

# 2020-11-30 Eightfold Path-Right Concentration (2 of 4)

Mon, 11/30 7:54AM • 14:49

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mind, samadhi, concentration, eightfold path, mundane, telescope, attention, absorbed, wholehearted, meditation, train, path, developing, sense, read, soft, tea, altered, distracted, stability

## SPEAKERS

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So continuing the series of talks on Right Concentration as part of the Eightfold Path. So the Eightfold Path ends with concentration in a sense. There's two more steps of the Eightfold Path that becomes then kind of the Eightfold path, that becomes a ninth step and tenth step, which we'll do Thursday and Friday.

The eightfold path in a sense ends with concentration as being the quality of state of mind that is ripe for a deep letting go. Ripe for change and transformation. And so part of the function of concentration, developing Samādhi, is in fact to tenderize the mind, the heart. Soften it, relax it, so it's not so hard or brittle, or defended or tight. So it can't be released or free or relaxed in a very deep way. And so concentration kind of prepares the mind so that it can have also deep insight. It gives the mind a stillness or stability that I can see deeply.

Imagine that you're riding on a flatbed train. And you're standing in the middle of the train - safe, nice. With a telescope, big telescope in your hand. And you're standing there as the train goes along the tracks. And you're trying to look at the moon at night. And chances are with that the train is rattling so much and you can't stand still enough that you can't really hold the telescope still enough to really be able to see the moon. You might occasionally scan by the moon, but you can't really focus on it. But then if you take the same telescope, and put it on a tripod on solid ground, then the telescope is stable enough, you can find the moon and zero in and look at it carefully. So if the mind is rattled like going on a train and shaking all the time and bouncing around, it doesn't have the stability to see deeply into the full moon of our own hearts, full moons of our minds. And so we won't have stability for that and that function of concentration is for stability.

When people talk about concentration, Samādhi, a powerful word. They often refer to or think about altered states. There are what it's called altered sometimes. The question is what is most altered is the everyday mind. Though maybe everyday mind, it's frazzled and full of hindrances and distracted easily and preoccupied. Maybe that's the altered mind. And some people say that when we practice

concentration practice, we're going back to the natural state of the mind, free of the weights altered by our attachments and preoccupations, and fears and angers and things like that. But still compared to everyday mind, that concentrated mind is quite different. And sometimes they use the word exalted, or they use the word, you know, a very powerful state of minds that tremendous stillness and bliss and peacefulness. And so it can seem very different from ordinary life. It can seem extraordinary and special. And in a sense it is. But we don't want to get too caught up with that idea or pursue it too much or think that's where we're supposed to be. So I'd like to talk a little bit today about concentration or Samādhi. And not so much in meditation, but in everyday life. That the ability to live our mundane life in such a way that the ordinary activities of our life. They become extraordinary. The mundane becomes, in a sense, sacred. That it's not like we're trying to get some different experience. It's more like the way in which we bring attention to the experience we're having. And so of washing dishes, for example, to have Samādhi. The Samādhi of dishwashing. Eating, the Samādhi of eating. Cooking, the Samādhi of cooking. Sweeping the Samādhi of sweeping. Driving, the Samādhi of driving.

And what this Samādhi here means is that we are just really there for the experience. We're not thinking about something else. We're not multitasking. We're not doing it, but really the mind is already ahead to the next task, the next thing we have to do. Or the mind is lingering in a conversation we had yesterday. That the attention in our hearts and our minds are kind of fully there for the activity we have. And so that making a cup of tea is a time of Samādhi if we do it wholeheartedly, completely. And there's something in the alchemy of doing something with our full attention, that doesn't really change the tea making exactly. But we're enveloping or we're meeting the tea cup, the tea that we're making whatever we're doing. We're meeting it with a kind of higher quality attention, a kind of wholehearted presence, that begins to infuse the situation with some really nice ways of being, qualities of being. Maybe not automatically at first. But Samādhi has a lot to do about settling in, and no longer being restless with, no longer bouncing around, no longer going off in mind and thinking about other things. But really, really being there for what we're doing. It can seem boring, because our thoughts can be much more exciting. or thoughts can be much more frightening. You know, we tell ourselves frightening ideas, and we're worried about the future about something. And so we're thinking about what's going to happen or something. But to trust and relax and feel like just okay, just a tea making for this moment. To learn to do that so that it becomes a delight. The ordinary becomes extraordinary. It's like it comes alive, there's a vitality, there's a livingness, there's a sense of intimacy and fullness with just this activity.

Now some of you probably have had, I hope, some of you had some nice experiences some time in your life. Or really being absorbed and doing some activity. I know that when I was younger, I used to read a lot of novels. And I just loved, I always feel so good, I'd be absorbed the novel. And the sense of well being would set in, partly because I wasn't thinking about all my worries anymore. And I was just being pulled and absorbed in the novel. And that kind of focus and concentration that brought me a kind of very simple delight or joy. And I think sometimes what I enjoyed about reading novels, was not necessarily the story I was reading, but rather the absorption I had. The kind of really there, fully for that thing. And there might be something else that does the same thing. That listening to music can do it perhaps or sometimes being at a park and watching some kids play or something happening in the park. And we get absorbed in this world. Sitting and watching a river go by can be kind of absorbing. The idea is to begin doing that in our everyday activities, the mundane world. So that the mundane

world becomes sacred, which is probably not quite the right word because in Latin sacred kind of implies something that's been separated out, someplace outside of what's mundane or profane. But in Buddhism, what's sacred is` the whole world when the attention is really there for it. It's really a worthwhile thing to develop that capacity, mundane concentration, mundane wholeness of just being with what we're doing when we're doing it there. Because it builds momentum. It builds a kind of familiarity. We learn eventually, wow, this is nice. This is really great to be here in the experience we have while we're doing it. So all the all the discussion about concentration applies to everyday life as well.

On the Eightfold Path, as I've keep mentioning, there are two versions of it. One where it's a path to freedom, and one is a path of expanding that freedom that we've experienced. And so concentration practice has both sides of it too. Were developing the mind, strengthening the mind by being wholehearted, present for the mundane experience of breathing. Just like we would do for the tea or the dishes, whatever else we do. Or if the breathing doesn't work for you, some other object or way of practicing mindfulness. There's a wholeheartedness just here for that. And we just come back, come back, sustain the attention over and over again, until the distracted mind begins to weaken and quiet. And it becomes easier and easier to stay present. It's partly, there's a muscle in the mind almost, the concentration muscle, that that gets stronger, and the muscle for distraction gets weaker. And so then at some point, construction muscle is stronger than what's left of the distraction muscle. And it's easy and easier to stay.

And as we do that, the mind begins to shift and change. When we have some degree of freedom, familiarity with that, we can recognize some of the qualities of a mind that is free. Not that the mind is 100% this way. Maybe it's just a little sliver of the mind. But we recognize Oh, there is something that's a part of the mind that's soft and relaxed and open, receptive. And so to begin using that as a reference point for how we develop the continuity of attention, which is concentration.

So I want to read a paragraph from - I have a book on the Eightfold Path called the Steps to Liberation. And maybe I should have mentioned that the beginning of this Eightfold Path series - and I want to read a paragraph. "When we know how a concentrated mind is part of the Eightfold Path, we can use the possibility of the peaceful, expansive mind as a guidepost along the path. Rather than straining with striving and expectations, we cultivate receptive readiness. We let go deeply so the mind can be free of tension. By understanding the value of a soft mind, we're less likely to get tense as we practice, When we remember the need to become free of the hindrances, we're less easily taken in by their authority. And when we understand the role of joy and mental brightness on the path, we will be quicker to recognize and support these states. When we understand the role of joy and mental brightness, we will be quicker to recognize these states when they're there." So it's not a big should, it's not a big strain, it's not a big something that you have to perfect. The path to the perfection of concentration is through being relaxed about the imperfection of how it's going. How easily distracted you are and how caught up. But then regardless of how it is,` to keep coming back, keep coming back. And maybe coming back with a kind of attention that is a delight to bring, that you enjoy doing. Maybe it's a tender care, maybe it's a lovely curiosity interest. Maybe it's a a soft wholeheartedness just there. Maybe it's love. That somehow find a way to really be with your meditation, fully there. With the idea of absorption, being

absorbed in it, being really in its domain fully. But with a soft mind, a joyful mind, a receptive mind, a ready mind, a malleable mind, a mind not caught up in all its preoccupations. Developing that mind is one of the great tasks of meditation. It doesn't really matter how long it takes. But mindfulness practice is moving in this direction. The more we practice mindfulness, concentration follows in its wake. The more we cultivate concentration, mindfulness keeps opening more and more.

So be very content with the mundane world of dishwashing and breathing. But see if you can meet those things wholeheartedly as each thing that you're doing is the most important thing of the moment. And then we'll continue with this topic of Samādhi tomorrow.

Thank you.