

Samādhi (44) Five Jhanic Factors

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Welcome back to this ongoing series on *samādhi*. We are now discussing the first *jhana*. This is the first level of absorptive, immersive meditation.

One of the great aspects of this stage of meditation is that we are allowed to give ourselves over to being happy. We are allowed to trust joy and well-being. It's okay to give ourselves to it. There are many reasons why this is okay. It is more than okay. It is actually beneficial and a very important part of the Buddhist path.

One reason is that the happier we can be in a genuine, peaceful, meaningful way, the more we know that this is a possibility for others. The more we can support others and see people's potential for well-being, the more it inspires care and love. Perhaps our happiness is a gift we bring to others.

It's also a gift to ourselves. There is something about a peaceful, healthy happiness that's embodied and present that helps the mind get organized. It helps the mind become whole, be fully here, and be immersed in this experience. In part, immersed means we are not distracted, divided, fragmented, or caught in any attachments or clinging. There is a movement in this full embodied happiness to spread through our whole being and bump up against the places where we are restricted, tight, holding, or afraid.

It is a loving happiness that can gently touch the places that are hard for us. It can hold them, care for them, and accompany them so that we're not over-identified with our challenges, pains, or emotional difficulties. We don't over-identify, so we're subtly reinforcing them or picking the scab in a sense. We are loving them. We're caring for them. We're offering them profound nourishment of attention and care that comes in the form of well-being, trust, and confidence. This allows us to continue on the path of being settled.

In the teachings of the *jhanas*, it is quite common to provide a list of what *jhanic* factors are present in each of the four *jhanas*. In the first *jhana*, there are five factors. As we go along into the deeper *jhanas*, certain factors fall away, and the list becomes shorter.

Sometimes it is taught that there are quantum steps of letting go, of deepening, or releasing as we move through these steps. We release what is coarser, more energetic, or has more activation to it. We let go of those so that we can drop into the more subtle factors that are more sublime and peaceful. There is a movement from coarser to more refined, from more activated, energetic to more peaceful and quiet.

Some people emphasize these four stages as being the first, second, third, and fourth *jhana*. It can definitely feel like we are taking a big step, a sudden quantum drop, and going further, opening further. It doesn't have to be that way. Sometimes there is an over-emphasis, attachment, expectation, and drive to go from one to the other. Instead don't focus so much on the stages as these rarefied states that we go into but just learn to recognize the primary factors that characterize the deepening of practice.

These first five *jhanic* factors are useful to recognize. I'll go through them. There is the initial application of attention and then sustaining that attention. This means placing our attention someplace and keeping it there for a while. We do this again, like a massage or kneading dough.

There is joy or rapture. I'll talk more about joy tomorrow because it's such an important part of the beginning stage. The fourth factor is happiness, or *sukkha*. Some people will call it bliss because it is so deeply embodied. Some people even call it pleasure, but that doesn't quite do it justice because it is so sublime. It is such a

satisfying feeling with such contentment that I prefer to use the word happiness. Finally, there is becoming one, the unification, the one-pointedness that I talked about yesterday.

The five *jhanic* factors are the initial application of attention, the sustained attention, joy, happiness, and becoming one. These are the five factors that are at play, and it's nice to recognize them. They are kind of in order.

Initially, we need some continuation of a subtle, intentional way, or a gentle effort to stay present. We're pretty much locked in. We're not going anywhere. It feels like the mind will not wander off. There is no discursive thinking. It's very peaceful. But there still needs to be a bit of staying here, stay here, be here. Yes, I like the word yes, to help focus our attention on the present moment. It is very subtle, very slight, but it's kind of stay here, stay here.

There can be the start of joy. There can be a lot of joyful energies manifesting in the body, such as tingling and thrilling. In comparing joy to happiness, joy is understood to be more of a mental activity. With joy, the mind is a bit excited or delighted. It is like when I say, "Yes, this is good." The yes is a bit more in the mind.

The mind is hardly involved with the feeling of deep contentment or happiness. The body, or the breath, is involved in saying, "Aaaahhhh," with the exhale. Happiness is that deep place of aaahhhh. The joy is a little bit of a yes. But whatever this is, both of them are present. It is not that important to initially distinguish them.

The Buddha instructs that when this joy and happiness arise from really being in the moment, in the flow of the present moment, one is to relax with it, open with it, let it pervade, suffuse, and spread. The Buddha uses a series of words like this.

There is a tendency in the body and mind to hold things in check, to hold things in place. There's tension in our body and mind. There is an attachment to what is happening. There are many ways in which we bind things up to keep them limited. The opportunity here is to soften the body, soften the attention, and open to receptivity in the body and mind.

It is almost like blowing on a fire, kneading the dough, or saying, "Yes." It is like spreading out a sheet of paper until it is completely flat with no wrinkles at all. Sometimes it's just a gentle heater that heats up from the inside and spreads out in all directions. Some people like the image of light. There is a golden light that is spreading through the body and beyond.

Some people are much more physically oriented. It's the physical sensations of that joy. It is the physical warmth, glow, tingling, and vibrations. The pleasure of it begins to flow outwards. The pleasure is actually quite useful as an object at this point. We are letting that pleasure spread and spread. It is not bound up. It's almost like letting go around it or with it. Nothing is stopping it from spreading out beyond us, beyond the edges of our bodies.

Some people will just focus on the pleasure itself and become one with that pleasure. I prefer to have that pleasure, and the breath be coterminous. The pleasure, the well-being, and the joy are intimately associated with the breathing. It is almost like pleasure, joy, and breathing are holding hands. They have become one.

This wonderful rhythm of breathing supports this spreading, the letting go, the opening of that well-being throughout. This is not easily done. We don't just sit down or plop down and do this. This becomes the instruction when we finally arrive in the present moment, when we feel like, "Oh, now I'm really here. This is good." Don't expect this often. Expect that we often feel we are beginners. It is incredibly profound to always be a beginner and be content to practice with how you are at any given time.

If we do practice regularly, every day. Slowly, the tendency to go into deeper meditation becomes easier and easier. There will still be ups and downs through the days and weeks, depending on what's happening in your life, but we are predisposing ourselves to go further and further over time. This is a time in the *saṃādhi* series where I want to encourage you to consider meditating more – maybe twice a day. This can be done once with this YouTube offering, and maybe one time on your own. If you really need support, consider listening to the guided meditation a second time. Really try to make this a bigger part of your life.

As you go through your daily life today, look for pleasure, look for the times of well-being. For most people, there's a lot more pleasure, a lot more joy that is available to us than we open ourselves to or take time to experience.

It is springtime here in the northern hemisphere. Maybe there are delightful colors of green, or flowers, or new life being born. Maybe the delightful colors or animals running around bring you a lot of pleasure. You see someone smiling. Take time to feel the small pleasures of life. Your ability to let go and feel the small pleasures might support you to feel those pleasures in meditation as well.

May you be happy. Thank you.