

# Samādhi Is Pure Enjoyment

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Let's look at the idea of concentration, or samādhi. When you hear those four little syllables con-cen-tra-tion, what do they imply to you? It may take a few moments to articulate it, but you might immediately feel a particular set of energies starting to take over. You probably get a sense of doing something, working hard at it to get it right. That's the normal take. We clench up, get tight, and go for it. It's intensive practice, a 'concentration' camp. No slacking! With this kind of thinking, we rev up the controlling systems, the duty systems, the work systems, the 'get-it-right' systems. Right there is stress. A line of tension starts to form across your brow.

Now such attitudes and tactics may work for a while – but in a few days we will start to tire out. Something in us tightens up, but at the same time, something else in us is probably saying, 'Ah, the heck with this.' We want to get some enjoyment, so we look for legitimate ways to avoid 'The Practice.' We need food for the heart, and if we don't get our happiness and ease in Dhamma practice, then we'll get it elsewhere. Read something, eat something, or go for a walk to relax. But what if samādhi was a relief, even accompanied by the enjoyment of feeling 'at home'? What if samādhi was a matter of settling into a unified state? After all, in the suttas it's defined as 'unification.' And in the way the Buddha presented it, samādhi is food for the heart, and its immediate cause is happiness – the happiness born of unplugging stress.

So it's important to question our perception of concentration, and our attitude towards getting it. The 'getting it' approach doesn't work in terms of appreciation of the present – but the present is all that we can fully directly be aware of. We're directly aware of the present moment through feeling it and being affected by it – and that's not a matter for thought or goal, it's a matter of heart in the present. But if we're led by a work-ethic that demands achievement, we lose present-moment appreciation and enjoyment; so we leave out the heart. And there's the mistake: because there can't be any settling and unification without feeling it in the heart.

Of course, the snag is that the heart can be affected by some pretty wild, scared or nasty impressions and impulses, so a cleanup is needed. This becomes apparent as we meditate and find ourselves getting irritable and critical. For instance when somebody opens the door too loudly, or we don't like the way other people are walking, or the number of cushions they sit on. We find that the heart is out of touch with kindness or empathy; and this faultfinding attitude gets even worse if meditation practice is based solely on intense attention, in which the discriminative faculties are heightened. If the heart isn't gladdened and brought into play, the balance between head and heart is lost, and we get irritated whenever anything prevents us from getting that intense scrutiny. And by and large, everything – weather, body pain, noise and of course other people always does just that! In fact 'getting' samādhi seems to be the recipe for endless frustration. We may think we need to try harder, but this misses an important point. The heart needs to be purified but not through intense attention on an object, but through wise reflection on our attitudes and approach. Then samādhi can come around through an enjoyment that deepens as we purify the heart.

Let's consider the process that leads to concentration in the way the Buddha described it, as being based on right view, right effort and right mindfulness. Samādhi is the settling into and enjoyment of the results of those three factors. In one instance he begins with: 'For one who keeps good moral conduct, there is no need to wish: "May freedom from remorse arise in me." Bhikkhus, it is in accord with 'nature' (Dhamma) that one who keeps good moral conduct will experience freedom from remorse.' So our effort and mindfulness is to maintain integrity in terms of bodily action, words and even intention; then to recognize and draw on the uplifting qualities of such conduct. We dwell on the heart opening effects of recognizing that 'no creature need fear or mistrust me.' Then the sequence of results proceeds with: 'For one who is free from remorse, there is no need to wish: "May gladness arise in me." Bhikkhus, it is in accord with nature that in one who is free from remorse, gladness will arise.' We're encouraged to put aside other ways of thinking and dwell on feeling free from regret. This affects our bodily tension and restlessness (notice the fidgeting and discomfort that accompanies a deliberate lie); and the body feels calm. Then: 'For one whose body is calm, there is no need to wish: "May I feel rapture." Bhikkhus it is in accord with nature ...' Here rapture is the buoyant, uplifted, spring-in-the-step energy that affects body and heart. And: 'For one who is rapturous, there is no need to wish, 'May I feel at ease.' This sense of being at ease is the final factor that supports samādhi : 'Bhikkhus, it is in accord with nature that the mind of one at ease is concentrated [or unified].' So we don't begin with the intention: 'May I be in samādhi'; through this process of bringing happiness into body and mind, the mind is naturally concentrated. That is samādhi.

So the 'how to?' question for those who rightly seek samādhi involves widening the focus to include wise reflection on cause and effect. This is right view. Then to keep bearing that focus in mind; to live with integrity, and feel the results of your attitudes and actions: this is right effort and right mindfulness. In detail: right view recognizes that we are an experience of causes and conditions, a web of potentials, actions and consequences, for good and for bad. This naturally gets us interested in what potentials we're activating in our mind – and those which lead to harmony and contentment and take us out of deceitfulness, distraction and selfishness are going to be our best bet. If we make an effort in that respect then we're potentizing factors that lead to samādhi. Because we're also lessening the potential for hindrances such as worry, denial and selfishness to take over the mind. To pay wise attention (yoniso manasikāra) to the skilful and bear it in mind is the track to samādhi ; and even without arriving at that, this is a fine and skilful way to live.

Right view is one of a natural consequence, of skilful effects proceeding from skilful causes. If we're mindful of the effect of living with integrity, and dwelling on how that feels in the heart, right view leads on. Right effort then follows as the effort to live with integrity, and, through meditation, to dwell upon and integrate that attitude and attention in terms of body and mind-states. For samādhi, we don't need to make any further effort than this: to gentle our attitude, to widen and deepen attention and to stay with and firm up in that. This is the kind of attention that you work on as you focus on body, or breathing, or whatever your meditation object is.

There are two pieces in that paradigm that meditators may miss: the focus on the overall subjective feeling (which you lose if you over-emphasize the minutiae of scrutinizing sensations) and the encouragement to open up, and enjoy. So consider enjoyment to be

something to be skilfully developed. Normally enjoyment only gets triggered by exciting or delightful objects that cause the mind to pause, linger and drink in the sight, sound or taste, etc. But with cultivation, we pause, linger on and drink in the effects and attitudes that accompany kind and honest behaviour. We learn to widen, soften and include; and then continue that approach to our breathing, and our overall experience of embodiment.

Now that may not seem very precise. That's because it's not precise in terms of object definition, which is where we feel most secure. We think, 'When I can feel so many breaths occurring in my nostrils, then I'm concentrated. That's samādhi.' But on its own this approach leaves out the subjective dimension of motivation, attitude and psychological tendencies. So instead of basing samādhi solely on an object, also turn your attention around. Forget about the breath for a moment. Contemplate how are you feeling. Just being here – how does it feel? Are there regrets and grudges? What is your aim and intention? Is there a demanding impatient attitude? When do you feel calm and easeful? What's the energy like in these attitudes?

Living ethically and with respect for other beings is going to develop caring attitudes, and make us more attentive to what is driving us at any given moment. We may get pushy or manipulative or 'dogged but dull', but if we're attuned to attitudes and the very real consequences that an unskilful attitude has, we'll recognize that we need to step back and start from somewhere fresher, less driven or dutiful. So wise (or deep) attention is the initial activation for meditation, and it's based on right view. What is skilful or appropriate to sustain awareness of at this time? This means beginning with collecting the heart in the present, because the present is all there is. Here, now. And because just about anything can occupy that 'here, now' space, we might begin with reflecting on the Refuge of Buddha, the potential for awakening; or of Dhamma, the 'accessible, timeless, encouraging you to come and see'; or of Sangha, all those who experience some degree of realization or are on the Path to do so. Then there is reflection on ethics: to put aside our normal view of ourselves and pick up awareness of our virtues, skills and aspirations. This is a heart-matter, it's not about creating lists of good ideas, but about tuning it to a bright tone that is available here and now. This is right effort. Then to bear that tone in mind is right mindfulness.

So you put your mind on the right footing. You change the attitude and perspective that comes from the daily world of time and having some place to go, to one being more steady and collected in the here and now. The time sense is important to be clear about. Notice how the future feels as a direct experience: when there's something in the future, there's tension. This could be either because of impatience to get to a desirable state or an achievement; or it could be worry or dread over what might go wrong. In either case you lose the open ease of being in the present. When you think of the future as a definite reality, you believe in the moods that are embedded in that sense, and in the ideas that they create. Worries start to solidify; flexibility and the capacity to deal with what arises begin to dwindle. But how real is 'the future'? After all, we might be dead tomorrow! Isn't it more the case that the present will unfold in line with causes and conditions (the right view that the Buddha points out)? So check the time sense; it's caused by the moods and energies of the present. The visions and ideas are an illusion.

Take Refuge in Awakening. Direct awareness is only and always here and now; and conditions change around that sense. Tuning in to that truth grants us a perspective on our historical functioning personalities. Personality is tethered to the apparent realities of time and place – which are both subject to change in accordance with causes and conditions. And we can notice: when a strong sense of self-consciousness takes over – ‘I am this, I’m not that; I wasn’t that, I will be this’ – the heart/mind loses the right view of causes and conditions, and we get stuck in them. This getting stuck causes us to either grab or drop people, events, memories and feelings. We may try to hang onto them, or defend ourselves from them, or try to perform and make ourselves into something. Or we may compare and compete – but in all these cases, the mind tightens up and loses clarity and confidence. And in truth all that we can have and own is right view and all that we can get rid of is wrong view and suffering. Haven’t you noticed how everything else comes and goes and change?

As you enter more fully into meditation, the process is one of learning to get comfortable in your body and mind, and then resting them into stillness.

When we get into a good upright and settled posture, we attend within the boundary of the body to clean out its inner divisions – the tensions and staleness – so that it is no longer cramped or unbalanced. For this you can attune to the rhythmic process of breathing in and out and the pulsing, throbbing or dull sensations of the body. Within that realm of direct experience, notice that breathing is taking place. How do you know you are breathing? Just start to be aware of the rhythmic flow of that. It’s simple. Train in receiving the breath-flow, consciously attuning with the word ‘receive’ because it’s the least intense ‘doing’ that can occur. At first your receptivity may not be very clear or sharp or bright. Enhance the receiving; stay with it. Then ask, ‘What can I sense?’ Feel the modulations, the ins and outs of the breathing and the pauses; you can pick that up quite quickly. Focus in terms of patterns; like knowing the difference between the sounds and the silences when you listen to a voice. When you’re breathing, simply receive the patterns of sensation and allow yourself to enjoy and rest in their flow. Flow is not a discrete object. You can’t substantiate flow; things are dynamic, things are flowing. So the response has to be dynamic and flowing.

This means we focus the mind onto breathing and ask, ‘Hmm. What is this like? Why is my breath like this?’ Of course, we may think, ‘I need to adjust the breath to get it right. There’s something wrong.’ So we tinker with it and refine it. For example, you might want to slow the breath by lengthening the pause between the in- and out-breaths. Fine, if this leads to ease. But if we make elaborate concoctions or formulations around breathing, it gets to the point where we don’t even want to hear the word ‘breathing’ anymore.

Then attend to the breath-flow as it presses and moves through the tissues of the body. If you bring them together, this is ‘breathing through the body.’ It steadily clears and soothes the body. Then, where do feel your energies come together? Get there. Let the breath pass through that, time and time again. You’ll find yourself neither snagging on it nor moving away from it. Contemplate this breathing in the same way you’d appreciate a painting. Look at what it signifies. Don’t go up to the canvas and hook your nose on it. Keep it at a distance where your eye rests comfortably. That’s going to be different for different people. Your eye may rest comfortably on an object ten inches away, a foot away, two feet away. It depends. Put it where you feel comfortable. The idea of focusing is to settle, so focus in a way in which you feel

settled and easy, not confused or sleepy. That's the only point where you'll experience a steady breath. This point is really where your awareness can settle. Which means that it's a matter of attitude as well as a physical point.

Then you'll find yourself settling in. Then you'll begin to experience some kind of sign – the quality of openness without attachment has a characteristic feel, such as brightness. Listen in to that if it's something you experience through listening, like listening to the listening. If it's tactile, feel it. If it has an emotional base, resonate with it. It is beautiful. Notice the beauty. What is this beauty? It's where the mind feels gently delighted and uplifted. This is rapture – the threshold of samādhi.

We can't hold this beauty of rapture. A relationship to beauty is something akin to devotion. We don't hold it; we're aware of it in a way that's both gladdened and respectful. We have to give ourselves to it. Of course, this is something we're not used to; it's something that requires trust. Trust your body first of all. The body is something that can be trusted much more than the mind. And as one learns to trust, one learns to receive the blessings of what is good and conducive to the heart's welfare. This brings joy.

The enjoyment of embodied presence – this training to open to and settle in the body, rather than think about it – causes the mind to stop creating injunctions, controls and distractions, just because the underlying agitations that cause the mind to do all that get soothed out by the direct experience of the body. And as the body begins to feel settled, the mind also settles – it doesn't have conflicting interests and doubts. The mind gives up wrong attitudes, and yet refrains from conceit. In this way, release in terms of the body – release from tension and staleness – supports release of mind.

Overall, practising for samādhi entails introducing awareness to body, thought and mood in a mindful way. This requires a clear commitment of intention: like being here, being with the body, and the feeling. You use the bodily sense, especially the breathing sense, to get grounded in the here and now. Then, when you are settled into this embodied awareness, you can stand at the door of the heart and be with what arises in the mind without holding, favouring or resisting. You let things pass. This dispassion is also a 'sign' that the heart is calmed by; it loses interest in what passes, it doesn't mess with them. Pretty soon, the distracting inner visitors stop coming – why should unskilful mind-states arise in the first place? They're just created by the wrong view of the mind, in which it believes it can have or get rid of things that belong to the world. So release in mind comes down to release from the mind's wrong view.

Release is a graduated process. We work on getting the mind to release by changing its behaviour; as we've done with attending to Refuge, to the present, to wholesomeness and to being in flow. And for all of this the mind needs a reference, whereby we directly know the stress or ease by sensing how these mind states feel in the body. Whether we feel all up in our heads, brows furrowing, tension around our eyes, or sinking in the chest; or alternatively whether we feel more centred in our bodies, with the face and head muscles relaxed and a sense of open fullness in the chest. Then you can get a feel for what structures such as time and identity do to you. Can you breathe and soften out of them?

All this definitely changes the way the mind operates. And through this change we can check all kinds of psychological and emotional habits, by directly feeling how our attitudes affect us. Attachment to the senses feels rather violent compared with the flow of breathing. Also attachment to routines, systems and customs – *śilabbata-parāmāsa*: that has to fall away. This attachment hinders how *samādhi* can integrate into our lives; it fosters a controlling approach that conflicts with life. For example, we may compartmentalize a retreat. We divide our experience into sitting, walking, then free time, then more sitting, walking, free time. This seems logical and systematic, but it sets up the controlling mind, and pretty soon, that mind finds fault with what it can't control. *Samādhi* gets limited to specific systems and routines. Then we try to recreate the concentration by the system or even the external conditions. We plan: 'I'll have my cushion set up straight and my own special walking path that nobody better take over!' We create zones in which anything unwanted or unusual has been weeded out. This is a very rigid approach. If when something gets slightly out of pattern, we feel confused or upset, this is no way to live. If you want a sterile experience, you'd better live in a laboratory.

Instead we should learn to be more like a weed, rather than like a precious orchid that can survive only in a hothouse with sprays and special foods. Weeds can live just about anywhere; it's just our controlling and picky personalities that can't handle the raw stuff anymore. Because they're not in touch with the buoyant current of right view, right effort and right mindfulness.

So we train awareness rather than fuss around conditions. What we always have is body, thought and heart/mind. Then when awareness holds the body, there's embodiment – somatic presence. When we form skilful concepts and think reflectively with full awareness, there's wise clarity. And when we relate to what we feel and what moves us with an aware heart, there's openness and an inclusion that doesn't approve or disapprove. It allows what is felt to be felt and to pass. As these bases of awareness become assured, then the mind that is moved feels the steady presence of the body so it doesn't jump up or recoil from contact. The thinking simply notes rather than babble and proliferate, and the heart lets conditions pass. After a while sights and sounds don't even enter the heart; they may be seen or heard, but there's no resonance or disturbance. This is bare reference, developed mindfulness, or referring to things as they are. When this reference is fully established, awareness can settle into the experience of the peaceful heart. This is the enjoyment of *samādhi*.

I think of 'enjoyment' as 'receiving joy'; and *samādhi* as the art of refined enjoyment. It is the careful collecting of oneself to the joy of the present moment. Joyfulness means there's no fear, no tension, no ought to. There isn't anything we have to do about it. So there is stillness. It's just this.