

Mindfulness of Breathing (55) Abiding in Harmony

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

concentration, abiding, meditation, harmony, mind, liberation, settle, nourished, Buddha, nourishing, goodness, composing, *samādhi*, *ānāpānasati*, *samādahati*, *dahati*, *Abhidhamma*, *sama*, *jhāna*, *viharati*, *vihāra*, monastery

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The eleventh step of mindfulness of breathing is:

Breathing in, one concentrates the mind. Breathing out, one concentrates the mind.

This relates to the whole topic of *samādhi*. In Buddhism, *samādhi* is often translated as “concentration.” It is worth spending some more days on this step because *samādhi* is such an important foundation for the final steps of mindfulness of breathing. We don’t want to rush through this.

Ideally, you are coming along a little bit. You’re following just enough, getting a sense or a feel for what these steps are about. You have some inner reference point

for what we are doing as we continue – even though the next steps are getting into what is classically described as deeper and deeper states of meditation.

The sixteen steps of *ānāpānasati* are also relevant in ways well short of deep states of meditation. We can go through them even in relatively ordinary states, recognizing the little shifts that represent these different states. I am hoping that by going slowly enough, you can follow along. So, we are spending more time with *samādhi*.

I've said some of this already. The word for concentrate in the sixteen steps has also been translated as “steady.” I like to translate it as “unify” – “to unify the mind,” or “to steady or stabilize the mind.” The word is *samādahati*. The verb *dahati* means “to place something.” It is like placing the mind, placing awareness on the object we are focusing on. We are placing it on the breathing.

I love the expression “landing.” Just landing – like a little helicopter or a drone gently landing. Or a bird that flies down, almost stopping an inch or so above the ground, and then lands. We come right in there. We land, settle, and place ourselves.

I am very fond of using the word compose or composure. We are composing ourselves on the breathing. *Samādhi* is an act of composing ourselves. The word pose also means “to place or to stand someplace.” So we are taking a stand and resting there. To settle and to steady are words associated with *samādhi*.

Samādhi itself is often translated as concentration, but, more generally, it means meditation or a state we are in – a state of mind. It can be many different states where we are quite settled, steady, and peaceful.

I want to read a very early commentary from the *Abhidhamma*. It defines *samādhi*, and it is a wonderful definition. It has a whole series of definitions:

Samādhi means embracing.

Samādhi means completion.

Samādhi means single-pointedness.

Samādhi means unconfused.

Samādhi means unscattered.

Samādhi means undisturbed.

Samādhi means unperturbed.

Samādhi means liberation.

The next series is particularly nice:

Samādhi is seeking harmony.

Samādhi is acquiring harmony.

Samādhi is receiving harmony.
Samādhi is grasping harmony (taking hold of it).
Samādhi is entering harmony.
Samādhi is going along in harmony.
Samādhi is lightening up in harmony.
Samādhi is being lit up in harmony.
Samādhi is harmony, welfare, and happiness.

This is a wonderful list – the idea of harmony, evenness, or balance. The word is *sama*. You get a very different feeling for *samādhi* from these kinds of descriptions than you would if you thought of *samādhi* as just one-pointedness of mind.

We have talked about absorption states – *jhāna*. Sometimes the way they are talked about has the intensity of a laser. People really try hard to get into them, not realizing that a big part of *samādhi* is letting go, relaxing, and settling more and more deeply.

The verbs related to *jhāna* (absorption states) are “entering” the states and “abiding” in them. I think the idea of entering is a beautiful image. We are not looking to zero in or force ourselves to be in a state. Rather, we are entering into what I like to think of as a sacred area – a sacred piece of land or a temple. We enter into it with some reverence, respect, and care.

How we are – how we enter – is an important part of entering. The two verbs are “to enter” and “to abide.” This means that we take time to linger and reside in those states. Whatever kind of *samādhi* states, or good, nourishing states there are, we abide in them so we can be conditioned by them.

There is a reconditioning process in meditation, which we allow ourselves. Life can condition us in all kinds of negative ways. Meditation undoes that. The conditioning that comes from greed, hatred, and delusion is very different than the conditioning that comes from generosity, love, and wisdom.

Some people have even said that *samādhi* is a kind of a re-parenting, if parenting didn’t go so well for us growing up. It has a very deep and profound impact on us *if* we allow ourselves to be nourished by it. This requires abiding – abiding in it, dwelling in it – so we can really let the goodness of these states seep in and affect us. If we are in a hurry to get more and more concentrated, we are not going to allow the nourishment to really recondition, open, and soften us in a way that is useful on the path of liberation.

I thought I would also read a list of the things that the Buddha talks about and encourages people to abide in. In the modern United States, there is often discussion

about being rather than doing. It's said that meditation is a chance just to be. I don't think the Buddha would say it quite that way.

Rather than being, he talks about abiding. But he is always talking about abiding in something – in something that is wholesome and good. Not being angry or fuming. If you abide in that, – if fuming, resentment, and anger are simmering – it may have a negative impact. That's a whole different topic: how to be wise with things like anger.

For the Buddha, it is abiding. Here are the states of abiding the Buddha talks about:

Abiding in safety.

Abiding in fearlessness.

Abiding in a mind free from the hindrances.

Abiding in equanimity.

Abiding in contentment.

Abiding in pleasure.

Abiding in happiness and gladness.

Abiding in happiness without moving the body or uttering a word.

Abiding in loving-kindness.

Abiding in compassion.

Abiding in a mind like space.

Abiding in the Dharma.

Abiding observing impermanence.

Abiding in stillness, devoted to a pleasant abiding here and now.

The Buddha often describes *samādhī* states as a pleasant abiding, here and now.

And then:

Abiding in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

It is very significant that the word is “abiding” in the Four Foundations. It does not say practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. It says to abide in them.

Abiding in bliss.

Abiding in emptiness.

Abiding in peaceful liberation.

Abiding in the supreme goal.

To abide, one has to be patient. I think of abiding as closely akin to being in a receptive state. When we abide, we are patient. We are not in a hurry. We are in a receptive state, feeling the goodness of all these states – all these ways of being that can happen.

We are talking here about the eleventh step of *ānāpānasati*. Of course, when we sit down to meditate, there are times when these states are not available. We are angry. We are agitated. To sit down and say: “Just sit here and abide in these good feelings” simply doesn’t work. So we learn to practice with the first steps of

ānāpānasati, which can really support us in the challenging states of being we can have in daily life.

As meditation proceeds, at some point, we experience the goodness, the nourishing and beneficial feelings, and the sensations that are here. The Buddha encourages us to abide in them. And when these states of harmony, settledness, steadiness, and unification arise in *samādhi* – now we are really here in the present moment.

We can really feel in the present that there is harmony, joy, well-being, and gladness – all the different flavors of goodness that might be there. Whatever the flavor of the day is, there is also a very important place to abide in and receive it. Let it nourish and fill you. Let it penetrate and permeate you in some way.

To dwell in these states is not to be thinking about them. It is not to be seeking, planning, expecting, wanting, and holding onto things. It is simply abiding. Allow them to be there. Bask in them and enjoy them. Breathe with and through them.

In mindfulness of breathing, the reference point is always breathing – breathing in and breathing out. We are always using that as a support, guide, grounding, or pointer – a way of staying in these different steps. Now

we are staying with the breathing, abiding in these states, abiding in the present moment – in a pleasant state, here and now.

The word in Pali is *viharati*. It's related to the word *vihāra*, which means a monastery, a place where monks or nuns reside. For the rest of the day, you might have the word abide or abiding – *viharati* or *vihāra* – close by. Maybe you can write it on a sticky note and keep it with you – or post it in some places.

See when in the day it is beneficial for you to pause and abide with what is happening. Especially when there is goodness or something nourishing, abide and really take it in. Learn to abide. Learn to be nourished by your abiding states.

Thank you. We'll continue with *samādhi* for a few more days until we get to the twelfth step, which is “liberating the mind.” And that's only the twelfth of the sixteen steps. Thank you all very much.