

Insight (16) Insight with Samadhi

Gil Fronsdal

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So hello everyone and welcome to this continuing series on Insight. And today is the end of my vacation up in the hills of Lake Tahoe. Glad to have you along.

So in this series on insight, I've been doing a while now in many talks on the first insight, usually in English called impermanence, more literally meaning inconstancy. And this emphasis on insight can sometimes lead people to believe that mindfulness or insight meditation is meant to be a form of thinking, thinking about things. But in fact, the deeper insight that is being developed in insight meditation... certainly has a cognitive side to it, but it involves a deep *samādhi*, a deep subtleness and peacefulness and quiet and focus of the mind.

We have in, and so I'd like to talk a little bit more about this insight into impermanence before we move into the second insight, which is the insight into *dukkha*. So the deeper insight into change, into impermanence, arises when the insight practice becomes co-joined with *samādhi*. So the first part of the year, the emphasis the series was on *samādhi*. And I hope those of you who came along with it that you had some feeling for the possibility of a deep, quiet, focused, silent mind that's a state of being, of being collected, unified in a quiet, peaceful way. And that sense of *samādhi*, this state of unification, of subtleness, of peace, usually gets unified around something, like around the breathing, around loving-kindness, around something that allows everything to settle.

And one of the things that we can get unified around is unified around the experience of change, especially if that experience of change initially is a very simple one. And that is the function of breathing. And to enter into the current of changing, flowing, moving sensations, with time, the minute sensations that come into play with one inhale, one exhale, is a ripple of sensations that are coming and going. And, of course, we don't have to look for the ripple. We don't have to look for the subtle sensations. But as we are staying more mindful of the

changing nature of breathing, staying in the present moment with that, this allows the mind to get unified around breathing.

For deep *jhānic* work, the *samādhi* gets organized around something that's more stable. The changing nature of what's happening is less important than the stilling of the mind. For insight practice, the stilling of the mind together with the changing nature of the object of attention, in this case the breathing, come together in harmony. They come together and work together. And so insight begins to, the deep insight of insight meditation begins to come into the forefront when the mind gets very still, quiet, absorbed, unified around the experience of breathing. At least that's the way I was taught when I was in Burma.

At some point, as we get absorbed into this world of change, as we get unified around it, it no longer is limited to the experience of breathing. It could open up into the whole field of changing sensations in our experience. And sometimes that opens up to something that's called choiceless awareness, where we're not choosing something like the breathing as the focal point for seeing change, but rather we're just allowing change to show itself to us in whatever way that it shows itself. It might be a sound and a sensation in the body and then a feeling, then a thought arises. And all this stuff happens in a way, but not that we're chasing it, not that we're following it, but rather that we're in the midst of it. Settling, quieting, becoming unified, just this.

What is possible is to, sometimes with a choiceless awareness of opening up too quickly to include everything, sometimes it's too easy to limit the quieting and settling, unifying of the mind. It's sometimes too easy to mistake kind of a kind of cognitive awareness of everything from the deep, non-discursive, thinking mode of being. And so the idea, sometimes people find it very helpful just to stay with the breathing. And all the insight that we need to have for insight meditation can be found or can arise from being with a changing, shifting sensation of breathing. And so as a mindfulness teacher, insight teacher, my preference is to encourage people to stay with the breathing as long as that's compelling, as long as that's an easy place to be and just to flow. So it's because it works as a great place to develop this unification of *samādhi* so that *samādhi* and insight are working together hand in hand.

Some people like to... So that's my emphasis. And then, however, if anything becomes more compelling than the breathing, like say there's a strong sensation in your body elsewhere, or a strong feeling, or a strong emotion, or a strong sound outside, then, whether it's a relaxed mind as possible, fold that into... the mindfulness, the awareness. Let that become the focal point or the organizing center for this unification. So it isn't so much to go out and really understand the sound, if it's a loud sound. It is to take it in that also as a changing, flowing

part of the present moment.

And then there's a knee pain. And you do the same thing with the knee pain. You don't start thinking about the knee pain, but rather that becomes the place where to stay with the changing, flowing sensations, getting... So the *samādhi* is arising in relationship to change. The relationship to things constantly shifting and moving and becoming different than it is. And in the process of doing that, a meditator might go through similar stages of *samādhi* as we do in pure *samādhi* practice.

There might be comparable to going through the approach concentration, approach *samādhi*. And they're approaching *jhānic*-like states. There's kind of *jhānic*, a deep absorptive states that go through the quantum leaps of deep joy, deep happiness, deep peace, contentment, to deep equanimity, as it works in *samādhi* practice. It can also happen in insight practice because it's the change, the flow of inconstancy, of impermanence, comings and goings of things that becomes the resting place for *samādhi*, the home base, the grounding place for our experience of being attentive. And so in this way, it isn't that we're looking for change, trying to understand it and cognitively evaluate it or cognitively believe in it or focus on it, but rather awareness is flowing in it, unified in it. Almost as like where awareness is becoming the change, the changing, shifting flow of the present moment.

So in this regard, I like to sometimes think of now as a river, the river of now. We're always in that river of now, but it's a river because whatever it's in the now is always shifting and changing. And the more we can rest in the river of now, the more we'll see it as a river. We'll see it as a constant shifting, moving of sensations, thoughts, experiences arising and passing, coming and going, flowing along. Sometimes only through very minute little shifts and changes in the texture, the quality, the density of what's going on. But to stay with it in such a soft, settled, restful awareness that the whole psychophysical system that we have can get settled, peaceful, quiet, settled into this flow of change.

Until at some point with deeper insight, all there is is change. And at some point even, it doesn't really matter in deep insight practice what's changing. It just simply feels so nice for the mind to be just kind of absorbed in a *samādhi* state of how much just to change the flow, the current of the river becomes the delight, not necessarily the kind of water we're in or the details of the experience. It's just that things are flowing, becomes deeply satisfying, partly because it's deeply freeing. It's deeply freeing to not have the mind latch on to anything, not have the mind caught by anything, reacting to anything, wanting something, judging something, but rather having the mind at ease, resting, flowing along in this current of the present moment.

So thank you very much, and very happy to be able to be here, and very grateful to my friend who allowed my family to come up here for our vacation. And I'll be back at IMC tomorrow morning, and I look forward to continue then. Thank you.