

Dharmette: Compassion Samadhi 3

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So welcome to this series on *Compassion Samādhi*. And it follows from earlier in this series, some weeks on *Mettā Samādhi*, *Samādhi* of loving-kindness. And so these two have *samādhi* in common, the way we can gather, unify all of who we are into a wholeness where our reactivity doesn't divide us. Then we don't get caught in ill will or aversion, or we don't recoil, we don't get anxious. And this is particularly important when we're dealing with compassion, because compassion is meeting suffering, our own suffering, the suffering of others, suffering in the world. And that can be difficult.

And it can be difficult when our own suffering is deep and difficult, and suffering in the world kind of reawakens or touches that place inside of us which is sore or tender or challenging. And so to find a way to do compassion *samādhi*, we have to understand better the elements of *samādhi*, how we put together the whole structure, the whole framework for *samādhi*, so that reactivity doesn't get in the way. And of course we will have some reactivity, but it's not what we base ourselves on. There is a Pāli word, ancient Buddhist word, *adhiṭṭhāna*. And *adhi* means kind of like a higher. And *ṭhāna* means a stand.

It's a higher stand, that we stand someplace. We're grounded on something. And if we stand and are grounded in our reactivity, it's kind of like standing on one foot, and the wind just pushes over so easily anything that goes on. And sometimes it's like standing on one foot with your eyes closed, or standing on one foot and scanning the world for dangers. It's very hard to stand on one foot with the eyes closed or scanning the world around you. But to stand on two feet and be grounded and really rooted in a place.

So to have, in a sense, metaphorically, two feet resting, or the whole bottom, like sitting in meditation, on compassion, not sitting on reactivity, on fear, hostility, wanting to escape, trying to resist, avoid. But to be able to rest on compassion, thinking of it as a ground that

we stand on or sit on. And it's a ground that's kind of very sacred. A sacred ground, maybe with a big, round surface place. Everything is invited to come and join us around the circle, around the wonderful compassion at the middle. And that includes our reactivity.

So everything says, here, here. So it becomes simpler and simpler. There's nothing to figure out, just more to include. But for *samādhi*, the idea is that the center of attention is resting at the grounding place, the settling place. In this case, it's compassion. In other *samādhis*, it's breathing. In loving-kindness *samādhi*, it's the *mettā*.

But here, it's compassion. So we need to find some way to evoke compassion just enough that it can be a place for the attention to land, the central focus here. Our sense of presence can rest there. Our sense of center gravity of our life can rest there for a few minutes with, or be connected with, the compassion. A slightly different image that maybe helps it combine is that to do this partly with the breathing, to breathe through the compassion, breathe with it.

Or if the compassion is a ground, like we're breathing up out of the compassion and relaxing back into the ground. Up and down, just real, that's the center. And then there's an openness around it in the peripheral awareness. We know what's going on. We know we have reactivity, we know we have distractions. But rather than fighting them or getting caught in them, we invite them to relax and settle here.

Come, come my friends, come and join us, be part of this. And they're part of the peripheral awareness that we don't get involved in with the central attention. So we're not making them a problem. We're actually doing the opposite, in a sense. If something is a big problem, then we're divided. We're too focused on the problem.

Now we're trying to be undivided, very simple, with the compassion at the center and everything else kind of coming in. And with that, various other capacities we have also begin to become focused on the compassion. The idea is that if we're thinking at all, it's very simple thoughts about how to stay connected to compassion, appreciate it, and remember it. And that's one way that some people will say simple phrases, very simple light thoughts. It could just be the thought compassion repeated in a nice, simple, compassionate way.

It could be bringing someone to mind who is suffering, that evokes the compassion we have, and then bring that person in mind and maybe have simple words, compassion, or may you be free of suffering, may be very simple, free from suffering, free from suffering, may you be free from suffering. And so our images, our recollection, our thoughts, are there together with the compassion, supporting it. The body is, after a while, if there's a good feeling in the body,

we gather that, we feel that, we support it. Maybe the compassion on the inhale spreads out into the body more widely, and on the exhale, the whole body joins into that ground in the middle of compassion. And so the body is participating in this.

In our motivation, what we're most motivated for, we've organized, oriented our motivation to be around compassion, not about what's for breakfast, not about planning the day. It's important. Our intention, our motivation, is such an important part of our lives. Make sure that it's there to support the practice. You're behind it. Get behind doing it.

If you want *samādhi*, you want to be behind or really there for what you're doing. And so in this process, compassion is a receptacle. And that image of receiving, actively receiving, is very different than a feeling that suffering in the world, we're being assailed by suffering, that we're the victims of suffering in the world, or our own suffering, as if we don't have space for it. It's too much for us. Or that we have to do something and go out and assert.

We have to get involved in problem solving and figuring out what to do. Or we center ourselves in a sense of responsibility and obligation. And we confuse obligation and responsibility with pure, simple compassion. To find it as simple, simple as we can, this compassion is. That in meditation at least, we don't have to be fixing anything, solving anything. We don't have to respond to anything.

The idea is to really trust simple, simple, simple compassion that can grow and expand and be the gathering point for all of who we are, that can start becoming the atmosphere or the field of all that we're only concerned with, the compassion. As we do this more and more, the *samādhi* of compassion means everything is just about compassion. It becomes the whole field of our attention at some point. And it's very focused, concentrated, centering, and delightful, wonderful feeling of sweetness, of beauty, of compassion. It's remarkable we have this capacity to have this sense of wholeness, completeness, ease, and kind of satisfaction of just here in the present moment with simply focusing on compassion.

So that's kind of the upper reaches of this *samādhi* of compassion that is possible to cultivate and beautiful to cultivate. And that becomes a wonderful training in how to go into the world and care for the world. How to go into the world in such a way that our compassion is open enough, receptacle, can receive, can be transparent, can be porous, can allow ourselves to feel the suffering of the world without getting caught in reactivity, without getting caught in some of the near enemies of compassion, the idea of pity or the sense of pity or the sense of feeling sorry for others or feeling sorry for oneself. The feeling that many of me can be, one can confuse compassion with one's own sense of despair, one's own suffering. There's a lot of complications that we add extra to compassion.

But compassion *samādhi* is teaching us something about the simplicity of compassion. So when we do go out to support and help the world, we can do it from that simple place that can be quite powerful and quite effective. Simple doesn't mean ineffective, it might make it more effective. So the *samādhi* of compassion.

And so if you'd like to continue with exploring this during the day before we meet again, I would encourage you to, as you go about through your day in public or different places, and you see that someone has something that is suffering, someplace they're struggling or feeling emotionally challenged by what's going on, that may be situations where you don't have to say anything or do anything, that you would gently, in yourself privately, just open yourself up as a receptacle of compassion to receive it, just be with it. Hopefully the suffering is not that great. Maybe look for simple things. Someone's impatient, waiting in line at the grocery store. And just open and receive that in your compassion.

Look for places in everyday life where people are suffering in some mild way, and exercise, do the exercise of seeing how you can hold that or be with it, receive it without reactivity, but with care, with kindness, with compassion. So thank you very much, and I look forward to continuing tomorrow. May we all contribute more compassion in this challenged world. Thank you.