

Dharmette: Samadhi (10) Easeful Thinking, Easeful Awareness

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Hello and welcome to this now 10th talk on *samādhi*, putting down the foundations for what is needed to really have a useful form of concentration in meditation. So we're learning how our minds work, how our thoughts and our attention work, so that we can use them in a useful way. To not understand ourselves and try to get concentrated sometimes doesn't work, or we override ourselves, or the concentration comes with a lot of tension and force. One of the things I've been emphasizing this week is that the ways in which our thinking, desire and aversion, and the ways in which identity, how we identify ourselves, can be divisive in ourselves, how we can create divisions and fragmentations, and how it contributes to not being fully in touch with ourselves. Sometimes there is even a disassociation or disconnection from ourselves. Because to try to develop *samādhi* while being disconnected is going to be much harder.

It's through being connected. *Samādhi* is a gathering together. It's a collectiveness, everything collected together, a collectiveness of mind and body. And so we have to kind of understand how we do the opposite, and then to understand how to use the mind, how to use the attention, so that that attention doesn't further the division, doesn't divide, and that attention actually begins to heal it. To use attention in a laser focus, in a fixed way, a determined way, to blast through something or blast into concentration, actually creates more separation. And so there's some kind of way of being relaxed and soft and welcoming, to have an attention that begins opening to the whole, not forcing ourselves into the present.

So I want to use an analogy that maybe points to something important. If I find myself maybe afraid, and the manifestation of that fear is that I hold my hands in tight fists, and I've just been doing that for so long, I never really opened my hand. If I'm going to pick something

up, I have to hold my two fists together and grab it somehow. And so all I'm thinking about is, all I know about my hand is it's fisted. And I start being concerned about my fist being in the proper way. You know, what's the right way to have a fist?

Is my thumb supposed to be inside or outside? What do people think of my fist? Do I have a nice, handsome fist, or is this something that's embarrassing as a human being, to have this kind of fist? Maybe I'm supposed to tighten up harder with a fist. Or maybe I'm supposed to be a Buddhist, so a good Buddhist has a relaxed fist. Okay, a useful fist. All I know is fist.

And then I come across some wise teacher who tells me, Gil, you might try relaxing your hand fully. Pry your fingers apart and let your full hand relax. And then I get disoriented. But, but, but, but, but I'm my fist. That's who I am. What am I going to do? There's no fist anymore. The fist disappeared. What did you do to my fist?

And eventually I discover, oh, how nice it is. The absence of the fist is really nice. I haven't betrayed the fist by relaxing. I've just stopped doing something unnecessary. And if I ever need the fist again, I can do it. I know how, but it's so nice not to have it.

So in the same way, the ways in which we cling, the compulsions of the mind, the pressure and tightness and the force behind which we think, want, and have aversion, it's possible to feel the sensations of that. And sometimes when people have a sense of I am, just amness, what they're identifying is that fistedness of the mind, the tightness in the center of our thinking. And thinking does not have to have any pressure associated with it. Thinking does not have to have any tightness, or thinking doesn't have to be fisted in any kind of way. But if that's what we're used to, and that's what we think thinking is, it's inconceivable that we would relax that thinking muscle. And we feel like we have to go along with it, and it's who I am, after all.

And so the very act of identification, holding on tightly to identities, it isn't the identity that's necessarily the problem. It's how we hold on to it, the compulsion, the pressure behind it. The thinking isn't necessarily a problem. It's the compulsion and pressure, the clinging, the force behind it. And so what we can start looking at is the underlying tension that's there in thinking and in identifying ourselves, having an identification with anything at all. And it's possible to loosen the fist, to relax.

And something disappears, just like the fist disappears. Something disappears in the mind. And if we think that what disappears is who we are, it can be disorienting. But what disappears is the tension, is the pressure. That same thing can exist in how people focus their attention in meditation. They associate meditation with having this attention, or the pressure

that's in focusing, focusing on the breath.

I know I'm focusing on the breath because there's a kind of gathering and tightening in the mind. It's like a little strain of looking at my breathing or some part of my body. And for some people, that strain is what keeps them present, because otherwise the tendency of mind to wander off is so strong. And what we're trying to do here is to find some other way of being present that does not involve force, does not involve any kind of strain. And so we have to let go of the strain and realize it's still possible to be focused, you know, in a different way. And that's a light way, a soft way, an open way.

And so the dedication, the persistence, is in staying open and relaxed, staying available and relaxed, staying intimate and relaxed. And so we work hard at being relaxed. We work hard at being at ease. Right. And of course, you can't work hard that way and strain. The working hard is just kind of like a repetition, coming back, staying close to, in a gentle, kind, supportive way.

And so learning a whole different way of using attention, a whole different way of thinking, and a whole different way of maybe even taking some aspects of who we are and identifying, this is who I am. And this applies also to how we identify other people. There can be force and compulsion in identifying other people as being somehow wrong. You know, I'm right. That's an identification, and there can be a lot of strength behind that. They're wrong.

It's the force and the compulsion that something gets created that's not wrong in the being right and wrong. It's the reification, the solidification, the separation, the prioritization of a certain way of being, prioritization of a fistful mind, where we lose something in that process. A fistful hand loses the open hand. The fistful mind loses an open mind. A tense mind loses an easeful mind.

And so to begin experimenting in daily life, in meditation, with seeing, can you find a way to think, talk to yourself, have thoughts that are light, easeful, that are thoughts about staying present, giving yourself gentle instructions. Not that you're going to do this forever, but if you're honest, you might find that sometimes that's the better alternative to how the mind is wandering off in different kinds of thoughts by itself. Thoughts that maybe are not so useful. And it's a beginning of training, preparing the mind, learning the mind, how to be friendly, how to be easeful, how to be light, how to be a very comforting mind, a mind that you want to stay close to, by beginning to talk to yourself in nice ways, in gentle ways. It's not so much what you say to yourself, but how you say it.

And that can begin translating to having a form of present-moment awareness that is com-

elling because it's not compulsive. It's compelling because it feels so nice. Of course I want to be present. Of course I want to have an open hand when it feels so nice to have it open. Of course I want to open to the sensations of my body. Of course I want to open to the feelings I have.

Not because the body and feelings are necessarily comfortable or nice, pleasant, but it's so nice to have that awareness that's light and useful and available. And so, in a sense, if you want to identify yourself with something, don't identify yourself with anything that has pressure or tension in it. Identify with the awareness, the thinking, which has none. That's easeful and light, pleasant, and maybe friendly.

So I hope that what I'm saying makes enough sense for you to experiment with this and to be patient as we move slowly into this world of *samādhi*. Where we're going is, as I've said earlier, it's kind of like a sacred temple. And it's kind of amazing capacities of the mind that we should have a lot of respect for. The higher reaches of *samādhi* are astounding. But we want to really create a good foundation for it. And that's the whole thing we're doing.

And with the instructions for today, I offer you those for this weekend. That you find a nice, useful way of thinking, and find a way in meditation to have a nice, easeful way of giving yourself instructions, so that you can ease yourself into a nice, comfortable, relaxed awareness that's able to stay welcoming the present moment. Thank you.