

Guided Meditation: Shedding Snake Skin of Self

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So hello and welcome to this meditation session that is part of the series on *samādhi*.

And the last two days, I've emphasized that, or taught how *samādhi* can be understood as a progressive process of calming the mind, stilling the mind in a way that leaves the mind not frozen or offline, but leaves it kind of luminously awake and clear and kind of a very peaceful, lucid awareness. And then yesterday I talked about the process of stilling the mind, stilling the mind, not just calming it, but letting go of clinging, a progressive process of clinging less and less and less, less contraction, less tightness, less holding on, until there's a feeling of kind of a phenomenal degree of freedom in the mind because it's not disturbed by anything and it's not clenched or held or resisting. It feels... It doesn't feel safe, because that's too active to have that feeling and idea. But it's a situation of predominant, pervasive kind of safety that is so safe, the idea of safety and danger disappears.

And then today I want to emphasize that *samādhi*, going through the *jhānas*, as a progressive, stilling, quieting, or releasing, or dropping the activities of the mind that involve selfing, that involves taking something, using it to define who I am, commentary about oneself, having concepts and ideas of who I am in some way that we're living in those concepts and ideas, even if they are subconscious, and they're not really part of the conscious thinking mind. We are stilling and quieting even the very subtle activity of "I-am-ness," I am. It's just a feeling "I am," not "I am" anything in particular, but we'll see as we go into this that the feeling of I-am-ness is a locus. There's a kind of a place where something, kind of a concentrated area of a concentration or a coagulation, a contraction, or a pressure point inside that's identified. I-am-ness that seems to be here, no matter what, unconditioned by events of the world, there's still the one who knows, the one who thinks, the one who is. And oddly enough, because it's so strange from how we normally live our lives, this is an activity of the mind that constructs that, that makes that, and that quiets down.

So all the constructions, all the thinking, all the mental formations that have to do around me, myself, and mine, that has to do around I, and I. None of that is rejected, none of that is no philosophy that says that that shouldn't be there. *Samādhi* has nothing to do with philosophy, nothing to do with beliefs. But rather, if *samādhi* is a deep appreciation that we don't need to do, we can let go of what is stressful in the mind, we can let go of what hinders, a kind of natural radiance of mind. The luminosity of mind, perhaps, a clarity of mind, a peace of mind. These are all metaphors rather than looking for exactly these things themselves. Maybe metaphors for something that cannot be discussed so much.

The Buddha, you know, in the description called it a pure, clear mind, or a clean, clear mind. And some of that is the softening, the relaxing mind. Of what is often quite active for many people in daily life, is selfing, referring things to myself and how it affects me and what the self wants. So it's a, again, it's not something we have to do, it's not a rejection of self, it's not a letting, you know, in a sense, not quite a letting go of self. It's just feeling, sensing, through the calming, through understanding clinging, the disturbances of the mind, that those activities of selfing are not needed. And we can just be, we can just be in such a deep way that even the practice of being, a practice of being, is too much, falls away.

So to assume a meditation posture and to, one of the associations I have with meditation posture is to assume a dignified, somewhat dignified, upright posture that somehow allows the body to be expansive. Maybe simply the chest is a little bit more open than usual. One way or the other. For people laying down, there's a way of kind of adjusting the back so that if you're on your back, to get the shoulder blades in the back, kind of go down the back a little bit. The shoulders kind of a little bit turned and the chest a little bit open. Maybe rather than having the hands on the body or just to the side, to have the hands, if you're laying down, kind of open, expansive.

Sitting in meditation, I like these days to have my hands on my thighs. The feeling of more openness, a little bit bigger. And this idea of a bigger in the posture is the idea is to be bigger than the skin of snake, a skin of the skin, like a snake, snake skin, that falls off as the snake grows. As we take our bigness, the skin of self can begin to crack and fall off. We don't have to be here with a lot of selfing and self-ideas and comparisons and right and wrong and worthy and not worthy. Even thoughts "I can" and "can't do this." Just become bigger than all of that.

Gently close your eyes. And with a way that maybe you can enjoy, slowly take some deeper breaths, just deep enough so it stays enjoyable. But these deeper breaths, again, make your in-breaths make you bigger, big enough to shed thoughts, ideas, memories, feelings that

make you smaller, that keep you small. And as you exhale, long exhale, imagine all that keeps you small falls away, relaxing the body. And then letting the breathing return to normal, and continue feeling the body, and on the exhale, relaxing the body.

Sometimes when we relax the muscles, they might settle, but they might also expand a bit because they're not held in, clenched. And there's a way of becoming larger. Generally, relaxing the body will relax the mental constructs that we live by. Relaxing the mental constructs relaxes the body. And then sitting quietly, centering yourself on the breath. Maybe resting in the resting place at the end of the exhale, the grounding place, and from there, feeling the expansive of the inhale, the return of the exhale, feeling that rhythm as a way of helping the mind settle also and relax.

As you breathe, see if you can feel the tension or pressure, maybe even clenching, that might be associated with the activity of selfing, often manifested in the thoughts that are centered on self, the pressure to think, the tightness to think about things related to me, myself, and mine, or perhaps the emotional center of some emotions that arise from stories and ideas and experiences that we carry as a concern of me, myself, and mine. So the center of self, in emotions, in thoughts, in the body, feel that as you inhale, and on the exhale, let it fall away, let it float away, relax that. For these few minutes, the tension, the pressure, that has any association to me, myself, and mine is not needed, and you can stay large and have the snake skin of self fall away so that a natural way of being that's free of self, ideas, contractions, feelings, judgments, has a chance to open up. Every exhale, letting go, not of self, but any pressure, tension, activity, activation in the body and mind, connected to selfing, self-concern, self-assertion, self-imagination, letting go of it all.

And as we come to the end of the sitting, to feel and sense any way that you feel calmer or more settled than the beginning, or any way that you are not. And either way, can you, for the last few moments here, let go of anything that is not calm, anything that is not peaceful, even if it's just letting it recede a bit to the periphery. Let go of holding, let go of resistance, let go of pressure, let go of wanting and not wanting. And as you do so, does that soften any self-concern, self-preoccupation, and in the middle of it all, maybe there's some feeling, sense of a clear, clean awareness that takes a form of a radical simplicity, just to be alive as enough. For these few moments, nothing more is needed and to sit here quietly, peacefully, allowing the body, the mind, to breathe, to exist with nothing extra at the center of awareness, like an open window, that allows sights and sound to come and go freely.

So open awareness, clear, clean awareness, with which you allow yourself to feel, see the people of this world where that clear seeing is a gift, a gift that you don't impose yourself,

your self-ideas, self-assertions, needs and desires onto others. You don't require them to activate their self, their ideas of self. In your open awareness, all things are allowed to be themselves for a few moments. Just this. And then connecting it all, a simple goodwill and care that wishes for the well-being of all beings. May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. Thank you.