

# Samādhi (27) Joy

February 18, 2025

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Mindfulness, suffering, present, momentary samadhi, happiness, beginners, choicelessness, connecting, sustaining, pleasure, beauty, *pīti*, thrill, enthusiasm, still, smile

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We are continuing this series on *samādhi*. The topic I'd like to discuss now is joy.

It is not always easy to feel joy. When people come to meditation, they often start because of a particular challenge they are facing. They may be suffering from some difficulty. They can't just sit down and smile and feel joy. As we learn mindfulness, we learn to be present for our experience. It is phenomenal that we have a practice that can meet our suffering, that can meet our sadness, grief, or anger.

When we do the practice of mindfulness effectively and in a significant way, we are not caught by our emotions. At the same time, we develop the capacity to hold them beneficially. We are not being driven around or controlled by our emotions, but we also do not avoid them.

This process of mindfulness is a good foundation. As mindfulness develops, the capacity to be present grows. There comes a time to appreciate that mindfulness can partner with *samādhi*. It brings a steady, stable, calm focus on staying here in the present moment. Some people call a certain kind of concentration samadhi, momentary samadhi. We are here, moment by moment. We can sometimes feel a shift when we feel, "Now I'm really here." We are not being pulled this way and that way anymore. The whole system is settled enough, clicked in enough, that we are in the flow of the present moment.

That can bring so much delight and joy, especially if it's been a long time coming. Perhaps, we have been working with the reactivity and the strong preoccupations of the mind. We practice bringing the mind back, waking up again and again. At some point, it is not so much work to be present anymore. We are here.

Even the most experienced meditators have to begin again at the beginning. Even experienced meditators will sit down, and their minds will be preoccupied. It feels like they are beginners again. In a sense, I like to think that we're all beginners, just some of us are experienced beginners. The difference between a raw beginner and an experienced beginner is that an experienced beginner kind of knows the territory. They know how to recognize what's important and what to be present for. Someone who is a novice to meditation might not know that yet.

When we start bringing in *samādhi* as a partner to mindfulness, we are going further toward recognizing what is important and useful to notice in the present moment. We are not being present for completely random choicelessness. If we allow that, then the old habits in the mind give priority to certain things. We are not really choiceless.

When we settle deeply, at some point, we start noticing that it feels good to meditate. There's more calm and settledness. The mind is not so out of control. As we develop *samādhi*, we begin to recognize some of the good factors as they begin growing and developing. One of those is the ability to stay present.

One of those forms of *samādhi* is connecting and sustaining attention. This is a gentle reminder to stay here, just here. We are not ready yet to really click into the present moment, but we are close enough. We just stay here, stay here. It can feel delightful. It is pleasant, like it is pleasant to get a massage. It can be pleasant to massage the mind, the attention, and the present moment. Stay there, be here, just here.

As our meditation develops, we want to become familiar with whatever pleasure there is in it. The word pleasure involves a wide range of good feelings. Sometimes it is a sense of beauty or sweetness that is present. It might be a strong, clear, physical flow of pleasure. There can be a tingling or delight that moves through some parts of the body. Some of them have more emotional qualities.

One of the things that becomes invaluable as we approach and become immersed in the world of *samādhi* is to feel joy. The Pali word is *pīti*, which is spelled P-I-T-I. I have seen it translated as a thrill. There is a bit of joyful excitement that is there. It is represented by a smile. Sometimes, with a smile, there is an energy that awakens and becomes strong. There might be a sparkle in the eyes, and maybe the cheeks and head. There's a feeling of energized delight, a kind of enthusiasm, "Yes, we are here to practice." That enthusiasm, that yes, that delight, and joy can be soft and sweet. It can also be quite strong at times.

The connecting and sustaining, the staying there with experience, becomes a bit like blowing on a fire. The fire gets stronger and stronger. Staying there with the breathing, with the focus of attention – this connecting, applying attention, and then sustaining it – is a gentle kind of blowing that lets joy arise.

In the Buddhist tradition, joy is considered to be a bit more mental. This contrasts with another form of well-being that comes into play when we go into *samādhi*, which I call happiness. It is more sublime and settled. It is often associated with being a bit more physical. This is because the mental excitement, or thrill of joy, quiets down. It becomes quieter. Then we feel a kind of settled, calm, peaceful happiness that feels very still. Joy has a bit of movement or excitement in it that this deeper happiness doesn't have.

These two can coexist. They are elements of this gathering together. We are gathering together these good qualities. We are gathering our emotional life. We are gathering the goodness that is there with our inspiration and practice, the goodness of the intention and purpose of why we practice, and the goodness of how we offer ourselves in the practice. We are gathering self-respect, care, and love for ourselves that grow as we do this practice.

There is a gathering of goodness that is being collected to be present in a very simple way. We are present almost as if we are doing very close to nothing, but we are engaged and fully here. At some point, this engagement to be fully here begins having a life of its own. Sometimes the effort to practice does not feel like we are doing nothing, but it feels like we are not doing it. The practice is carrying us. The practice is flowing, and we are here, connecting and sustaining. The joy and pleasure of practice begin carrying us. It begins to move, flowing with us.

It is like we have stepped onto a moving sidewalk. We are walking and walking, and then we suddenly step onto a moving conveyor belt. We can stop walking because now we are being carried along. At some point, as we gather, as we feel, as we allow ourselves to connect to all this, it clicks in. We are being practiced rather than doing the practice.

For this to happen, there is an organizing and a gathering of ourselves. There is a unifying of those things that we know are part of this process of *samādhi*. There is a selectivity. This is not to push anything away or to deny and put on blinders. *Samādhi* is the opposite. It is the release of blinders.

It is beginning to take in the pleasure and the goodness of the practice here and now. We are allowed to feel joy in this practice. Joy and happiness are the qualities that begin to allow us to approach the wonderful, sweet lake that we're going to immerse ourselves in. These are the qualities that come into play.

If we chase joy or happiness or try to engineer them, then we get in the way. Having strong expectations or trying to force them will get in the way. It is the pleasure of not forcing or chasing anything. That is part of the pleasure of *samādhi*. It allows us to settle in. It allows something to come into play and puts us on the conveyor belt. We are in the San Francisco airport, which has all these moving sidewalks. We can stand on them and they take us to the plane.

So, I hope this makes sense. I certainly hope that if your direct experience isn't the same as what I'm talking about, you don't lose heart. The great joy of this practice is that it puts us in the middle of our lives as they are. Then we find our way with that, with mindfulness. Oddly enough, I have had a lot of joy in the practice by having a practice that connects me in a useful, significant way to my difficulties. Even there, we can find a certain kind of pleasure.

So, thank you very much. As you go through your day, see if you can find more joy. Avail yourself of the joy that's here. If you slow down and look around, there are many more opportunities to feel joy than you usually

allow yourself to feel. See what happens if you spend a day allowing yourself to feel the simple joys of life here and now.

Thank you.