

# 2005-05-11 Concentration (Week 4 Part 1)

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mind, breath, concentration, breathing, people, settled, concentrated, stay, distractibility, image, intentional, distractible, intentionality, imagine, easy, focus, important, develop, recite, helpful

## SPEAKERS

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For fourth class of the concentration class, I'd like us to begin with a short sitting. We sit together for 10 minutes. And I'm not going to give any guided meditation, just sit in silence and use this silent 10 minutes, as a time to prepare yourself to get yourself here intentionally with a sense of purpose, a sense of being conscientious being kind of mindful that you're gonna, you're gonna kind of use those 10 minutes to arrive and really be here, this place this time. Take care of whatever distractions you might have or whatever else might be going on. And you'd have 10 minutes to kind of work massage yourself, find yourself settled here. In this place the best you can get yourself settled and concentrated. Welcome back to our fourth day concentration class. A very important aspect of concentration is having an non distracted mind. Non distracted mind is one that then can be focused. Most people most of the time will find that their mind is distracted, distracted, distracted state. pretty much anybody who sits down to meditate will discover that there's all these kind of centrifugal forces in the mind you're going to scatter outwards and restless, agitated. Busyness of the day is continuous in the busyness of the mind. Mind is tired or sleepy. There's all these forces in the mind that keep the mind from being settled or being focused keeps it kind of easily to get distracted. When a person wants to develop Samadhi or concentration, they have to work with that distractibility of the mind. And there are two primary ways of doing that. One is to let go of which distractibility demands that go up, you certainly all the thoughts, you have let go of them, but more deeply, letting go of the structure underneath to let go of the impulses underneath the thoughts, the impulse to think or the impulse to be distracted, could let go. And for some people that works really well, they can let go really well. And there's let go, the mind gets less and less distractible, and more and more stable. The other way is to use our intentionality to use our capacity to be directed in the mind to direct the mind focus the mind intention Lay on something like the breath, some object and really kind of stay there. And then there's a tension in the mind between the force that wants to kind of spin you out into thoughts. And that force which you're applying to, to keep you steady. And so there's a kind of a tug of war between the two of them. And as you develop your strength of concentration, then, with time, the ability to be focused, intentional, intentionally focused, becomes greater than the force of distractibility. And then there's a

play back and forth. So that's sometimes before the mind is in a very distractible state. might be that no matter how intentional and how strong your concentration is, you can't overcome the strength of distractibility. Are there times distractible, distractibility the mind is really, really low. And so you don't need a lot of concentration, a lot of effort, a lot of intentionality to get yourself focused. So to to General ways one is to let go and one is to kind of hold the mind steady on something to be very intentional. With time as the concentration gets stronger becomes more natural or becomes more second nature gets established, the intentional aspect of concentration falls away. And so we don't have to MIT director effort anymore to stay there. But as the mind becomes less and less distractible, it becomes more more natural, easy to stay present, and just be there. And eventually, intentionality disappears entirely. The directed is directing the mind, we stopped directing the mind just there. But until that point arrives, the these two qualities are important letting go and being intentional. I think when you first sit down to develop concentration practice, it's very important to sit down in a very intentional way. Be very clear, by leaving the Maven by talking to yourself and saying it to yourself. Here I am. This is what I'm doing. I'm here to get concentrated, maybe sit. I'm not here to think about what happened at work or what's happening on television or something I'm sitting here, this is where I'm going to be. And we do have that intentional quality of sitting, maybe in your posture of fuel in your body, here I am, this is where I am, I feel a solidity of your body here the weight of it, just feel it here I am. And then whatever else you can do to kind of intentionally gather yourself together to gather yourself get gather your being here in this place in this time is useful. The some people will find it useful to do some kind of preliminary work before sitting to meditate. I've talked about this, you know, maybe sitting and just taking it easy having a cup of tea for 10 minutes, and that gets you in the mood so you can really help you to really be here or maybe going for a run or taking a shower. You know, as I said me the first day, one of the supports for developing concentration is having a clean environment and having clean clothes. So you can do that intentionally, you can actually go and take a shower, put on clean clothes, new clothes, and it's kind of expensive for new clothes every day. But you don't put on clean clothes. And if your room is a mess, tidy it up before you sit, and then do your sitting so there's order and stability around you and claimant is to kind of kind of give me some give a give us a good feeling about being here. And also creates a sense of intentionality, and this this is what I'm doing. And then there's a number of other things you can do. And one of the things for example, is chanting or reciting or saying it over in your mind. If you know if you have something like the Metta Sutta, have you memorized it, and that's somehow exercises the mind gets kind of moving in a kind of directed way, focused way. And, and it kind of gets it gets the mind kind of kind of geared up into being focused so that once you end in the chat you're doing or the reciting you're doing, your mind is more likely to be present. And some of the distractions, some of the distractions have kind of faded away or lost interest in. Some people find it very helpful to connect to something that's inspiring about their spiritual life, before they sit down to meditate. So in order to kind of sit in mind, the psyche can kind of get a little bit straightened out in terms of his priorities. So if you said, you know, maybe we read a Dharma book, for example, or some book by a Dharma teacher, and it could just be reading a paragraph or a page. Sure. Oh, yeah, that's what it's about. That's this is really important. All that concern I had about how my stocks are doing. That's incidental. That's the, you know, that's not really that important. What's important is the spiritual life of mine. That's what I can take with me when the

stock market crashes. So let's kind of work on what I can, you know, and so somehow or other, I don't know how it is for each of you, but somehow to inspire the mind with face with confidence with, with a sense of, you know, this is really a wonderful, important thing to do. And is more important than thinking about when women have for dinner or, you know, all kinds of other things in the mind, one might want to do. So all this is kind of getting yourself in the mood, getting yourself kind of ready prepared, and doing it intentionally, to sit down, just kind of walk off the street, you know, and come home and slam the door and sit down, okay, I'm gonna get concentrated. Maybe you can, and I'm sure it's helpful, I'm sure it's a nice thing to do. I'm not gonna tell you not to do that. But it's probably better off if you have kind of a sense of intentionality, and respect and care and what you're doing. And you set yourself up to do it in a nice way. Some of you might be interested in doing it much more elaborate and involved. Some of you might, you know, might be too much and you don't like all that kind of stuff. Some people do it very ritualistically can I say almost like a ritual every day. And the repetition of a ritual also is very helpful to getting the mind geared up and folks getting ready to do something. There are some times when the mind is distracted. And there's nothing you can do to get concentrated. You might have a major argument with a good friend. And maybe you're able to get a good concentration for some time. And then after this big argument, you find might take weeks and weeks before you can get yourself concentrated again, because somehow that's reverberating in your mind before we until it gets settled and processed. So there are things that can happen. That as you go along, that might make it difficult, and you'd have to kind of work with patients without with grace with that as it happens. I heard an interesting thing this week. In my son's school, there's a young girl who has taken dyslexia, how you pronounce it, most I must be having myself as always confused the words with that word, dyslexia. And so she's having really hard time learning how to read. So she was sent, she went to my mother took her for a week at a special week long workshop for children's dyslexia to help teach them to read. And the person who's figured out this workshop figured out that people was that lexia attend to their mind works differently than people who don't have it. And they tend to be much more visually oriented, and spatially oriented than people who, you know, can read much more greater ease with linearly. And so they do things like create sculptures of all the letters, so they have a visual image in three dimensional image of the letter. And they have, and there's some words like 281 words in the English language apparently, which don't have easy images associated with them. So the kids make these sculptures Are those words so they have an image associated with it. So we can see that word, they see an image so that it helps them to read. But the most interesting thing in terms of the concentration was the, the teacher, I haven't explained to the kids something like this. Imagine that you're looking at a slice of pizza. And then move around and look at the pizza from the backside and the crust side. And then move your mind around. So all in the mind, imagine yourself looking at one side, and then imagine you're looking at it from the point side, looking at the point and move around, look at it, you know, and apparently, kids have dyslexia I have a pretty good apparently a good ability to use their visual mind like that and kind of move around in their mental space to kind of looking at different angles set at what

is going on.

And then the teacher said Okay, so then imagine that you go behind the pizza crust, you look at that part of the wide side of the wedge, and it's behind your head, and you're kind of there behind your head. And the point of the pizza is going straight ahead and imagine that you're there. And you're kind of following that point in looking straight ahead into what you're focusing on. And the mother who was with the daughter the whole time, it was really amazing to watch my daughter learn this skill. I couldn't make any sense of it myself. But my daughter, you can see I can see her now she kind of gets into this little mode. And she gets kind of focused, in a way she'd never seen her focus before. His image and this idea of kind of being behind her head a little bit. And looking down at something was really helped me be concentrated. So I say that because everyone each of us has their own particular unique mind how it works, and sometimes having some sense of, of how to work our mind. can be helpful. Some people I know who have used visualizations to get themselves concentrated. So because it kind of visualization image is kind of really captivating, but mine's really interesting for some people. I know one person who used the image of herself as a, as a Soaring Eagle. And she's the magic kind of soaring. And somehow that image of her story and kind of helped her kind of really be present in the moment and get concentrated. There's a variety of things you might use as an image. I know one person other person who had the idea, also a bird image, where she imagined she was a hawk, high, high high up in the sky. And the Hawks have this great vision so she imagines and has great vision. She's kind of just see what was there. I like the imagery, you sometimes have the ocean waves washing back and forth across the beach. And so imagine the breath is like the ocean, washing across the beach, you know they in breath now metaphor, some of that image kind of gets me connected to the breath. And generally, when we people do mindfulness practice, it's not a good idea to do visualization like that. It's a very different process. But developing concentration visualization can be quite helpful. And so there's a simple thing that you can do, then you can do the visualization as a way of getting started. And once you feel yourself getting started in your present and calm down, then maybe you can let go the visualization and then focus on the breath, wherever the object is. So you know, part of this, I would say is a play with a mind, experiment. Experiment with the mind in different ways and see if there's ways in which you can begin working the mind in different ways in the normal mind is used. And maybe that's helpful to have concentrated. It's almost like you know what, it is? McAfee physiological point of view, concentration practices, kind of working our brainwaves in a biochemistry in different ways. And, and be adjusting and changing, it's settling it. And so, you know, we're kind of learning how all the different buttons in the mind work in the brain work, the learning, you know, the different factors and how they play play them. In the mode of mind, the brain is three dimensional. And I would suggest, I don't know if it's true, but it is most people were kind of like a two dimensional model of their mind. And so if it became kind of getting a three dimensional quality of the mind, and began kind of playing or how it would be like to, to focus on the breath, from that part of the mind, or from that part of the body, or from this angle, or like this, you know, kind of find out what it takes what works for you to get concentrated. So there's this intentional quality that's necessary. Some people need to develop strength intentionality be able to hang in there resolve and be resolved. And you can develop a capacity to resolve this is what I'm doing. I'm doing doing this and following my breath. When I was in Burma, it was observed that when the Burmese teacher told the Burmese to follow the breath they did. You know, it's a patriarchal culture. And if the patriarch of the family tells you

what to do, you do it. And so he's model of the Buddhist teacher in Burmese, Buddhist teacher, as the is the father figure probably tells you what to do. Because follow your breath. You do it Westerners, Americans, when they came to Burma, and had this father figure, tell him to follow your breath. Well, there was a lot of confusion about that. And, you know, those issues about their father and their mother. And, you know, and autonomy and you know, being independent and you No, it was not so easy because, you know, just to follow the breath, but you know, often it was, you know, seemed very easy for the many of many of the Burmese to follow the breath compared to the rest of us who struggled for months sometimes. So this capacity to kind of just settle down, be resolved and here I am, this is what I'm doing is very important. So, it'll be very nice this evening. If someone would recite the method sutta you're supposed to have memorized it, memorizing it. Anybody would like to do it. You mind doing it with a mic

to reach the state Peace, when skilled in the good, should be capable and upright,

straightforward and easy to speak to. Gentle and not proud, contented and easily supported, living lightly, and with few duties wise,

wise and with senses calm, not arrogant, and without greed for supporters, and should not do the least thing that the wise would criticize. One should reflect. may all be happy and secure. May all beings be happy at heart, all living beings, whether we Strong, tall, large, medium or short, tiny or big, seen or unseen, near or distant, born or to be born, may they all be happy. Like no one, no one despise another. Or let no one deceive another or despise anyone anywhere. No one through anger or aversion, wish for others to suffer as a mother would, would risk our own life to protect your child, her only child. So toward all beings, should we cultivate a boundless heart with loving kindness for the whole world should we cultivate a boundless heart, above or below in all around without obstruction, without hate and without ill will, standing or walking, sitting or lying down? Whenever we are awake? Maybe stay with this recollection. This is called a sublime abiding here and now, when you is virtuous endowed with vision, not taken by views and having overcome all greed for sensual pleasure, will not be reborn again.

Thank you very much. So, what I'd like us to do now is the moment is for everyone to recite together the best you can and then we'll do another city. But if you so if you'd like to stretch a little bit, just for a second, just so you're welcome to stand and do that. So let's all do it together to reach the state of peace, one scale

All right, straight forward to speak to

10. So, proud, contented, supportive, living likely and with you duties wise and with census comm again Then being gentle at ease with yourself

## Set yourself

in an intentional posture for meditation. The intentional side of meditation does not need to be forced or hard. Be at ease with yourself. But then carefully, conscientiously. Gather yourself together in your body and mind here. We want our body and mind to be together in the same place at the same time. You're thinking about yesterday or tomorrow than you were your mind is in a different time and place in your body, which is here. Bringing your mind here. You might even start thinking about here, thinking about your body, feeling it exploring it. And in your mind, suffuse your body with awareness helps you arrive here and be settled. It can be helpful to think about the preciousness of human life of the live life. being alive now. Right now your experience your lived experience is important is precious. new image which I use sometimes this image of lowering myself into a refreshing pool the water or bring the body into it the same way can you imagine your awareness yourself, your being lowering itself into the body. Become one body more here, like you're lowering yourself into refreshing pools of water I think the awareness settle through the body. feel any tension anywhere. As you exhale. Maybe you could imagine it dissolving as you let go or soften with it dissolving in the water And then take a few moments to see if you can find a good feeling in your body and your being something it feels kind of nice or comfortable feeling contentment or ease. Pleasure. Or if it's easy you can evoke a sense of contentment or ease, maybe even delay, peaceful delight for being here in this body this time. tuning into the breath and making a choice intentional choice now to direct the attention on the breath. You might begin by taking a few deep breaths and usual so that there's an intentional quality to breathing. That helps the intentionality of your awareness. Connecting the breath with the awareness. And then the breath more fully. More sensations of the breath by breathing more deeply. Feeling good Breath more deeply so the mind will usually begin to turn itself to focus on the breath to be familiar with it. Then slowly let the breath return to normal feeling the breath And then notice if you can adjust your breathing within the normal range of breath and natural range. So the breath is more comfortable, more enjoyable, more contentment as you breathe. Relaxing as you breathe out perhaps you breathe out more fully. Breathing in a teeny bit more fully. Maybe it's breathing into the ribcage or the diaphragm be more relaxed to the belly softer Maybe it's enjoy. That's very brief pause between breathing out and breathing in. It's not always possible, but when possible, see if you can tune into something which is pleasant or enjoyable about the breathing the sensations of breathing right To the whole breath body expanding and contracting, a particular spa. A particular phase in the cycle. Make a resolve be resolved. Even a stay with a breath one breath after the other. I didn't go whatever interferes with that. Applying a little bit of strength to hang in there with each breath. And if it helps, you can count. Stay there with the breath. The breath becomes the center of your universe. Most important thing going on right now just breathing. Breathing in an enjoyable way. There's no need to judge how well you're doing Every energy or effort you have in judging what's going on, use that energy instead for staying with the breath or focusing letting yourself sink into the breath It's sometimes constructed. Make a very small, little smile, smile in the corner of your mouth. As your smile arises or happens to be feelings of pleasure, well being that arises because of that. See if there's some way if that pleasure or good feeling comes from smiling can encourage you to stay with the breath and that in turn, staying with the breath kind of helps that good feeling to grow. Spread Sometimes having a sense of stillness

around you and you still miss around the breathing can help you help a person stay with the breath more easily will help the mind become stiller and its focus. If there's any tendency to think about how poorly it's going, don't bother with that. And if instead it might be more useful to focus on how it is working focus on softness, stillness, breathing in, breathing out. Perhaps you could imagine that the awareness is like a hand that's placed on the sensations of breathing. And you're not going to let the hand pull away to the kind. So throughout the whole cycle of breathing, breathing in and out between beginning of the end breath, the end of the opera, the awareness, just progress there stays there in touch with the breathing. And then in the last minute to the sitting, let go of the breath and then review the sittings. Take a minute or so to review what it was like for you review the quality of your effort. What happened? Now that you review it, could you imagine that you could have been a little bit more resolved or intentional? Could you let go of things faster, more willingly. The more tension we carry with us, the more likely it is for the mind to spin out and thoughts to be preoccupied with thoughts and concerns. The more calm we are more settled relaxed we are, the more likely it is to be able to actually stay present because it's not going to be so much for me the mind wander off and spin around. So, important part of getting concentrated is to get calm, you can get to calm so you have to be watched for that. So you may keep a good effort and energy going. At the same time. The process of getting concentrated is described sometimes as a process of unification, bringing all the different aspects of the body mind in harmony working together. As that begins to happen, and as the hindrances as we talked about last week, no longer are grabbing us who have different thoughts don't grab us. We're not compelled or seduced into going off into different thoughts and concerns. And we can just stay there and Mike and stay there on the breath without being distracted. Then it said that we've arrived at a stage called access concentration or sometimes called neighborhood concentration, which is the access point or the threshold for going into a whole other realm of consciousness, whole other dimension of, of meditation. And as a person gets into this access, concentration, and there's very little tendency to just be distracted anymore, the hindrances are put to rest. Not so easily pulled pulled aside. Then the practice continues, just be focused, focus oneself, one pointedly as best you can, on wherever they are. Objective attention needs to be one pointed on the breath, for example. And this point is, generally tends to be good to choose a very small area of the breath. It's a really precise focus at this point. It doesn't have to be, but I think that's often the best with the breath. And then, and just stay there. And some teachers will encourage meditators to spend a lot of time in excess concentration, Don't be in a hurry to go deeper. There are deeper these deeper states. But there's one approach to developing meditation is to develop deeper states of meditation slowly, so you get familiar with each of the different levels you can go and, and so you get stabilized in it, and you get integrated with it and you get to develop it kind of Institute's fuller capacity. It's possible to go kind of quickly through different stages of meditation and it's kind of rewarding to go deep. But it's kinda not so stable each time you go. And a lot of the benefits and integration of our psychophysical being that can happen, doesn't really happen if we kind of go through deeper and deeper very fast. So some teachers will say, it's really good when you get to access concentration, okay, let's just won't give you any more instruction somehow go further. Let's just kind of get you to go and go stay stay there longer. Let's, you know, that was great to be able to stay there for five minutes or one minute, that was great. Now let's see if we can do 10 minutes or 15 minutes. Can you really kind of stretch

how long you stay there? And can you begin exploring that little bit of terrain and what's going on in access concentration? What are some of the different factors of different like physical or mental factors that come into play, in particular, with teachers who like to kind of keep the person access concentration for some time, there is some investigation that can happen there. And sometimes, too, The person is encouraged to investigate or notice the presence of five different mental factors. There's a lot of different mental factors that can come into play. But there's five, which are really helpful for the process of going deeper. And the first one is the initial, it's called, maybe awkward way, the initial application of mind, the initial kind of, kind of bring the mind to focus on the breath, the focus, just the beginning, you know, the first intention and place in the mind there. The second is what's called a sustained application of mind or in direction in mind, that's where you sustain the attention on the object. So we talked a little about that last week, is you know, like, the polishing the bowl, you put the cloth on the bowl. That's the initial effort, and then the sustained effort is to then to rub the bowl. So you said, noticing a little bit, that ability of the mind to do that. It's not always easy to do that. I've had some terrible trouble with this particular one. But even though I'm doing it, I know I'm doing it, it seems obvious, I'm doing it a little bit. It's kind of strange. And that's this access data kind of actually, for me to kind of identify it, or the people have an easy time. Sometimes it's easier to tell a story. But then, so there's two factors, the initial and the sustained application of attention. The next one is to notice joy. And joy can be very subtle. And it can be really powerful, but it started noticing the presence of joy or delight, or sometimes they call it rapture. I like the word joy. And that's a third one and then the fourth one One is to notice the presence of happiness. And the difference between joy and happiness is that joy is a lot more energetic than happiness. Joy is happiness tends to be much more settled and peaceful feeling than joy. There is image of this given is, if someone is in the desert really thirsty and they see a pond drinking water in the distance