

Friday Dharma talk, week 2

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I don't know if you've noticed, but I've started going through this *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* slowly, going through the mind, taking a lot of time. One reason is each of these topics are worthy of a lot of time. Another reason is that after all these days of practice, probably it's good not to have a lot of input—just enough. Okay. Something I haven't mentioned so far, and that's very much part of the *Satipaṭṭhāna*, is this idea of observing X in X. So literally the Pāli can be read as observing the body in the body, sensations in the sensations, and right now mind in the mind.

But the grammar of "in," that locates something in a place, can also mean in relationship, in terms of, so to know the mind in relationship to the mind. And one way this is understood is to know it in its own terms, not to add a lot of interpretations, a lot of meaning, a lot of history, but somehow in the simplicity of how it appears, same for the body. And this is part of this movement of simplification, of simplifying how we are present for things. It's so easy to have a complicated mind. And one of the dangers of a complicated mind is it can be a maze with no exit. One of the refrains, perhaps, for the *Satipaṭṭhāna*, is simplicity—simple, simple awareness.

There's a history in the West of using the word "bare," bare attention. I prefer simple. So observing the mind in and of itself as it is, kind of on its own terms. And the next step in this, these eight pairs... is one knows a steadied mind is a steadied mind, and one knows an unsteady mind is an unsteady mind. The word that I'm translating as steadied is sometimes translated as concentrated. One knows a concentrated mind is a concentrated mind.

But the word is not *samādhī*. The word is *samāhita*. You don't have to remember that, which is related to the word to put things together, to gather something together, to unify. *Samādhāyitā*. And in this form, it sometimes kind of implies, you know, putting something down,

putting attention down onto something, studying it. Sometimes I like to translate this word as stable. To know a stable mind is a stable mind.

To know a steadied mind is a steadied mind. And there might be many other translations that are useful. When we're talking about meditation, the idea is to find something in your own experience, and maybe your own words, because you're supposed to be your own teacher, to find what is it that helps you for your mind to become free? What helps it to become steady, unified, stable? What helps the mind to become sensitive, available, open? What helps the mind to be expansive?

So all these things can happen. So here I like the word steadied. One of my sons, when he was young, had dyslexia. If you ask him about him now, he says he doesn't remember. I don't know, he was kind of young, so I don't know if he... And there's no evidence that he has it anymore, if anything, the opposite. But when he had this period of time of dyslexia, we took him to the program to help him with his reading and stuff.

And he thought it was pretty neat to go there because the person who founded the school wrote a book called "The Gift of Dyslexia." So he didn't know he had dyslexia until he was told he had a gift. And then he met this really cool teacher there. He really admired the teacher who also had dyslexia. So not only did he have a gift, but he got to have the same as this wonderful guy. So I don't think he was too harmed from this experience.

But he also, part of the dyslexia was his mind which starts spinning in a certain kind of odd way. And this was a known phenomenon at that school. And so they taught him something that they called getting oriented. And a few times he was at home, and it was a little bit like he was possessed. There were a lot like it. His eyes, you look in his eyes, and like, is he there?

But then we had to tell him, orient. He learned this technique. And what he would do, he would stand up, kind of straight, stable on the floor. He'd take a deep breath and close his eyes and imagine a green dot in the back of his skull. And then he would, from that green dot, he would focus his attention out through his eyes to some spot in front of him. And then he was back. It was remarkable. Our son was back.

And so this, you know, they call it being oriented, being organized, being gathered, being unified, being steady, to have a steady gaze, to have a unified gaze. And some of you, maybe not at the retreat, but you might have sometimes wondered if you were possessed. Yeah, the way the mind has a mind of its own. And so this capacity of the mind to get concentrated, to get oriented, to hold itself steady, to be stable in some place, like to settle, just okay, we're here, stable, present, to be at ease, is this domain of *samāhita* or *samādhi*.

And these three parts of the plus, I guess, three talks, knowing the mind that's expansive, there's a mind that's expansive, knowing the mind that is with the ultimate, there's a mind with the ultimate, and today the mind that's steadied, there's a mind that's steadied. Each of these, in my way of understanding it, relates to these three different ways of using attention that, to know the mind is expansive. Expansive mind uses the perception of sight, the inner seeing. To know there's something in the mind that's ultimate, some degree of non-clinging, is to use our capacity to know. For *samāhita*, *samādhi*, it's the primary thing is to feel, to sense, to know. All the senses come into play, and maybe different people, they have different percentages of different ways that this works.

But at least this is how it works for me at least, that I said. So this steadying the attention on something which is a sensation, some area of sensing and feeling, in such a way that things get gathered, such a way that we get the mind now is oriented in a certain way. Not straining, not pushing, not contracting or getting tense, but just getting lined up. A word that I love is harmony, a mind in harmony, or a mind that's balanced, balanced in its ability to be centered, gathered here. There's a lot of very dry Buddhist books. Yeah. It's hard to get absorbed into *samādhi* reading some of these books.

But there's one of these kind of *Abhidhamma* kind of books, the *Patisambhidāmagga*. It refers to 25 *samādhis* you can have. I mean, maybe you thought there were four or eight, and now you have to deal with 25. Listen to this wonderful list. Maybe listen to it as a kind of guided meditation, where maybe the last word is the evocative word that somehow, like a little pebble has dropped into your *samādhi*.

- *Samādhi* through embracing
- *Samādhi* through completion
- *Samādhi* through unity
- *Samādhi* through non-confusion
- *Samādhi* through being unscattered
- *Samādhi* through being undisturbed
- *Samādhi* through being unperturbed
- *Samādhi* through liberation
- *Samādhi* through a mind established in the power of attending to unity
- *Samādhi* through searching for harmony
- *Samādhi* through not searching for disharmony
- *Samādhi* through having harmony
- *Samādhi* through not having disharmony

- *Samādhi* through acquiring harmony
- *Samādhi* through not acquiring harmony
- *Samādhi* through holding harmony
- *Samādhi* through not holding disharmony
- *Samādhi* through entering harmony
- *Samādhi* through not entering harmony
- *Samādhi* through not entering disharmony
- *Samādhi* through not being aligned with harmony
- *Samādhi* through not being aligned with disharmony
- *Samādhi* through brightening up in harmony
- *Samādhi* through not brightening up in disharmony
- *Samādhi* through radiating harmony
- *Samādhi* through not radiating disharmony
- *Samādhi* through harmony and harmony, welfare, and happiness

I kind of wanted to read that because of the emphasis on harmony. The word for harmony can also be translated as balance. I associate it with that being attuned, deeply attuned, *samādhi* through being attuned and not misattuned, disharmony, imbalanced. And I love it that they talk about a *samādhi* that simply comes about because you're not in disharmony. That doesn't have to be this great kind of harmony. But what does it mean to be in harmony with whatever is happening?

What does it mean to be in disharmony? What does it mean to be attuned instead of misattuned? So, I don't know if there's any longer list in Theravāda Buddhism, but this is the longest list I know. In the context of Mahāyāna Buddhism, this is just like a teeny little short list of some... The Mahāyānas have... they have huge number of *samādhis*. Boy, oh boy. It'd be pretty busy if you tried to do all of them until you get the hang of it. Everything you're doing can be a *samādhi*.

If you do it oriented in harmony, wholeheartedly, with a steadiness, stability, a unification, just enter into it. The *samādhi* of washing dishes. The *samādhi* of standing in line for a meal. The *samādhi* of walking down the steps here. And then it gets very interesting, and this is where, why I wanted to say this, the *samādhi* of being sad, the *samādhi* of grieving, the *samādhi* of being happy, the *samādhi* of being confused, the *samādhi* of being heartbroken. It's all kinds of *samādhis*.

But why would you call them a *samādhi*? All these things. It has to do with how we're with them, how we hold them, how we're oriented. It is possible to feel these difficult states and

treat them just as worthy of a place to be steady, steadied, to be steadied in these things, to be open to them, to allow them, to be unified in a certain kind of way with them, not to fight them, but to be in harmony with them, not to be in disharmony. What does it mean to be in harmony?

Many years ago I read a story by an American spiritual kind of Dharma teacher more from the Hindu tradition, I think, but called Bolozov. And he was a kind of a leader bringing mindfulness and spirituality into prisons. And the story was about a person who, I think it was a young man who was really, really sad. And he tried all kinds of things to not be sad, maybe spent a lot of money in therapy and different things, and nothing helped. So he went to some teacher and the teacher said, When you're sad, be a sad Buddha. Be a sad Buddha. And I love that little story.

Don't fight. Don't resist. Don't give in. Don't collapse. Don't pick it up. But to be a sad Buddha means that you leave it completely alone and you're willing just allow that to be the *samādhi*, the *samādhi* of sadness. To be steady, unmoved, unagitated, unperturbed. Just this.

I know plenty of people who try to use *samādhi* to move away, to get away from how they're feeling. One of those things is that I think most people who do develop some capacity in concentration will do sooner or later is use the *samādhi* to get away from physical pain. I did that. Did a lot when I was doing the three-month retreat at IMS. It was great. My legs would start to hurt, and I'd just, okay, let's get focused here, oriented. And it worked until it didn't. And when it didn't, that's when the practice began.

I wasn't really practicing using concentration to avoid it, to make it kind of recede or disappear. Your practice sometimes begins when it's difficult. There's a strong orientation that the practice is really about being deep or being some great spiritual thing. Maybe, it's okay. But if the point of the practice is to be free, the point of the practice is to be attuned and in harmony with all things. If the point of the practice is not to gum it all up with conceit and greed and aversion, maybe we shouldn't be so focused on getting away when what we need to do sometimes is to steady ourselves with what's actually happening, to find our stability with what's actually happening, to find our harmony, our balance.

And you might prefer other words. Like, I love this list I gave you. And all these words, embracing and unperturbed, completion. I don't know what I mean by completion here, but in Zen, sometimes they say that someone wants to... I think maybe it's they asked Suzuki Rōshi. I don't know who they asked, but they said, what is *nirvāṇa*? Seeing one thing all the way through. So this kind of steady, getting oriented here. Yes, let's be with us, no matter

what it is. It's very respectful.

And I like to think of this practice of ours as a practice of respecting all things, having that wonderful maturity of mind to say yes, to no matter what it is. And that's a skill to learn, that's a capacity to develop that lends itself to being unified, to being gathered, to being centered, to no longer be in disharmony. And there is a *samādhi* that happens from not being in disharmony. There's a way in which *samādhi* doesn't always have to come from focusing on *samādhi*. Sometimes *samādhi* is a byproduct of practicing sincerely, practicing in harmony with what is, practicing attunement to what is.

The peaceful unification of mind, peaceful unification of heart and body, is really helpful for this process of mindfulness because it allows the awareness to be steady. It allows the awareness to be clear, allows the awareness to know simply. And these three things are represented by an expansive mind, this mind that has clarity, to see, to know. A subtle mind can feel. A mind that is not cluttered with a lot of attachments can begin to know something very precious. And that this text talks about, that is read, all these things about how *samādhi* can occur through not being in disharmony. These are all ways in which in this sense *samādhi* is a byproduct.

There's something about the whole psychophysical system, I believe, given the right conditions, wants to gather, wants to settle, wants to become unified, wants to be deeply at peace in this kind of unified *samādhi* state. I think of *samādhi* as being not an altered state of consciousness. Ordinary life is the altered state of consciousness. *Samādhi* is just the healthy way the mind is when it's not caught up with the agitation and attachments and fears. When the mind is in disharmony, *samādhi*, the mind starts feeling healthy. Like this is a normal mind. This is how the mind can actually be.

So these observations of the mind, these are not something to chase after. They're not something to try to make happen. But there are things to notice when the mind starts being settled, when the mind is steadied and settled in the present moment. And there comes a time when you can feel and sense very little orientation, very little interest in the mind to be anywhere else. Some people in between, the scattered mind and the mind that's settled here in the present, well, I have kind of an experience of the mind begins to wander off into something, past and future. But it's like uphill. So after a while, the ball just rolls downhill, because that's where it wants to go. Or the image I had for myself was, there was a rubber band attached to my thoughts. And as the thoughts started to go away from the present, this rubber band would get stretched, and then I get pulled back to here. It wasn't like me doing it. It's like something new to be here.

So to be steadied, to be here, to practice with whatever way. Remember I said earlier that we're always beginners, and partly that means that we actually spend more time with the very basic beginning practice than we do with, you know, some advanced practice or something. But with over time you begin to recognize, oh, I'm here, the mind's not wandering off. And the mind starts having a different quality and begins to stand out and highlight. And then there's the observation of an expansive mind. There's knowing a mind that has within it some of these qualities, characteristics of the goal. It knows that we are steadied, we're stable, we're settled here. We're trying to unify, gather together. And when that begins to happen, this unification, this *samādhi*, I believe that if you're sensitive enough, this is why being so sensitive, developing your capacity to sense sensations, starts to bear a lot of fruit. Because as we develop a heightened sensitivity, you can actually feel that that's the direction your life wants to go. Your life wants to go into *samādhi*, wants to go into subtleness, wants to become gathered, wants to just be here in this full way.

Just like a ball put on the hillside, wants to roll down the hill. And since we have a lot of marbles in our head... It's nice to know what they all want to do is to roll downhill and rest. If we allow them to. When my sons were young, we'd take them to these kids' discovery, science museums. Some of them had these really big bowls. I don't know how big they were, 10 foot wide, 6 foot wide or something, big, big bowls. And you could drop marbles into them or throw them around the sides. And they do all kinds of fun things to watch the marbles, but the momentum would slowly go out, and there was little hole at the bottom of the bowl. And usually it was going too fast, so it would go right over the hole. But finally, finally we could slow enough, quiet enough, and it's always all the marble is going to go to the bottom of the bowl. They all settled, and then they would fall through the hole. Unless my son would reach over into the bowl, and keep spinning the marble. And if he did that, it never went slow enough to fall through the hole. It would always be up and down and always go skip over the hole. Leave your marbles alone. Don't keep spinning them, pushing them. Let them settle. They want to go down. They want to come and rest. Your mind, your thinking, everything wants to come to this wonderful place of rest. Or maybe wants to come to that little hole where the bottom falls out. How great. Maybe from time to time, you can take a deep breath and on the exhale, orient yourself, settle yourself, steady yourself here in the present, and making it easier for everything else to gather, for everything else to gather at the bottom of the bowl. Everything comes to rest here.