

Thank you for your presence together.

We are looking at Samadhi:

The experience of being fully present, which is rather mystical. It is being fully alive in the moment.

It is a state of suchness, of flowing and presence as the moment unfolds that both feels miraculous and fresh, but is also inherent to who we are.

According to the Eightfold path, there are three ingredients necessary for Samadhi: right concentration, right mindfulness, and right effort.

We are starting with concentration: coming back into the moment. The question is: how does coming back into the moment align with feeling deeply alive? Is this true in your experience? How about for the difficult stuff we want to avoid?

- Directly: what was it like to come back into the moment?
- Indirectly: what takes you out of the moment?
- And coming back into the moment to something difficult, that you'd normally avoid?

In class, there was heartfelt sharing about the pain and discomfort that we flinch away from, and the fear of being truly present.

Also the need for patience and steadfastness with the deeper patterns that cause suffering. Some painful arisings, like being stuck in traffic, have short roots, and being present with it usually self liberates rather quickly.

But other kinds of pain have deep roots, and need repeated coming back to, repeated presence, to shift. Like a deeply stained piece of cloth, deeply held fears need to be washed over and over by being present with them. Each time, a little of the stain is lifted.

And, importantly, not resisting (coming back and being present with) is what removes the energies that keep fueling these patterns. Like a plant you stop watering, it might appear to live for a while, but eventually, if you stop feeding painful triggering by resisting them, they have no choice but to atrophy.

As one person said, it is saying 'yes' to life all during the day instead of 'no' on many subtle levels.

We did a short guided meditation together to recall a time and place where we felt samadhi, much like the historical Buddha, who recalled a childhood experience of deep presence and peace sitting under the apple tree during a festival. Some words you used to describe this: grounded, peaceful, intentional, electric, peaceful, alive.

In our lives, we stumble into this place from time to time. What if you could go there at will? When you wanted? To actually begin to live from this place? Would it be worth the effort?

I think we all felt yes. Which is what we are exploring this fall together. Remembering that this path isn't about fixing what's broken, some kind of discipline so we don't 'mess up'. It's about peace, and joy, and happiness. It's what our hearts are yearning for.

THE JHANNA STATES: in both fixed and flexible concentration styles

From the book, Thich Nat Hanh describes two kinds of concentration practices:

- SELECTIVE (fixed): a concentration practice, where we exclude everything but one thing. This includes Zen., mantra focus, etc.
- ACTIVE (flexible) concentration: what we are do in sight practice, staying and welcoming whatever comes into experience, our focus moving with objects as they come and go.

Hanh also talked about not misusing concentration to escape. From our understanding of samadhi, we see that this does not bring peace, is a temporary bandaid at best.

But there's something else here that you will run into from time to time: Jhannic practice. You will see the jhannas discussed in many traditions, including Insight retreats focused on the jhannas. It's helpful to know what this is about for when you come across it:

You may have come across the term "access concentration". Access is the development of concentration to the point where the mind is no longer pulled away by detracting forces. When you reach access level in a fixed

concentration practice, absorptive states called the “Jhannas”, or “Dhyanas” begin to open.

And they feel wonderful. They temporarily suppress the hindrances. But more than that, they involve states of great positive feelings and equanimity.

The first set are called “formed”, because you are still in everyday mind focused on everyday conditioned objects, the ‘forms’ we encounter in daily life. Conditioned objects are everything that comes and goes: thoughts, feelings, sensations, perceptions, memories, planning, etc.

The second set are called ‘formless’, because the focus is on emptiness, or the unconditioned ground of who you are.

The limitation is, when you are off the cushion and back in life, they are no longer present. These are STATES of being, and as such are conditioned and impermanent.

As Adyanshanti writes in “True Meditation”, “we do not seek states (ultimately) because all states are limited, impermanent, and conditioned. Fascination with states leads to bondage and dependency. True meditation is abiding in the .. ground of awareness... it appears spontaneously when awareness is not fixated on objects of perception.”

The historical Buddha himself went to a Jhanna master and studied deeply before he realized this was not what he was ultimately looking for to end suffering and moved on.

However, there can be insight and benefit in these states.

A little more about them, just so you have some familiarity.
The first four formed levels, in the order they are experienced:

- 1) rapture, joy, very pleasant. Thinking mind still active.
- 2) joy deepens, thinking dies away.
- 3) joy gives way to equanimity, as the grasping towards pleasant and aversion to unpleasant become suppressed.
- 4) both pleasure and pain die away, leaving equanimity and clear awareness and deep stillness.

The following four formless levels:

1. Limitless space. See emptiness and form, deeply realize that each fully interpenetrates the other. As the heart sutra says, form IS emptiness, and emptiness IS form.
2. Limitless consciousness. The limits of awareness, that we tend to confuse with the limits of the physical body, drop away. We see that the awareness that illuminates our everyday experience is in fact limitless and unbounded. It is the fact consciousness of the Cosmos, the divine Being.
3. Signlessness. we see that nothing exists separately. The entire cosmos is in every object, and objects do not exist as separate entities. The belief in the physical world begins to fall away. Everything happens within yourself, the open transparent awareness that makes up all things and experiences.
4. Moving beyond perception. see that our day to day experience is contained within perception. Because perception is a conditioned object, nothing is seen clearly. So we see beyond the apparent perception of things (no perception), but we are not without perception (no non perception). This can only be seen clearly by the spiritual heart, which can see both completeness and becoming without contradiction.

INSIGHT JHANNAS

However, jhannas are also available through insight practice. They feel a little different, because the focus is on realization rather than absorption.

- 1) With access concentration, the observer is completely stable, and you can practice from the observer seat without interruption. You feel effortlessly present, floating and present with each object, without the mind grasping or contracting around them. There's joy, deepening into ease and freedom, equanimity. Similar to the first four formed Jhannas.
- 2) Leads to a crises of a kind, as the 'meditator', the small self that was in charge of practice, begins to dissolve as the separate ego-identified

self cannot stand, or exist, in the NOW. As it begins to slip away, there can be a panicky place, feeling like you are 'losing yourself'. St John of the Cross details this beautifully in his writings about the dark night of the soul.

- 3) What is happening here is that the illusion of 'me' as small self is dying. It feels unfamiliar and disorienting to be without it. Important to understand this and be able to be with the disorientation this produces.
- 4) This gives way to the natural uncovering of Big Mind, or the essential Beingness of who you are. All objects go back to their functioning as before, but without suffering. You are no longer living from the seat of the ego identified self, but are living from the flow of all that is.

Off the cushion, there can be a point in practice where life feels a little dull, or flat, kind of a bardo state of being in-between.

You are beginning to lose your certainty about the illusion of who you thought you were, and the ego-identified mind you have been living in service of.

Old habits no longer satisfy, and you have given up believing that any outer circumstance can create lasting happiness and peace. This is the death of delusion, which is what you've wanted. But when you get there, it feels disorienting, like being in a new city and not knowing where anything is. This can be a difficult phase, and wise friends and wise conversation (as the sangha is referred to) is most helpful. It is temporary.

In the insight path these insights and stages grow gradually for most of us. Our lives align around these insights and we find freedom in direct proportion to how much they are deepening within us.

In the suttas, the Buddha said there are four paths to realization:

- concentration alone
- insight alone
- a combination of concentration and insight
- hearing the teaching, the heart is on fire and direct realization happens

The point of this is to know all paths lead to the same destination. Find the one that works for you.

HOMEWORK

PRACTICE: notice deepening levels of concentration in your practice, and look for the opening into Access, where the Observer seat is stable and less interrupted.

Be curious about what takes you away from the moment. Notice the parts of you that don't want to be present. Don't fight or try to push them away. Notice them with curiosity and kindness. The point is not so much being perfect in your concentration as coming back and seeing more deeply what wants to move away from the moment.

Emphasis: notice the places where you normally avoid, like difficult feelings, fears and insecurities, and turn around to be present with them. What happens?

LIFE: Work on staying present, of not flinching away, in moments of stress or difficulty. What happens?