

Samādhi (5 of 5) Equanimity as the Fruit Drops

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on April 10, 2020

Good morning again. I'm very happy to be here with you. The theme is *samādhi*. Today's talk is the last of a five-part series, part of a longer series on the Five Faculties. Next week, we'll talk about wisdom, the last of the faculties. I'm starting a retreat tomorrow, so I'll include the retreatants in these talks. And because of the retreat, I'll be giving another talk on Sunday morning at seven. Those of you who want to listen this weekend are welcome to come. Perhaps Sunday's talk will be more of a general introduction to this theme that we've been doing.

So, *samādhi*. I like to think of *samādhi* as being our birthright. It's closer to a natural state than how most people live. I suppose everything we are is a natural state, but *samādhi* is a natural state in the sense of being outside of our artifice. It's outside of the ways we interfere, get attached, make things more complicated or more contracted than they need to be. *Samādhi* happens when we relax all our artifice, all the artificial ways of constructing, being, protecting, pushing away,

and holding on. We simply settle into a very relaxed, deep, *attentive* way of being. The process of settling and discovering a natural state of being has a path. It's an unfolding that comes from ordinary life for many of us. That path has been the journey of this past week.

Monday's talk was the about the process of initiating concentration – the beginning of the process that we do over and over again. We center ourselves in our experience and let go into it. We let go of the things that take us away and keep us scattered and distracted. We can then begin to have the experience of an undistracted mind, an undistracted body and mind. Once we begin the process, we have the capacity to feel what it's like to be centered, to feel here, connected and focused. We may still wander off a lot, but we have a foundation to begin working with.

Then, we have initial and sustained application of our attention, an engagement of ourselves with the experience. I liken this to pushing a scooter. We push off, and then we coast for a while until we need to push for momentum again. We apply ourselves. Connect to our experience. Then, we sustain ourselves with the experience over time. We ride the scooter, coasting along, trying to stay present. And of course, at this stage, we'll wander off. That's ok. Don't fight it. Don't be upset with it. Just come back, give yourself another push on the mindfulness scooter, and move along some

more.

As we begin to stay more and more in the present moment in a concentrated way, the amount of time we can sustain concentration builds – from a few seconds, to many seconds, to minutes, to longer. At some point, the movement of being present and coming back supports the mind's ability to become collected, to gather together, to become unified. All of who we are becomes included or held, opening to this experience of *samādhi*. The idea of gathering together is a classic image, but that image might imply grabbing hold of something and pulling it in.

Sometimes, I think of the unification of *samādhi* as a continuous opening up of awareness, so that it becomes broader and broader. Then, everything works within that awareness in a harmonious way. I like this sense of awareness becoming more open for many reasons. One of the reasons is that this sense of opening goes along with the idea that *samādhi* is a gift. We have to allow something to move through us. We have to allow ourselves to be *changed* by the practice of mindfulness and concentration. If we're always on top of it, waiting for something to happen – like a cat at a mouse's door, we're interfering. We have to settle back and *allow* something to occur.

One of the things that begins happening in this flow, this

unification, this continuity of practice, is that there are wellsprings of well-being, good feeling, niceness, pleasantness, joy, and happiness. Sometimes in meditation, this joy can be quite strong – like rapture or euphoria. But eventually, joy moves to a very deep, sublime, peaceful kind of happiness and contentment. As we become more content and happier in this state of being, it can feel more like a natural state – more natural than anything else. Rather than leaving the real world, we're actually entering the real world. *This* is a way of being really integral – the integrity of being present.

This brings us to today's topic. Classically, in Buddhism, the movement is for concentration practice to bring us to a state of peace or equanimity. It brings us a deep, abiding, sense of evenness, openness, presence, and peace with whatever's happening. Rather than concentration moving into some kind of rapture, it goes beyond that into a state of deep equanimity. The value of that movement is that we're not trying to develop *samādhi* for its own sake.

In Buddhist practice, *samādhi* is a foundation for seeing things as they are. That's one of the goals of mindfulness, of concentration, of the liberating path of Buddhism. That goal is to see things as they are, to really be able to connect, to have a deep insight, a deep discernment, a deep recognition, not only of what's

happening, but *how* it's happening. We can see how we're attached and how we're free – see the deep underlying processes of direct experience upon which we build our experience. It's like going down to the foundations and seeing what's really going on. To do that takes a lot of settledness, a deep settledness, and an openness.

I liken this wonderful peacefulness, this settledness, this equanimity, to an open hand. We've released the fist of the mind, the reaching out of the hand, the wanting, the resisting or pushing, or closing up. The hand of the mind of awareness is opened up and flat so that it can hold things.

This experience of opening is like the ripening of an apple on an apple tree. There's a way of harvesting an apple. If you really want to know when it's ripe, you don't pull it off the branch. You gently hold up your hand so that it's taking just a little bit of the weight of the apple. If the apple comes loose by itself, then it's ripe. You're not pulling it. It's on the edge of the separation of the apple stem from the branch. It's just about fully ripe, and you're there to catch it, just as it releases.

The idea is to have a mind that's not trying to grab or hold onto, to pull away or push. We allow things to be just as they are, with the right kind of equanimity and peacefulness. Just *being* with it allows something in the

mind to release, to let go in a deep way. Then, with the deep letting go that *samādhī* supports, we have the fruit. We've experienced the fruit of practice.

That fruit, like an apple, has many wonderful seeds. And even though there has to be letting go for the apple to come free from the tree, if you focus only on letting go, you might miss the wonderful seeds of goodness that have always been inside you. You're the fruit that's had a chance to germinate so a whole new plant can grow. A beautiful tree can grow from you. The fruit that you've harvested, that's ripened, that you've received, can grow and become many, many apple trees. These trees bear fruit that you can give to other people, give in support of others.

So, to feel, to experience, to smell, to sense – as concentration deepens – how it moves toward greater and greater letting go, greater and greater settling and harmonizing, and toward peace, Where's the peace, the quiet, the stillness that allows the fruit to fall from the tree?

Thank you.

For those of you who would like to stay longer, I can take a few questions on this topic of *samādhī*, or questions about something else. I can well imagine that

there'll be more questions than I can answer. I'll try to answer the two or three that come in first.

Q1: "What readings would you suggest for further study of *samādhi*"?

GF: I don't mean to be flip, but I feel sincerely that the best way to study *samādhi* is in the book that's in you. *You're* the book to read. Part of what we're trying to do in mindfulness and concentration practice is to really learn to be present and see what is going on. We learn to discern what's healthy and what's not healthy, what's wise and not wise, what produces more stress and what produces more ease and peace. As we get wiser about this, that's the book we study. That's the topic for next week, the faculty of wisdom.

Q2: "Sometimes when I center on the breath, it leads to awareness of a physical trauma I experienced many years ago. It helps to shift awareness to sound and other things. Can you comment"?

GF: That's really wise. If it seems that it's really too much to be with the sensations, experience and emotions of the trauma, then yes, do something else like sound. It's very good. Sometimes, just staying and being with traumatic experiences makes it worse. If the trauma's really strong, it can be retraumatizing. So, you have to be very wise and careful with it. There are some

trauma therapists who are really skilled at working with this.

In mindfulness practice, a lot of the practice is being in the body. As we cultivate bodily awareness, over time, the body becomes a strong and stable container to feel some of the very difficult emotions embedded there from past experience. In addition to hearing sounds, sometimes it's useful to spread the attention more widely in the body. Find a place in the body where there's some stability or groundedness, a sense of safety and confidence. If there's such a place in the body, that's part of building up the body's capacity to be with the difficult things that can exist.

It can also be useful not to see this legacy of trauma – this legacy we feel as we're being present – as a mistake or a problem. We don't want to react more against it. See it as a healthy part of the process of practice, part of a freeing that goes on.

One way to do this is: when these difficult experiences, sensations, emotions come up, imagine that your mindfulness is a soft cotton ball. Gently, come close and touch the places that are really difficult. Just one or two touches to recognize and acknowledge it. Acknowledgement is so important. Then, pull away. Pull away as far as you need to get re-balanced. Pull away as far as you need to feel like you can go back into

sounds. When you feel balanced again, you might bring the cotton ball back to touch it again. Over time, you'll feel safer and more secure, more capable of allowing this deeper process of unfolding to happen.

Q3: "How do you know if you have *samādhi*"?

GF: There are different kinds of *samādhi*, so it can be hard to know. But you know you have *samādhi* if you're really in the present moment. You feel very connected to what's happening in the present. You feel that you're really wholehearted and settled. It feels easy and natural just to be with experience. There's no forcing, no tightness, no pressure, no strain. There's a relaxed and open feeling and you're really there – experiencing it almost receptively. You're just being with it, receiving it, being settled and relaxed around the experience, being with the experience. You're able to do that more continuously, through time.

Thank you all very much. I'm delighted to be with you and be able to share this. I look forward to seeing some of you on Sunday. And on Monday, we'll start the faculty of wisdom.