

Samādhi (20) Continuous Awareness

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Good morning and welcome to this 20th talk on *samādhi*.

The topic for the last four days has been related to the unification or inclusivity of *samādhi*. We want to settle our body and everything together. We want to be here, supporting the centering of attention in the present moment, centering it on something like breathing.

Part of this unification, or bringing everything together and being whole, involves time. We are also living in time. The only way to live in time is to live in the present moment. We want to continuously live through time with awareness, where it is not hijacked by preoccupations and concerns. Awareness is not pulled this way and that by desires, aversions, and fears. We are settled.

One way to think about this that works for me is that of riding a slide or being carried in a fast-moving river. The river is quite safe, but we must be really present to flow in the river's current in a canoe or a raft. It can feel like body or board surfing on a wave. There are a variety of things that we do where we get carried in the flow. Skiing or sports that are more active can create this feeling for some people. More active sports are enjoyable because we are no longer caught up in our preoccupations.

Something about what we are doing brings us into the present moment activity in a continuous way. If thoughts are operating, they have either receded into the background, they are not really relevant, or they are supportive characters in the activity. Rather than thinking being the main actor, they are a supporting actor for being engaged and involved in the activity. When most people go down a long slide that's not too fast, our preoccupations with other things tend to fade away. We are just on the slide. It can be nice, very nice.

I think there is something about our whole system that likes being fully present and engaged in certain activities. It could be a craft or reading a book. This is partly because we are not being pulled out of the present moment. We are not pulled out of the present moment by fears, diversions, desires, or preoccupations. Our awareness, our ability to be present in the moment, has not been compromised by the preoccupations of our mind.

It turns out that we feel more complete without the mind, the ruminations, and the stories that we live in, some of them almost subconscious. Without the beliefs we operate under, the natural capacity to be aware in the present, and the natural capacity for attention move through our body. We feel more complete with the different, inclusive attentional faculties we have. We feel happier. It is more pleasant. We feel the goodness and rightness to be here.

In the process of *samādhi*, we are learning the art of staying with our experience continuously through time. In the beginning, we are continuous for a short time. Then we are continuous for a short time, again. Slowly, as we relax and settle, as the preoccupations of the mind lessen, the ability to stay present extends.

This is not by force. It is not by holding ourselves there with great force. There has to be some intention, some oomph, some commitment to being present, open, relaxed, and there. This helps so that we don't easily wander off in thought. With time, we are not feeding the thinking or the preoccupations. We can stay in that flow of the present longer and longer.

Maybe in the beginning, if we are lucky, we can be present for the entire inhale and then the entire exhale.

Over time, it becomes multiple inhales and exhales. This is where counting the exhales can be useful. Some people count the exhale and the inhale. The counting is an encouragement to stay present. It is an encouragement to stay with the experience of breathing.

The count is a small piece of what we are doing. It is almost as if we are imagining ourselves counting. It is like a pointer. Stay there. The value of counting to 10 is that the mind must be a little more alert to the process of counting in the present moment. As we practice, it should not be forceful, tight, or contracted. There is a sense of settling, opening, and including all, with the center point on the breathing. Just stay on that center point. We feel we are resting in the canoe as the river's current carries us.

There is a natural process of goodness, rightness, pleasure, and comfort that can happen. Some of it is because the tensions we carry inside have a lot to do with how we think about things. If we are not thinking so much, then the natural comfort, well-being, or sense of relief can be quite nice. As we get deeper and deeper into *samādhi*, more pleasure can arise.

The process this week was about being inclusive, oriented, settled, and being here more and more fully with all of who we are. Then today, we practice with continuity through time. This is a prelude to feeling the pleasure, the joy, and the delight of *samādhi*. We are making room for that in the body. We are making space for it through time. We are making room in the mind for a deeper process to begin unfolding. The continuity of attention is very important. I would encourage you to practice with this.

Look for the ways in your daily life where you can relax the scattered, preoccupied mind. In a very simple way, enjoy your everyday attention and awareness of what is happening. Go for a walk in a park and enjoy the present moment of being with the trees, the landscape, and the people. Cultivate this ability to be more continuous in the present moment, here and now, with this.

Maybe spend less time on your devices. We are certainly in the present moment with our devices, but generally, looking at a screen creates a different attention in the brain. It encourages a distractible brain and a brain that is caught up in its thoughts. It does not encourage one where the whole system, the whole body, comes alive with awareness.

I will end with an image that is delightful for me. I hope you enjoy it. It is this idea of staying continuous, being carried in the current, and being carried on the slide of the present moment, maybe the slide of the exhale. Several years ago, I went out to my car on the street while it was raining. It wasn't raining super hard, but it was definitely raining. The windshield of my car was all wet, and there was a little bird. It wasn't very big. The bird would stand at the top of the windshield and slide to the bottom, hop off, fly up, and slide down again. It just did this over and over again. It was just sliding down the windshield. There wasn't any food involved. There wasn't any searching for safety or for a partner. As far as I can tell, it was just enjoying sliding.

If a bird can do that, then I think it represents a very deep way in which we creatures with brains have been shaped to find a certain delight in being fully in this moment with some experience of being open, relaxed, and carried along. May it be that until we come back on Monday, you allow the flow of time or the present moment to carry along your present moment awareness. May it bring you delight and joy.

In your meditation for these next two days, see if you can work on this topic. Work on this capacity so your attention can be more continuous through time. So, thank you very much.