

2020-11-27 Eightfold Path-Right Concentration (1 of 4)

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SPEAKERS

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So hello. This morning, I'm going to start the topic of right concentration, the eighth step, eighth factor of the Eightfold Path.

Concentration is really something to celebrate. Some marvelous quality, capacity. I know many people challenge with concentration and meditation. And hopefully we can engage in this topic and in the practice of it without being too concerned at success. But maybe there can be a kind of an inspiration or sense of wonder at the marvel of mind that gets concentrated. And perhaps some of you have had that from time to time. A mind that was very simply, a content, satisfied, settled, here in the present moment, with no concerns or no troubles.

The first teaching I received when I went to Thailand, I'd been practicing some years before that here in the United States. But when I went to Thailand, the first teachings I received when I got there within a day or two was that concentration was mostly a matter of letting go. So rather than something that we work at doing, pushing or straining to become concentrated, it was mostly letting go of what takes us away from being concentrated. And no one ever said this. But it's almost as if a concentrated state, or to say maybe in Pāli Samādhi, is more like coming home. And being settled at home, being at ease and at rest at home. And no longer running around the world, running in circles, doing all kinds of things. And being able to come home and sit really contented and happy because everything else has been let go of and we're just here in a very nice way. Samādhi has a richer, the word Samādhi has a richer connotation than the English word concentration. I think many people, English speaking people, will think of concentration as a straining or narrowing and a tightening of attention. And maybe it's almost the opposite. It's a softening and opening and settling. So the mind is not distracted. It's not being pushed here and there. But it's really here and connected in a focused way on something which is healthy and wholesome. Focus on something which is beneficial.

The topic of concentration has a lot to do with what we do with our attention. And if we don't do anything with our attention, if we don't have some choice about where attention is applied, the mind will

choose itself or mind will go wherever the strongest signals are coming from, whether it's advertisers or social media or our friends or whatever. And just kind of mind just kind of go scattered or the mind just wanders around all over in itself. And attention just follows in a random way, or haphazard way and without any consideration about what is really best for the mind? What's best for the heart any given moment? And these kind of moments of either non decision, just letting the mind wander freely without any choice are many, many, many. There's a phenomenal number of them. So there's this amazing list of or so of having to do with time. So, we all are given one life. And if we live long enough, we'll have 100 years. If we have 100 years to live, that's 400 seasons. If it's 400 seasons, then three seasons a year, then there's 1200 months that we'll have in that hundred years. 5200 weeks in a life. 36 some thousand days. 876,504 hours. Over 52 million minutes. And over 3 billion seconds. And every second, the mind chooses something for its attention. In fact, it's actually in microseconds, in fractions of seconds, the mind is actually already moving around and taking in many things. It's jumping around so much. We actually take in a lot of data in small parts of a second. But just this idea of 3 billion seconds in a life. Now, some of those I guess we're sleeping. But there's a lot of moments in which to choose where attention goes. And to choose something that's beneficial and helpful and wholesome.

The story about the Buddha kind of discovering the value of concentration for the path of liberation has to do with remembering a time when he was young, and we think maybe around six years old. And it was supposed to be a spring plowing festival in his time and his father was kind of officiating this festival. And as a six year old, he was left alone on the edge of the field under the shade of a rose apple tree. And apparently, he was sitting there and maybe absorbed in watching the festival or something. In this very safe environment cozy situation, he dropped into a deep state of concentration, deep sense state of well being. And when he remembered this state when he was an adult, he thought maybe this is the path forward. And he said, Yes, this is the path forward. This sense of being settled, focused, absorbed in a very nice way. And here he makes maybe one of the first distinctions that I've been talking to earlier in this series of the Eightfold Path and right mindfulness, between that which is of the skin and that which is deep inside. That which is of the flesh and deep inside. And he recognized the sense of well being that came from this concentrated state was not on the surface, was not skin deep or flesh deep. Really belonged to the deep inner life. And he realized he didn't have to be afraid of this deep inner sense of well being. And so then, his concentration practice was in a sense to cultivate and develop a deep sense of well being.

One way that he describes this kind of state of mind, it's a state of mind, Samādhi, mind, mind of Samādhi, of concentration, which is ready, receptive, free from hindrances, elated, and confident. So to be able to kind of settle the mind, classic language - tame the mind, develop the mind, strengthen the mind. So that it's not just jumping around and running around this thought and that thought, that concern and this concerned, jumping around paying attention to all kinds of data on the environment. But to really kind of settle and gather itself together, be gathered, unified mind. So that's ready, receptive, free of hindrances. Hindrances are these forces in the mind that grab the attention so much, they're kind of like black holes. We can fall into these hindrances, like desire and ill will, like light goes into a black hole and it doesn't see the light doesn't come out. So sometimes attention falls into the black hole of the hindrances and it doesn't come out for a while. And so to be free of hindrances is to have the attention available, really available to be present here. And then elated. This idea there's

happiness and joy and well being in this inner life of ours that comes from letting go. Really a deep settling in. And the art of letting go is challenging because there's so many things we think are so important, that's we have to be concerned with things or have things be a certain way or we have to stay close to our resentments or something. But to have the confidence and trust to let go, at least in meditation. Or take the risk to just let go of all things except really be here, gathered together, settled, present.

Here's another description of a mind that's concentrated, this Samādhi mind, that some of the upper reaches of Samādhi. So don't think that you're supposed to be this in regularly in your morning meditation. Purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability. Or sometimes the Buddha just called it much more simply inner serenity. To cultivate an inner tranquility here. And the purpose for this is not for his own sake, but it has a number of values. One is it's a powerful teacher. That to discover this deep inner contentment and happiness and serenity of concentration of Samādhi is to have an experience of well being that's qualitatively different than a lot of the sensual pursuits that people follow. It's a sense of well being this qualitatively better, obviously better, than being involved in ill will and jealousy and envy and things like that. It just like why once we have this reference point of this peaceful place of being, other things kind of begin to not seem so interesting. And there's a deeper wellspring of vitality that can come that is very different than the energy that's involved in sensual pursuits. Nothing wrong with them or being involved in ill will, which has some things which are wrong with it. There's a different vitality that is just clearly a really healthy and good place to be. That's also very healing. That to cultivate Samādhi is a deep reconciliation with oneself. The parts of ourselves that are hurt, broken, divided, separated, pushed away. You can't really develop the sense of wholeness that Samādhi is. And so as we develop this concentration, it tends to do a lot of healing, reconciliation of ourselves. But ultimately, the purpose of Samādhi and right Samādhi is to bring wisdom. To be able to see things as they really are. To see, think clearly. And see things so clearly, what's happening, that we attain liberation, freedom. We begin using concentration, the settled concentrated mind, to stay focused, stay connected to the sense of freedom that's here. And to open that freedom more, to grow it and develop until there's a deeper and deeper release. So that Samādhi is not for its own sake, but it has these benefits. And the ultimate one is really, really to go beyond Samādhi itself. And that is to open up into liberation and freedom.

So that's the introduction, and I'll talk about right Samādhi some more next week, and probably three more talks on it. Thank you.