

Dharmette: Eightfold path (9 of 10) Holistic Samadhi

Gil Fronsdal

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Hello and welcome to this ninth talk on the Noble Eightfold Path. Now we're talking about the eighth factor, and tomorrow will be the conclusion. The eighth step, the eighth factor of the Eightfold Path, is usually called right *samādhi*. For this series, I'm calling it holistic *samādhi*, holistic concentration, a holistic gathering of all oneself together, no part left out. It's a little bit of a paradox, because what divides up our world, what separates us from ourselves, generally is a preoccupation with something—preoccupation with thoughts, ideas, feelings, emotions, often together with stories and ideas of what all this means. It would seem that what we're trying to do is not have those so that we can have something else: the inclusive awareness.

In a sense that's true, but that which breaks the whole, that which separates the whole—yes, we're trying to overcome the way that it does that, but it doesn't necessarily have to be by getting rid of it. Rather, it's to no longer be feeding it, to no longer be centrally focused on it, but to learn how to soften and relax tension, clinging, preoccupation, and open up and make space, lots of space, so that whatever is dividing us, is limiting us, no longer does so. It can still be there, but it's no longer a limiting factor. It's no longer a preoccupation. It's just one piece of the whole.

Part of what is to do this involves a lot of relaxation. Traditionally, it's considered *samādhi*. My first instructions I ever got on *samādhi* when I went to Thailand to practice was I was told that *samādhi* is all about letting go. Over the years, I've come to appreciate that that's certainly an important part of it. But if I was going to make a broad, wide statement like that, a general statement, I would say *samādhi* is all about relaxing—or to put those two together, that *samādhi* is about letting go of tension, all tension that we have.

To soften, tension is what breaks up the whole. The release of tension begins to open up. We don't have to let go of all the tension, but we have to let go enough so that awareness can

hold everything in a calm way, in an open way, so that we can be aware of it, we can know it calmly. We don't want to know anger in an angry way. We don't want to know fear in a frightened way, but we want to know anger calmly, openly. It's okay to be angry, I'm just going to feel it.

It's not okay to speak the anger, act the anger, especially when you're meditating, but it's okay to have it—just open to it. So you know it calmly. So you know fear, but you're not condemning the fear or trying to get rid of it, but you know it calmly, you know it kindly. That too has a place—keep opening. *Samādhi* is both this opening up, but the opening up is not so intentional or deliberate. It's what happens, traditionally what happens as we find some place to really settle, to really be the home base of our attention, like the breathing, for example.

Some people like doing loving-kindness meditation; it's their home base. That's how they get into *samādhi*, into concentrated states. There are various kinds of focal points that become the home base. Plenty of people are concentrated, try to do it by excluding everything else and just kind of bearing down on an object. But the most healthy form of *samādhi* is a resting and settling and abiding in the home object—the breathing, for example—so that less and less of the energy of the mind goes to preoccupations, goes into thinking, goes into being tense, and the tensions of our system begin to just let go.

It's not so much a deliberate letting go, as it is a byproduct of trusting, staying continuous, and something very simple and healthy and good to be with—something like breathing. The breathing can seem boring, but as the focus on the breathing does its work, we begin letting go and softening, relaxing the tension, we realize that boredom itself has a form of tension, and that falls away and we're not bored. The simplicity of it all can seem more and more luminous, becomes more and more joyful, happy to be here. So it's with *samādhi* that my interest in translating *sammā* as whole, as complete, as holistic, really comes into play. The function of *samādhi* is to gather together everything.

Everything is oriented. Everything is in the same direction. Everything is participating in the process of being alive now in this meditation, in this being present, in whatever we're doing in the moment. All of ourselves is included. If we're cooking, we're really there to cook. All of us is there.

We don't have a book on the counter, and we're reading the book at the same time as we're cooking or watching something on a screen and trying to cook. If what you want to do is build up this capacity for all-inclusive awareness, don't multitask. That's a different kind of all-inclusion. Just do one thing, and from that one thing let there grow real calm, steady

samādhi, presence that holds all things. In this way, it becomes kind of a culmination of all the previous seven factors of the Eightfold Path. All of them are part of this holistic whole.

The more that the *samādhi* is there, the more the others come into their wholeness. The more the others come into wholeness, the *samādhi* comes into wholeness. They're all one part and parcel of the same thing, of kind of opening to the whole of who we are and finding at home there, finding ease and peace and well-being there. For that wholeness, that peace, that calmness, to really allow that, to be interested in how that can create a radical transformation within us. So that the Dharma practice is not about transcendence. It's not about some experience that really takes you far away from this world and has nothing to do with it.

Rather, it brings you into kind of a settled, harmonious, attuned sense of being fully here now. Then at some point there might be a deep letting go. When all the pieces come into harmony, something can release in a very full and complete way, where there becomes a radical absence of clinging of all types. With the less clinging there is, the more there's space, the more there's the appreciation that there's a way of living in this world that doesn't have to cling. A way of living in this world that can hold all things in an open, good heart. So the Eightfold Path is not—I appreciate that the way that—one way the Eightfold Path is emphasized in the teachings of the Buddha is not as a means to awakening, but rather as a manifestation of our awakening.

It's the result of it. It's a radical transformation, so this is how we live our life. *Samādhi* is an integral part of this, because we're no longer going to live, we're having tension or fear or greed or hatred divide us from ourselves, separate ourselves from the whole. So *samādhi*, to live in the world with a wide open kind of peace, calm, goodness, love that *samādhi* can give birth to, is one of the great things—not to live in this world. It's kind of creating a certain kind of paradise here and now, even in the midst of the hell that we live in as well. Both of those are included, not one or the other, but a loving meeting of the two in order to melt away all the ways that human beings harm each other.

May it be that this Eightfold Path is a radical, fulfilling means to end the harm that one human being can do to another. Let's be transformed to live a non-harming life. It's at the center of the Eightfold Path. *Samādhi* is an important part of this. So you might today, before we come to the end of the series tomorrow, practice *samādhi* through the day. Simple *samādhi*, ordinary *samādhi*, of when you do something, kind of just do the one thing.

But don't do it so tightly that you resent being interrupted. One person defined enlightenment: when you're enlightened, you're interruptible. But then you fully—what the next thing

that's interrupting you, if necessary? But practice a *samādhi* of just doing one thing, seeing one thing all the way through, and see how that changes the quality of your day. So thank you, and look forward to our last talk on the Eightfold Path.