

Samādhi (36) Approaching Well-Being

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Access concentration, present moment, goodness, joy, meditation, concentration, jhana, hindrances, objective thoughts, subjective feelings, sensing, sensations, awareness, attention, orientation, relax, pīti

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Welcome to the series on *samādhi*. Today marks the fifth anniversary of beginning these YouTube mornings together. Some of you have been along for the whole ride for five years. I am very grateful to everyone who attends. I have confidence that the goodness of our time together spreads from all of us into the world. This network, radiating goodness to the world, is a great thing to be part of. Thank you for these five years.

This week, we are going to cover more of the approach to *samādhi*. In English, it is often called access concentration. This is specifically the stage of approaching *samādhi*. This is when it is relatively easy to stay in the present moment. If we lose the present moment, it is obvious, and it is easy to come back. There is almost a call inside, "Come back, be here."

There starts to be a shift in our orientation towards our meditation. The orientation is towards the goodness, joy, happiness, and well-being of meditation or concentration. We are really staying present. The mind is not wandering, scattered, or caught by other things. We are really here. It is a bit of a quantum shift, like, okay, now we are here. It is a reorientation. That reorientation becomes a form of joy and delight. It is like, "This is good."

In the classic teachings about going into *samādhi*, or going into the *jhāna*'s, the penultimate activity is to learn to let go of the hindrances. We have talked about this before. The hindrances can be a very big force in the mind, and destructive for people. In approaching *samādhi*, the five hindrances are more subtle. In deeper meditation, we are getting into the subtleties of the hindrances. We notice how easy it is to drift off into thoughts or concerns of sensual pleasure. We see how easy it is to get involved with the movements of aversion, experience sloth and torpor, or become rigid and resistant. We notice the subtlest versions of restlessness, regret, or uncertainty. Like, what am I doing here?

We are somehow settling those, and appreciating the goodness, the rightness, the pleasure, and the well-being of not having the mind caught in those kinds of concerns. I think of this as a shift from objectifying thoughts to a subjective feeling. By objectifying thoughts, I mean that when we are caught in desires for sensual pleasures, they usually go with thoughts *about* the experience or object of sensual pleasures. The same thing occurs with aversion. There is no aversion without something we are averting, pushing against, or wanting to go away. This involves engaging the thinking mind. When we have an aversion or desire for something, it is an object of the thinking mind.

When we are not strong, it keeps us disconnected from ourselves. We are no longer present for the deeper subjective experience of what is actually the feeling of being alive, the vitality of being here. As we experience the approach, the shift begins to happen deeper and deeper. We are no longer satisfied or content to be objectifying or caught in thoughts about the world, desires, or aversions. There is a shift to trusting or resting in the subjective experience.

With the breath, for example, it's the deep subjective experience of the breathing that we linger with or stay with. Here is an example to give a little sense of what the subject experience is like – how directly, almost somatic it is. Take two fingers, your thumb and your pointing finger, and press them together. There may be sensations of pressure, heat, or firmness. There are some sensations there.

Those sensations that are felt as we press our fingers together occur together with sensing them. If we didn't have the capacity to sense, to feel, we wouldn't know that there was pressure. The sensing of the pressure and the sensation of pressure are the same. You can't really separate them. Linguistically, we can say there is a sensation as a thing out there. We are aware of some thing that is the sensation. To sense the sensations, that

is not out there. That is in the fingers. The sensing and the sensation together make up the subjective experience.

I can objectify it by saying, "I'm not feeling the right kind of pressure. There is a right way of doing this, and I'm not quite getting what the sensation is supposed to be. It is supposed to be harder, softer, more pointed, or spread out. This makes me wonder why Gil is doing this as an exercise. He could be doing it with some really pleasant, delightful sensations of the body. That would be the way to get my attention." Those thoughts are in the objectifying world. The subjective world here is a place where sensing and sensations occur together.

With the breathing, the sensations of breathing are known where they are being sensed. It is where awareness, or attention, is. Stay right there in that subjective world of sensing and sensations. As we stay there, the subjective experience can grow because there is goodness, sweetness, and well-being that can arise. This is not the well-being that comes from physical or sensual pleasure.

There is a shift in orientation in the approach stage. We move from being concerned, interested, or enamored with the objectifying thinking mind to now feeling we are at home, where it is good. It feels delightful to be here in this subjective experience where sensing and sensation occur together.

This subjective experience can be quite broad throughout the body. We can experience tingling, warmth, vibration, flow, opening, and lightness. This can happen even as we stay very close to the inhale and exhale, maybe counting them, but staying right there with them. The idea is not to be in the control tower tightly focused, but rather to relax into the subjective experience. We let go into it, trusting it. We might think that the subjective experience of breathing is like the nest, the resting place, the grounding place for our sense of being in our lives.

The Buddha talks about how making this shift from the hindrance of sensual desire to this deeper subjective experience feels good. It can feel like a relief. It can feel like happiness or contentment. Now we know something more satisfying. This is good. It is less exhausting or tiring. Thinking about sensual desire is exhausting. The mind can feel restless, forceful, or agitated. We might experience contraction and tightness in the mind. Resting in the subjective experience allows the mind to soften and open. The control tower no longer has to work so much. It can just settle back and allow the subjective experience to inform it, to arrive, and to be there. There can be a great sense of well-being.

In the approach stage, we are allowed and encouraged to start feeling the well-being that is there in meditation. We begin to recognize, trust, and allow it to be there, no matter how subtle it is. There's something about giving our attention, our awareness, and making room for what is wholesome that lets the wholesome grow. The wholesome gives us a different subjective way of being with everything in our lives.

I know that our lives are difficult. I know that there are all kinds of difficult emotions and sensations in the body that can happen. As we enter this approach stage, we learn to be mindful of them. We learn how to relate to these difficulties in a good way through mindfulness practice. It is okay to recognize and allow them to be there on the edges. In this approach stage, it feels right to open to the deeper feelings of well-being, however subtle they are. Breathing into the sweetness, with the beauty, the subtleness, and the contentment. This is the work of the approach stage.

Maybe I shouldn't use the word work. Some people think of it as play. Some people think of it as an act of love, lovemaking. Some people think of it as nurturing, caring, and nourishing ourselves. There is a wordplay in Pali where *pīti* means rapture, but also to drink. Because of this wordplay, the deeper experience of this kind of joy can mean drinking the goodness; we're drinking the wholesome.

For today, to support making this shift of orientation, I'd encourage you to spend the day feeling the difference between the objectifying world of thoughts – especially thoughts of sensual desire, whether it's food or sex or some other pleasant, wonderful experience – versus a deeply subjective experience.

The metaphor that I have for this is perhaps on a hot or cold day, a person is sitting at the edge of a beautiful lake. They are thinking, daydreaming, or wishing for all kinds of sensual pleasures that would be wonderful to have. Maybe they are angry about not having them and preoccupied by how difficult it is to have these sensual desires. Right there in front of the person is this delightful lake or hot pools. On a hot day, it feels so refreshing to go into the lake. On a cold day, there are the hot pools. As soon as we go into it, there is a tremendous sense of

relief, joy, and happiness. This is the subjective experience. It is not just simply the subjective experience of being under the wonderful water. It is the subjective experience of putting to rest, putting aside, all those objectifying thoughts under the control tower. Ah, this is good. So, study that. During the day, look at the objectifying mind versus the subjective mind. Maybe you can step into the lake. more often through the day than you realize.

Thank you.