that you can settle more deeply into the practice. So thank you very much. And we'll continue tomorrow.