





Samādhi  
is pure  
Enjoyment

Ajahn Sucitto



I offer these teachings and any good results  
that may accrue for the welfare of my late parents,  
Charles and Winifred Malcolm.

You gave me all that you had.



This edition has been made possible  
through the generosity of Kamala Hung.

*Anumodana!*



What bhikkhus, is noble right concentration with its supports and requisites, that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, and right mindfulness? Unification of heart equipped with these seven factors is called noble right concentration with its supports and requisites.

(M.117:3)



## NOTES ON ABBREVIATIONS

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- A** NUMERICAL DISCOURSES OF THE BUDDHA  
(ANGUTTARA NIKĀYA)
- M** MIDDLE LENGTH DISCOURSES OF THE BUDDHA  
(MAJJHIMA NIKĀYA)
- S** THE CONNECTED DISCOURSES OF THE BUDDHA  
(SAṂYUTTA NIKĀYA )

I generally refer to the translations by Bhikkhu Bodhi,  
available in Wisdom Publications, or by Bhikkhu Sujato at  
**[suttacentral.net](http://suttacentral.net)**



# 1 What is Samādhi?

## Don't do it, enter it

Meditation ... it's about concentrating on something, right? And that concentrating, that's what they call *samādhi*, right? Well, not quite ... Meditation certainly involves establishing and sustaining a useful focus, but one that requires careful receptivity and attunement rather than fixation. That focus is a function of mindfulness (*sati*), the ability to stay on topic so that we remain clearly attuned to it. By applying this clear awareness to what we see, hear, or feel as they change, mindfulness brings the watchful centre of the heart (*citta*\*) to the fore. As attention centres in that, there's a resting in that centre, not on a sensed object. This is *samādhi*.

In so far as mindfulness is to be established and sustained, there is a doing, but *samādhi* is not a concentration that you do, it is a unified state that you enter. It's a place from where you can review and reset your attitudes and deepen your understanding. And its determining factor is that the heart is happy in itself.

Bearing this in mind, let's look at the way we normally understand concentration, and how we bring it about.... When you hear those four syllables, 'con-cen-tra-tion', how does that affect you? You might feel a particular mind-set taking over, and it's not one of happiness. You might be determined, and interested in working at something to get it right. But

\* I use 'heart' as a translation of *citta*, though most texts translate it, as well as *manas*, as 'mind'.

normally when we concentrate on something we clench up. It's intensive. With this mindset, we rev up the work program, and along with this, the 'get-it-right' attitude and concern. A line of tension starts to form across the brow.

That's the kind of mindset that accompanies solving a problem or meeting a deadline. It's the business model. Meditation however, isn't business as usual; it entails acknowledging and steadily undoing worldly tactics of getting things done and coming out on top. That kind of motivation does of course bring results – but one of those is that we get stressed and depleted. We may approach the task with energy, but if we tighten up something starts getting strained. So it is with meditation: if it is approached with a mindset that is bent on its ideas of achievement, there's a push and a pressure – and that's a paradigm that we're often trying to move out of. Because if meditation is another work project, we can't always face that, and may end up skipping the practice altogether – and feeling guilty. Then comes the negative self-view: 'I just don't have the resolve to meditate; I'm too weak/lazy/messed up (etc.)'

So this syndrome and the mindset that created it need to be undone. But such an undoing doesn't mean that we can't sustain a sensitive and intelligent focus; it's just balanced in the present rather than leaning into the future. Because of this balance, the heart eases up and an inner happiness unfolds. I expect that's more in line with why one meditates.

Looking at it in another way, we need food for the heart, something that imparts inner well-being. If we don't get that in Dhamma practice, then we look for it elsewhere: read something, eat something, or go for a walk to relax. All blameless enough – but dependent on outward conditions. However, if there is inner happiness, a sense of the enjoyment of feeling at home in one's own presence – and that's *samādhi*. It's a matter of a disengagement, or withdrawal, from external contact and the attitudes that it encourages, and a gathering into what is always in the present – the heart. So in the teachings of the Buddha, *samādhi* is called 'unification of heart'.

So the entry to *samādhi* is marked by the happiness born of unplugging one's compulsions and inner turmoil. In this light and to support this process, the unified condition of meditative concentration is essential:

*Without the peace of samādhi ... it's impossible for one to enter and abide in liberation through heart and liberation through insight. (A.6:70)*

Or even more directly:

*...samādhi is indeed the path, lack of samādhi is a false path. (A.6:64)*

Mindfulness is the key agent for *samādhi*, and it's based on the effort to sustain a steady attention and a sensitive attitude. To bring this about, mindfulness senses distracting influences that arise and withdraws interest

\* See the introductory quote and M.44:12

and attention from them. Mindfulness of a moving condition (breath, body, mood, etc.) as it forms and changes encourages our most full, direct and unwavering awareness. This awareness is a heart-based receptivity; it's the spacious sensitivity that the attention of the object-focusing mind (*manas*) has to shield and direct.

The aware aspect of heart is always in the present, but energies and impulses pour out of the heart into what was and could and should be. Obviously, if we're distracted by fascination or irritation, we lose touch with that steady centre. But even if we're demanding achievement in meditation, we lose present-moment appreciation and enjoyment. Either way, the heart is pressurized by craving, impatience and grasping. Grasping tightens and closes that inner spaciousness and fashions obsessive thinking, and there's the mistake: meditation is about release of the heart from grasping.

## Intention and attitude come first

There is a way of developing a brighter and steadier heart that's not based on grasping. In a nutshell, it's the cultivation of letting go.

The heart can be affected by some pretty wild, scared or nasty impressions and churn out reactive and careless impulses, so a clean-up is needed. This

becomes apparent as we meditate. We may find ourselves getting bored and fantasizing; or getting irritable and critical – as when somebody opens the door too loudly, or when we get fascinated by someone’s superficial appearance. And most of all, we get obsessed with our ideas of ourself in a highly critical way. When it’s corrupted and confused, the heart is out of touch with clarity and kindness.

The tendency to get stuck on details gets even worse if meditation practice is based solely on intense attention, in which the discriminative faculties are heightened. In that mode, attention tightens the *citta*, so we get obsessed with moods, plans and fantasies; or we feel irritated whenever anything prevents us from maintaining scrutiny of a sensation. It seems that everything – memories, pain, noise, other people and thoughts – tends to disrupt that focus! We may think we need to try harder, but this misses an important point: focusing on a sense object is not a matter of heart, and so the heart isn’t gladdened and settled by it. The heart needs to be settled not through intense attention on an object, but through tuning in to and being uplifted by inner qualities.

Let’s consider the process that leads to meditative concentration in the way the Buddha described it. Although he never suggests concentrating on any object, he does say that *samādhi* is based on right view, right effort and

right mindfulness. It is the settling into and enjoyment of the results of those three factors. Right view, or, in my own way of conceiving it, ‘whole view’, is the view that acknowledges cause and effect: that is, what we do, say or even incline towards is based on states of heart, and these give rise to further states.

Actions in the world proceed from these, but the immediate and intimate lesson is that your attitudes and actions feed back into your own heart. So ethical intelligence and sensitivity become crucial. For our own welfare, we need to learn which attitudes, aims and actions lead to harmony and contentment and which take us into pushing and complaining and holding on. These are tough and bitter foods for your heart. Nevertheless, it’s generally the case that an effort is needed to pull out of such ways, and this has a necessary strengthening effect: the heart gets toned up and fit – and that lessens the potential for hindrances such as worry, irritability and depression. It also initiates an ‘upwards flow’ of heart-states: we sense the good, and are uplifted by it; further states of gladness and ease arise as a consequence.

Right (or whole) effort is then not a matter of brute power. Just as a skilled craftsman will spend time cleaning and sharpening their tools before using them, a wise meditator spends time getting their energy and attitude

right. Together, energy and attitude make up the all-important factor of *cetanā*, ‘intention’ or ‘volition’ – the ‘do it’ energy of the *citta*. This is the energy that feeds any effort, and it has to be carefully mediated in order to establish right (whole, balanced) effort. So we learn to fully sense what is unwholesome, biased, fake, and corrupting and put it aside; and to fully sense what is wholesome, unbiased, for our own welfare and that of others – and to delight in it.

In applying right view, effort must therefore be receptive to experience in order to assess its quality, and directive – to steer towards and fully take in what is fruitful. The effort to maintain this reflective attention gives rise to mindfulness. Mindfulness both locates something – a sensation, a feeling, a mood, a thought and so on – and is receptive to it. The locational aspect is attention; the receptive aspect is awareness. Together they create a suitable and intelligent space around what we feel, think, or are moved by. Bear in mind: *mindfulness is a loop, not a nail*. It can sustain a focus while being sympathetically receptive to how the heart is being affected by what it’s focused on. In this way, mindfulness brings around an amplification of skilful states. Overall, there is a consolidating and firming effect. By not leaking and not getting stuck in distractions, the *citta* enters the upwards flow.

## The upwards flow

The ‘how to’ question for those who cultivate purity of heart is therefore centred around maintaining mindfulness of skilful qualities. This is the baseline of meditation.

In elucidating this training, the Buddha mentioned a sequential process that begins with turning the mind towards recollecting one’s integrity.’ His encouragement is: *‘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 that one who keeps good moral conduct will experience freedom from remorse.’* This advice anchors the foundation of *samādhi* and liberation in everyday terms of integrity with regard to bodily action, words and intentions. Mindfulness of skilful conduct, or even how it can be inspired by others, gets one to recognize, linger and draw on uplifting qualities. We dwell on the heart-opening effects of recognizing for example that *‘no creature need fear or mistrust me.’* Or, *‘Everyone can rely on the authenticity and sensitivity of her speech. That inspires me.’* Mindfulness then attunes to wholesome effects, and by lingering on these, amplifies them until they flow on to a further, deeper state. This process is presented in the above example like this: *‘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.’* This summarizes the

\* The series of succeeding quotes are from A.10:2.

important step of dwelling on feeling free from regret and putting aside one's 'to do' list, grievances or self-criticism.

By extension, this also includes putting aside the anxiety, grief and consumer-hunger that come with the daily news. This is no small topic, and so it is often the case that practitioners chant their refuges, precepts, aspirations and teachings in order to bring these ideas into full, breathed and embodied expression – one that strengthens the heart.

In this process, mindfulness brings together the thinking, noting mind – which points out and considers – and the feeling heart. Through chanting, the heart will feel emotion, devotion, gratitude and aspiration, and also feel the bodily effects. The practice pivots around positive tones, but the intention to leave behind regret, anxiety, consumer greed and other afflictive emotions – and the relief of having done so – are equally important.

As the process proceeds, it ripens through joy, rapture, and bodily calm.\* This upwards flow is felt in the 'inner body', the somatic sense that transmits our states of mind into bodily tension or ease, jitteriness or calm.

So, as you encompass this body with mindfulness, breathing – the moderator of the energy in the inner body – carries the bright tone and releases subliminal bodily tension and restlessness (on the other hand,

\* The dependent arising of bodily calm with a happy and 'concentrated' mind/heart is also pointed out at M.118:35, S.46:3, and S.55:40

notice the fidgeting and discomfort that accompanies a deliberate lie). The inner body begins to open, and its composed vitality then contributes to the process: *'one tranquil in body, feels pleasure [or ease] ...'* This inner vitality, which is distinct and not associated with sense-contact or thinking, gathers attention – and as the *citta* receives it, the heart firms up without volitional input. One feels free from sense-desire, ill-will, stagnation, anxious restlessness and self-doubt: the classic 'five hindrances'.

As the bright bodily energy merges with that of the heart, things get pleasant. Rapture (*pīti*), a buoyant, uplifted, spring-in-the-step energy, arises, and, as the effects of that are felt in the body, the grounding effect of embodiment cools any excitability. The heart feels comfortable and rested. This sense of feeling pleasure, or being at ease (*sukha*), is the final factor that supports *samādhi*. *'Bhikkhus, it is in accord with nature that the heart of one at ease is concentrated.'* The *citta* is then firm in itself, without holding on to an idea, feeling or sensation.

This upwards flow can be likened to the way that water filling a stream overflows to form a lake, and a lake overflows to fill a river – and so on. You don't have to do much more than stay on track. This state then serves as the platform for wisdom: *'It is in accord with nature, that the heart of one who is concentrated sees things as they really are.'* So *samādhi* is not the end point of this process, but a support for clear seeing – the insight that leads to a turning away from conditions and accessing the Deathless.

## Mindfulness and purification

There are a few pieces in this presentation that probably need to be clarified.

Firstly, the suttas state that *‘The foundations of samādhi are the four establishments of mindfulness.’* (M.44:12) The cultivation is therefore of body, feeling, heart and *‘dhammā’*. *‘Dhammā’* are conditions, such as ill-will or faith, that carry potential and arise in the heart.

Taking all four together as a whole means that one is (1) sensitive to the **body**, (thereby withdrawing from sights, sounds and so on) (2) tunes in to the agreeable/disagreeable **feelings** that arise in that focus (that is those associated with pressure, stagnation or ease, etc.) and uses mindfulness to (3) steady, refresh and moderate the **heart**. Then (4) the bright ***dhammā*** that support awakening come to the fore and negative ones fade.

There’s a lot of scope within which to practise just this, while standing, walking, reclining, or going about one’s daily tasks. In fact, there is no instance when the Buddha recommends restricting that focus by concentrating exclusively on one point in the body. But he does speak of the body ‘internally’, ‘externally’, and both together.

The ‘body externally’ can be understood to refer to the sensations that occur through tactile contact – what a body senses is outside it. The ‘body internally’ is what we refer to when we ask: ‘How does my body feel, in and

of itself?’ Attention turns, not the outer body of tactile impressions, but to internal impressions such as ‘tired’, ‘tense’, ‘bright’ – in other words, to energies in the nervous system (*kāyasaṅkhāra*). These are attributable to emotional impact and psychological pressures, and they become recognizable patterns: ‘she’s hypersensitive’, ‘he’s overbearing.’

When referring to these patterns as a whole, I use the term ‘inner body’ or ‘subtle body’. The patterns may change, but they form a weave that’s located in this body. This subtle inner body has a changeable shape: for the average person, it will be large and dense in the head and shoulders, and faint in the lower body and legs. The hands light up and come to the fore when we use them; a sense of worry occurs in tandem with constricting energies in the abdomen and face. So this is a body that is felt and composed of where attention is centred. As we mostly use the eyes and thought to guide us, and our facial muscles involuntarily express emotion and facilitate speech, energy generally collects in the head. So we feel centred in the head: ‘That’s where I live, that’s me.’

Furthermore, where attention and energy go, the heart goes. The inner body is shaped and activated by what aspects of our environment we engage with – and the heart tone of that engagement. Our ‘environment’ is that of our personal ‘world’ – a mix of subjective impressions, assumptions and memories, both helpful and obstructive. And we create and perpetuate

this world with our attitudes and inclinations. So, if you use reckless or callous attitudes, even through acquiring them from others, they infect your inner body and it takes on a corresponding energetic ‘shape’. Do you ever see a callous person with a relaxed but upright body? Can you express or act on anger without a bodily flush and a hardening?

This shaping and patterning occurs as the *citta* gets activated by heart-memos or ‘signs’ (*nimittā*) – such as ‘urgent’, or ‘fun’. These also include emotional messages of pain, reward, or anxiety. Such impressions, which may include traumatic events from long ago, get encoded in energies that shape the subtle body – it gets scattered or hyperactive or closed. But the key point is that attending to the good, the true and the sacred also produces signs – so one is encouraged to cultivate them. They are a resource for cleaning the heart.

The subtle body is therefore a kammic body, formed by emotionally significant actions – either what you’ve done, or what has been done to you – and, thus formed, the energies and disposition of this inner body support corresponding energies and inclinations of the heart. Bruised and pressurized hearts generate a tight and defensive bodily pattern – and one gets prickly and joyless. Therefore, clearing afflictive impressions to arrive at a comfortable and balanced state is important for one’s psychological, emotional and bodily well-being.

Breathing acts as the moderator of this subtle body, and to make it effective, one is encouraged to open and steady the entire body internally and externally to allow the breathing to suffuse it. Personally, I feel that too much is made of focusing on external bodily impressions – such as the sensation of air at the nose-tip, or the feet while walking. This form of attention is on externally-based sensations – which in life in general are either irritatingly unpleasant, or seductively agreeable. The teaching therefore is to incline away from that basis to something more soothing and independent of external contact. As the subtle body is where negative kamma is stored, it is also a more important body to contemplate. ‘*This is a certain body among the bodies,*’ says the Buddha, ‘*that is, mindfulness of breathing in and out.*’ (M.118:24)

It’s not that we ignore the external body, but this mode of attention, extended over the entire form (as if you’re exercising, or taking a shower), is less sensation-based and more attuned to balance and general presence. It’s a wider focus than that which accompanies our usual scrutiny (which is usually of words and visual images) and it lessens the build-up of energy in the head. Establishing and working on this whole-body reference gives you greater poise and balance when sitting, standing and walking, and it encourages increased receptivity to the vitality that keeps you alive. Pretty important, that – and natural. But you can lose that if you absorb into the minutiae of scrutinizing sensations.

Therefore, the full establishment of mindfulness of body is externally on the whole body as it sits, walks, stands or reclines; and internally centred on the rhythmic process of breathing. Internal and external come together through the experience of the skin, the only sense organ that both pertains directly to the body, covers its entirety, and through which energy passes.

When this process of inner clearing bears fruit, the bases and effects of the hindrances are removed from the subtle body (and heart), and the resultant uplift and easefulness is the mark of entry to *samādhī*. If this sign is mindfully lingered in, the energy of the internal subtle body suffuses the external anatomical body and *‘there is not one part of one’s entire body that is not pervaded with the rapture and pleasure that is born of withdrawal* [from unfulfilling and unwholesome states].’ (M.39:15)

This brings me to another point: enjoyment of the authentic and uplifting results of mindfulness is something to be developed, so that the inner body and the heart can learn what a wholesome shape actually *is*.

Whereas we might associate enjoyment with the stimulation triggered by exciting or comforting sense-input, the enjoyment of cultivation comes through clearing energies that leave agitated or negative residues. We learn to soften our impulsiveness, to be more patient and receptive, and to cultivate goodwill and gratitude to brighten the heart. We clear the subtle body to feel refreshed, and we mindfully widen our attention to include

the entirety of body, mind and heart. As the energies in body, mind and heart combine, they keep us balanced and well-fed. Then we're not stuck in the random comings and goings of tactile impressions and ideas, but attuned internally to what benefits the heart; we're not heady, but we're astute; we're receptive and sensitive, but not engrossed in emotional tides.

It is of course essential that a meditator understands the causes for how the subtle body and heart get impaired and uses wisdom to uproot the mental tendency for sense-craving and the rest. One episode of *samādhi* is not enough. But cultivating *samādhi* through the understanding of the co-dependency of body and heart will support inner balance and deep insight. Training thus, in daily life and in meditation, brings us into wholeness and out of internal turmoil and discord.



# 2 Notes on Practice

Cultivating *samādhi* is a matter of a careful and steady practice, one that steps out of the afflictive programs of the five hindrances. This is the down-to-earth aim in freeing the heart: it leads to well-being and clarity. Depending on each individual's *citta*, entering *samādhi* may be relatively straightforward or require more careful application. But here are some notes and suggestions that may be useful.

Three aspects of our intelligence control our life, and we need to use them all.

**Body:** establishes direct felt presence and thereby anchors mind and heart. It also educates the mind in terms of opening to direct reality and out of creating fantasies, phobias and projections.

**Mind:** reports. It brings up themes for attention and investigation. As it gets wiser it can act as a mentor: 'How does this feel? Where is your breathing now? What's needed here?' It doesn't provide answers, but can tell you what your heart senses.

**Heart:** receives impressions. As it is carefully guided, it learns to moderate its responses and reactions and to balance its directive energy with its receptive, appreciative energy. In this it develops wisdom. It is also the aspect of intelligence that enjoys, and consolidates.

## Set the tone

All this can be encompassed within the four establishments of mindfulness; but establishing them begins with the mind. Wise (or deep) attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) is the guide to where and how to place mindfulness, and it's based on right view. With this, we consider: 'What is skilful or appropriate to sustain awareness of at this time?' Just about anything can occupy the *citta* – but as *citta* is a sensitive and imaginative intelligence, a recollection that brightens the heart puts it on the right track. Therefore, you bring up images and impressions of what gladdens you: the example of the Buddha, or of a reliable, compassionate teacher that you know. Reflecting on teachings and exemplars that inspire or encourage you is a good place to begin. It can help you to connect to your sense of integrity and goodwill, and to acknowledge your aspirations. You might recollect benefactors, parents, spiritual friends – or even incidents that have struck you as examples of the commonwealth of human goodness.

It takes a few moments to bring these to mind (*vitakka*) and a longer time to sense (*vicāra*) the mood that arises as you turn a memory or an idea around. Then you tune into its sign – that is, a heart-tone and impression. By acknowledging and lingering in this goodness of heart, a sense of purpose – to support, strengthen and liberate the heart – comes forth.

This sets the atmosphere and inclination of your practice. To maintain one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*) of that is itself a kind of *samādhi*.

However, in order to fulfil this mental and emotional resolve, mindfulness of body is needed. This restrains the thinking mind, and grounds one's emotional energies and reactions. The practice then is one of getting interested in the direct experience of the body; referring to and sensing your body in terms of how it feels in itself, not as something you make use of or present as a personality statement. Mindfulness of body is of the body in the body's own terms. The consequent increased receptivity causes the mind to be steady and attentive, and this, along with a more comfortable bodily disposition, helps it to quieten down and discard negative *dhammā*. In this way, the four bases of mindfulness can be cultivated while staying in the body.

## Establish your space and get upright in it

As you settle in, imagine you're sitting beneath the canopy of a great tree – that is, wherever you are, you feel that your body is placed with plenty of private space around it. Mindfulness can then be established to cover a space that is, roughly speaking, of an area a relaxed arms-length in circumference with your body sitting in the middle of it. That's your personal zone.

Take some time to get established and rested. Then, trace with attention the spinal axis that draws up from that base of the body. You might imagine that base is a root and there's a stem growing out of it. Can you feel your sacrum and your lumbar vertebrae? Flex them a little to sense how your pelvis and spine interact, and find the angle with which your spine feels engaged but not stressed. If the lumbar vertebrae are snugly resting on the pelvis, the spine is well supported. If the spine is held in a way whereby the in-curve of the lumbar region is maintained, then the weight of the chest and shoulders is transferred down through the pelvis into the floor, the spine isn't stressed and the musculature of your upper body can unbind and settle.

Bring your upper body into balance by drawing your awareness slowly upwards. Give more attention to the back, and let the front of your body be soft and receptive. Form a connection between your lumbar spine and the centre of your chest. Gently draw in the area of your spine immediately between your shoulder-blades, as if it's connected to the breastbone. Feel your neck as an extension of the spine; as your skull balances on it and your chin turns down very slightly, your neck-muscles can lengthen and relax.

Stay a while with the impression of the bodily form as a single unit. Settle into that, relaxing whatever muscles you don't need to use, such as in your face, shoulders and fingers. Get comfortable.

You'll sense the whole body, not a specific part, as a firm warm presence with vitality flowing through it. There is a spaciousness to the focus that allows you to easily sense the body and the rhythmic flow of breathing.

Stay with this for a good while, letting mental and emotional energies pass through. The spaciousness of your attention will catalyze a spaciousness of heart that lets moods and thoughts express themselves, be felt and allowed to pass.

You can get pretty settled and clear doing this on a regular basis. The advantage of this focus is that, with a few minor adjustments and tips (walk as if you have an empty basket on your head; focus on balance) you can cultivate it walking, sitting, standing or reclining. As the spaciousness gets established, that very spaciousness, into which thoughts, feelings and moods empty becomes a sign that the *citta* can absorb into. This may be enough.

## Enjoy embodied presence

Learning to sense the whole body is itself a practice that bears good fruit. It doesn't mean that you're oblivious to the world around you, but you're disengaged, poised, and centred. Aware of the whole body, you sense the overall qualities of firmness, warmth, fluidity and mobility as they are

bounded by the skin. With awareness spread over all that, the sense of space beyond the skin becomes apparent. That relieves pressure and tension.

Physical discomfort, generally being of a local nature, then occupies less of your attention. And you sense your body as an embodied presence rather than as a set of parts. It's alive and it breathes deeply and fully.

The enjoyment of embodied presence – of opening to and settling into the body, rather than thinking about it – causes the mind to stop creating injunctions, resistances and distractions, just because the underlying agitations that cause the heart to activate the mind get soothed by the direct experience of the body. As the body settles and unwinds into a living and regenerative state, the heart also settles – it doesn't have conflicting interests and doubts. In this way, release in terms of the body – release from tension and staleness – supports release of heart. You can absorb into that.

## Clearing the inner body

If and when you want to cultivate deeper levels of ease and integration, you can give more attention to clearing the inner body. With this, the recommended theme is mindfulness of breathing.

In the psycho-somatic environment of being under one's tree, with spine

erect, wait for the breathing to settle and become apparent. It may help to silently ask, ‘How do I know I’m breathing?’ Tune in to the rhythmic flow as it causes the body to expand and subside.

It’s simple. Train in consciously receiving any sign of unforced breathing. This is to redress the imbalance whereby most of our energy is going into doing, and the learning and regenerative capacities of the receptive sense are ignored or depleted. Therefore, we try to *do* breathing – which is both unnecessary and contracts the heart. So even if your receptivity is not very clear or sharp or bright, receive how breathing happens by itself. Place your attention in a way that allows you to feel that rhythmic flow, then ask, ‘How is this?’ Feel the modulations, the ins and outs of the breathing and the pauses. Focus in terms of patterns, rather than isolated details.

This kind of focus is the one whereby you might listen to someone speaking and attend to the tone, the volume and the pauses between their words rather than react to what they are saying. Contemplate this breathing in the same way you’d appreciate a painting – you don’t go up to the canvas and stick your nose on it. Remember that spacious personal zone. In like fashion, 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, but things are dynamic, and flowing. To attend to this stimulates an alert and flexible mindset.

Keep the mind lightly engaged in relevant conceiving and sensing. When focusing on breathing you might consider, ‘Hmm. What is this like?’ We may think, ‘I need to adjust the breath to get it right. There’s something wrong.’ True enough: energies, as they unwind, can go into irregular patterns – but the main thing is not to jump into a mentally-derived remedy, rather to widen and soften the heart’s attitudes and responses and stay connected to the whole body. Return to the sense of ‘upright at the root of a tree’ and get spacious. Also, if you linger and relax in the pause between the in- and out-breaths, this will help to dispel an unconscious tendency to grasp the breathing, a resistance to letting go. However, avoid tweaking or formulating the breath-flow – this tendency to interfere creates intensity and mental complexities creep in. You don’t have to *do* breathing; the system takes care of itself.

## An education for the heart

At any time in this process, thoughts and emotions will arise, diverting or impairing your attention. They may be restless or bored, or be telling you of important things you have to do. The advice is to not get involved with the topic, but acknowledge the mood that is driving a thought.

Name that mood and feel how it is affecting your bodily experience. It may make your body feel weighed down or tense. Notice how sense-desire

brings a tingling energy to the body. Investigate: what does ill-will feel like? Or sadness? Widen your focus to include the entire body, keep your spine energized, and use the breathing to ventilate these moods. As you do so, notice how unattractive and unnecessary much normal mental activity is. Without getting negative about your mind, step back from its activities and appreciate the spacious awareness that this brings.

This too is a major, penetrative and transformative practice. There is bound to be a good amount of emotional and energetic debris in the heart and body. Don't form judgements. If negativity is arising, being negative about that isn't going to help.

Some things need to express themselves and allowed to pass through your space: be aware of the space. Don't get dragged into reactions, but let mindfulness sense anything that needs investigation. When that's the case, make it a kindly inquiry as to how such states feel in your body, not an inquisition or a tribunal. Leave your self-image out of it.

This is because these mental and emotional phenomena are all *dhammā*, not self. Dynamic and potent, they present a test. If you adopt them and engage with them in an unskilful way, they grow and distort your perspectives. If you resist or ignore them, they fester and stew. If you cultivate a disengaged but kindly interest (not reactive, but not numb), your heart will grow in terms of stability, wisdom and compassion. So

this is a great education for the heart, and becomes a growth-point for wise relationship. Train the heart to refer to itself as it experiences *dhammā*, rather than to the self-image. Embodiment will help; as through this, you can experience resentment or passion in terms of their bodily effects, rather than get caught up in the analysis and judgements of the thinking mind.

The awareness aspect of the *citta* can learn to hold thought and emotion with wisdom rather than lock them into good-bad boxes. This means that your awareness stands at the door of your heart in a calm way; neither adopting nor rejecting what is inside. Clarity and discernment as to what to engage with will arise; meanwhile the open door allows both mind and heart to breathe out. Release.

## Follow the breathing within your body

As you settle more fully into the embodied condition, contemplate how breathing happens. The more you give interest to the details of the process, the less time and energy the mind will have to chatter and dream. So, starting simply and, picking up what you can feel of your body, then aim towards filling your awareness with the rhythmic sensations and energies associated with breathing. When you breathe in, these sensations become stronger, they are energized. You're inspiring, energizing. With breathing

out, the sensations and the energy soften. The energy that's been gathered gently suffuses the entire body.

On the physical level, in-breathing begins with a pull in the lower gut that swells the abdomen. Let it happen. Don't make any effort to breathe; keep your chest, throat and nose passive. Feel the breathing steadily drawing air in through the nostrils as if it's drawing a thread through the body. As the in-breath completes itself, allow a pause and a hovering, and note when and how the out-breath begins. You may feel a release mechanism switching on somewhere above the palate and behind the nasal cavities. With the out-breath there is a softening and relaxing that begins in the chest and continues in the abdomen; imagine that its thread is descending through the body, and feel the relaxing effect in the lower gut. Linger in the pause that occurs between the out-breath and in-breath while relaxing the mind; the same between in-breath and out-breath. Don't force it.

Notice how breathing occurs in your throat. Keeping the voice-box relaxed, contemplate the throat as a large open tube. Feel the movement of the breath through the throat and the 'swallowing zone' at the back of the mouth as it streams through the nasal cavity of the head. The eyes, ears and sinuses all connect to this large cavity, so an unrestricted unpressurised flow will help to relieve tension and congestion.

To ease and open the torso, focus on the play that occurs between the abdomen and the chest as you breathe in and out. Imagine them being two cavities, two balloons whose skins meet at the diaphragm. With the in-breath, the balloon of the abdomen swells and pushes out. As it pushes the diaphragm, the chest swells forwards, sideways and upwards. Rather than conceive of breathing going up and down, let the gentle interplay present a perception of expanding and subsiding. This may ease the diaphragm. You might feel the muscles around your ribs relaxing and the shoulders shifting.

Give yourself the time and encouragement to attend to the breath-flow as it presses and moves through the tissues of the body and slightly stretches and flexes the skin. This brings the inner and outer bodies together: the spine maintains the upright and holds the body open, and the inner, breathing body moves through, massages and suffuses the energy.

It's normal for the breathing to be irregular, but generally speaking as things calm down, the breathing goes from long and slow to short and more subtle. Sensations associated with the muscular aspect of the process may fade out; at times it's as if you're not breathing, or that you've lost it. Stay aware of what is there in terms of a bright vitality.

Your further training will be to moderate your attention and energy. If an area in your body or your heart feels tense, sore, or inflamed or over-

active, don't fix attention on it – because where attention goes, energy goes and where the energy goes, the *citta* goes. If there is fixation on a stressed point, you can get emotionally impacted and psychologically imbalanced. That's how inflammation starts: we get obsessive. So don't put more energy into an area that already has too much; but do give suitable attention to areas that seem depleted or stagnant.

What is 'suitable' attention? In general, this means that when you're dealing with unbalanced (hyper/hypo) energies and formations in the subtle body, you give attention to an area that's quite comfortable and gradually expand to connect to the uncomfortable areas. And keep the breathing in mind. A balanced *citta* is naturally empathetic, so, with an awareness that is receptive, travel from the comfortable to the uncomfortable areas and back again accompanied by the flow of the breathing. The empathy will have its effects.

You may find, as you widen your attention, that another part of your body seems to resonate with a stressed area. For example, as you sense tension in your shoulders and widen, you sense a corresponding imbalance in your abdomen. You may be more capable of relaxing your belly – and by so doing, your shoulder may begin to release and drop. All the time breathing is moving through these areas like mist, and as it does so it learns the healthier pattern.

It's often the case that the widening of attention needs to include the attitude or mood in the heart: and as you acknowledge, say, frustration,

and open around that, the tension in your shoulder or abdomen releases. In this inner domain, body and heart are not separate.

The same line of practice can be developed in the heart. Don't go into your obsessions; tune in with an empathic awareness. Place it at the door of your heart and check what's happening in the body. Opening and encompassing the entire body while sensing with a compassionate heart is a support for release.

In this way, psychological hindrances can be sensed and tackled at a fundamental level – in the subtle body that stores them as unresolved psycho-emotional energies. It carries your history. It's time to move on.

## Attend to how it is, not to how you think it is

As you focus on the breathing process, you can sense that energy in areas of the body that aren't associated with respiration. For example, with the in-breath you may feel a slight pulling or tingling behind the eyes and the forehead. Notice how these areas feel when you're breathing in, and when you're breathing out. With the in-breath, something brightens. Then it softens with the out-breath. There's an energetic flow there.

With time and practice, you can note that flow in other parts of your body. Its effect can most readily be sensed in the temples of the head, the palms

and fingertips and the soles of the feet. Keep attuned to the quiet energy of the breathing, even as the pauses lengthen and the sensations fade out. Widen your awareness to let this breath-energy gently massage the body and the heart. The calming effect that this has on the body will make it possible to place suitable attention on any point that seems stressed or numb and feel energy streaming through it into the entire body. This will bring harmony and balance.

Spend time sensing and appreciating this quiet vitality. Feel it moving through and bathing the flesh, bones and cavities of the body. Open the felt boundaries of the body and extend your awareness through the entire field of what you can sense. Let the boundaries of the body be relaxed, as if they are porous. At this point, you can abandon the perception of being inside an anatomical body; what actually arises are embodied phenomena in awareness. Not a body, not an entity that is separate from the aware space in which it is arising. Let your presence merge with this personal space. Prioritize the span of that subtle energy over the mental notion of (and attention to) the anatomy. Deepen the appreciation of that.

The heart might become very bright and emotionally charged. Quieten it with emotional balance; aim to support steadiness. When the heart's energy and the breath-energy blend, there is the stable pleasure of ease.

## Wise fruit

Through any of the above, as you find yourself settling in, you'll experience some kind of sign. These are generally reminiscent of a visual, tactile or auditory sense – such as brightness or spaciousness or ringing silence. This impression can be rested in, in order to deepen calm.

Listen in to that (if it's something you experience through listening) as if you're 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. It's where the mind feels gently delighted and uplifted. This is rapture – the threshold of *samādhi*.

We can't hold onto this. We're aware of it in a way that's both gladdened and respectful. The attitude is akin to devotion: we give ourselves to it. Of course, this is something that requires trust. Trust your body first of all. This body is something that can be trusted much more than the mind. As one learns to trust, one learns to receive the blessings of what is good and conducive to the heart's welfare. There is a consequent emotional relaxation.

Suitably calmed and collected, the mind can then review its normal concerns and energies and realize their conditioned and ephemeral nature.

And as you wisely reflect on what's present, what's absent and what now feels off-centred, you educate your inclinations towards liberation.



When it's time to withdraw from meditation, attend to the physical sense of the body, the skeletal structure and posture. Centring around the spinal axis, slowly half-open your eyes with no particular focus. Your energy and interest may go out into the visual field. The eyes often want to focus on something. Acknowledge that, and then soften the gaze and widen the focus so that things become less differentiated. Be aware of the overall visual field; be aware of shapes and colours rather than discrete objects. How does that feel?

Get a sense of the boundaries of your body, the pressure of the body on its seat, the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet. Use a simple repeated word, like 'Buddho', to activate the thinking process and then slowly move your head to engage the eyes in focusing. As you conclude your session, bring to mind a mood of appreciation and goodwill.

# 3 Questions & Answers

**Q** What about *jhāna*? That's *samādhi*, isn't it?

**A** The word *jhāna* refers to the process of absorbing into one's mind-state, or state of heart; this is through lingering on and dwelling in the energy and the feeling of wholesome mind-states. This is a skilful use of our tendency to absorb. Normally we absorb catchy songs, games, slogans, attractive styles and social trends. That is, we pay attention, we linger, we get the perception and feeling and we dwell upon that until that topic becomes a central theme. And we can see how people get absorbed into hobbies, social media and preoccupations – and, unfortunately, into grievances, fundamentalist dogma and pornography.

The Buddha directed this capacity towards states that were conducive to one's welfare and liberation. If you're looking into the Buddhist suttas and using English translations, when you see the word 'meditation', it will most likely be a translation of the word '*jhāna*'. Otherwise, *jhāna* is translated as 'absorption'. The Buddha referred to unskilful absorptions, but encouraged the skilful absorption of 'right'/'whole' concentration. In the more refined territory that opens up when one establishes the four bases of mindfulness, the Buddha traced skilful absorption in terms of certain key stages where certain mental activities fall away and others come to fulfilment. He then listed these stages as four; hence there are four *jhānā*.

The first *jhāna* is marked by the putting aside of five major hindrances (sense-desire, ill-will, dullness, restless worry and lack of confidence) in accordance with the activities of placing one's attention on and fully sensing one's meditation theme. The resultant state is one of rapture and ease. If that *jhāna* condition continues into a flow, then the need to keep placing one's attention disappears and the *citta* is steadied in the uplifted buoyancy – second *jhāna*. And so on ... If the process continues, the more buoyant states of happiness relax into the steady firmness of equanimity and mindfulness. You can look at these in the suttas as they're defined and illustrated by the changes in the subtle body.

In any of these stages will have signs: that is, you really get it that something is bright, or deeply comforting, or spacious. This 'signing' is similar to the process whereby the heart places 'a sign' on a fondly remembered place, or a style of dress or a piece of music – it's poignant, or chic, or stirring, or jazzy. There is a heart effect.

Another approach to *jhāna* comes in the Theravada commentarial tradition. In this, *jhāna* was based on a practice that bypasses the subtle body and focuses on visually and then mentally derived signs. It requires a highly refined and sustained form of attention. As this kind of *jhāna* was understood to be contrary to the development of insight, this approach can create conflict between insight and *samādhi*.

As I've never attempted this practice, I can't offer much advice on it. But I would comment that losing touch with your body is risky. People can get very unbalanced if they do that. Remember that for his Awakening, the Buddha-to-be gave up cultivating immaterial states and based his practice within the breathing body. Personally, I am satisfied with the approach that is presented in the suttas. It makes it much easier to integrate the practice in the same reality that one lives and works in.

In brief: absorb into what skilful, stay embodied and follow what happens from that basis.



**Q** My mind is a scrambled mess. I'm about as likely to get into *samādhi* as to jump over the moon. Is this really necessary?

**A** What is necessary is that you manage your life with care and clarity and you don't give up on yourself. This is the attitude of goodwill that is essential for meditation; it's a foundational state in the upwards flow. If you keep in touch with that attitude and atmosphere, you'll learn to let go of what is useless, strained and painful. This is the natural law.

What I'm encouraging is to allow that natural law to bring forth qualities that your heart can settle into. It's not up to you to push it, and you can't put a time on how long it will take for qualities to ripen and produce that

flow. But you can keep cultivating authentic experienced goodness to feed the flow and open the heart, and to plug the places where your heart is leaky and lets you down.

You'll learn in time about such sabotage programs – the psychological habits that place you in a wounding world and tether your heart to behaviour that corrodes or fragments it. You'll learn to check, starve and uproot these. Mindfulness of *citta* is a matter of staying in touch with this process. *Samādhi* is not the ultimate aim, it's a stage in that flow where the heart gets some rest and regeneration.

♦ ♦ ♦

**Q** I don't seem to get much rapture. At times my mind can get quite quiet – but it's not like I'm blissing out. What should I do? Am I missing something?

**A** Just enjoy the times when your mind is quiet. Really appreciate that; it's not that usual. Rapture can be relatively serene, buoyant or even quite thrilling depending on each individual's heart, but the crucial feature is that you're not having to deal with hindrances. Your mind is quiet, but it's not dull, spaced out, or suppressed.

Another point is to cultivate the receptivity to allow yourself to be touched by that quality; to let go into it. It's rather like lying down on a beach when

the sea is coming in on a gentle tide. We feel we can relax as we sense the water lapping against our feet. We're not resisting it, nor do we have to do anything about it or even understand it. The background sense of 'being the doer' is relaxed and that allows the tide to come in and gently lift us.

In practice, as in life, there can be a necessary amount of managing our situation, our minds and bodies. Perhaps we get used to the role of a parent or a responsible manager. Rapture comes when you allow yourself to be a peaceful child. Things are calm, things are steady. We don't have to keep looking around and holding things together. We don't have to know a lot. Just widen your awareness through your body, soften your intentions, and enjoy.

Why we don't experience rapture may be because we are highly responsible, trying to understand, on the lookout for problems – or even feel that we don't deserve to relax and be uplifted. This 'holding oneself together' is an aspect of self-view that the heart has to grow beyond. We may also be trying to 'get it right', or thinking, 'Is this what it says in the book?' Instead, we need to cultivate the deep trust that the power of goodness is available and happy to receive us.

So, rapture is at the turning point between being the doer and learning to receive. But the word 'rapture' may not be helpful for you. 'Allowing enjoyment' or 'trusting your embodied heart' might be more useful. The

feeling is less important than the psychological shift whereby the heart begins to come out of its chaos and clenching and know itself. This is why it is a recognizable stage – because to let the process go deeper, we need to allow the heart to be the moderator, and the mind to incrementally step back and stop trying to figure things out.



**Q** With happiness and pleasure, isn't there a danger that we could get attached to it? You know: get stuck in indulging in blissful states and not develop wisdom?

**A** In my experience, it's the case that for most people this kind of happiness is not a problem. People are more likely to get stuck in hyperactivity, obsessive thinking, guilt, self-criticism, depression or addictions. They're much more prone to these sabotage programs than they are to being overwhelmed with inner happiness.

Of course, we can and do reach out for and try to hold onto happy experiences, but by and large these come from sensory input. Happiness of heart will, in my opinion, always be conditioned by some degree of selflessness – such as generosity and kindness to oneself and others. These are reliable openings to the happiness that brings you back to your heart. To know that is wisdom.

If one wisely cultivates from that base, the firm ease of *samādhi* can arise. The nature of this firmness is that it's not based upon holding on or grasping. It's a firmness based upon the heart being properly settled into its own authenticity, void of sabotage programs. And it's pleasant.

When one hopes for, or retrospectively thinks about, *samādhi* or bliss, grasping can take over. Maybe you get stressed. Or if you do get calm, you get possessive of that, or even mildly conceited. But these will bring around discord with how you are when the situation changes and you have to engage, or with how you are when that happy energy subsides. So this is wrong *samādhi*. It's dead-end *samādhi*, in that it has failed to awaken wisdom.

Where there is mindfulness and true understanding, we acknowledge the relief of not being cramped or hindered or agitated. And it's wise to know and dwell in that pleasant state in order to allow a reset from being cramped and hyperactive. But the main point isn't happiness itself – which is a byproduct of the purification process – but the resultant freedom. What can be realized as the grasping relaxes, is that bodily and mental phenomena arise and pass and are not-self. This realization wisdom has to be directly experienced, and that requires a collected and pure *citta*.

So cultivating *samādhi* brings around different forms of wisdom. It's not a problem that this makes you feel good – it's supposed to. You can review the process, acknowledge the unwholesome programs or self-view that were abandoned – and wisely maintain the space to not pick them up again when you leave the meditation room.



**Q** When I meditate and get a bit concentrated, I get intense. It feels like there's a lot of energy moving up into my head, and sometimes I feel quite unbalanced. My right side seems a lot stronger than my left and the body even twitches at times. What should I do about it?

**A** You might need to talk to a teacher who knows you well about specific points in your practice. My suggestion would be that your attention may be too close-up and you're losing spaciousness. Also that your attention may not be adequately grounded in the whole body. Where attention goes, energy goes, so you could be unconsciously ramping up and constricting energy by maintaining too intense a focus. If you do a lot of what you call 'concentrating', this is probably directed by the head, so it puts more energy there. So I would suggest you get more spacious in your attention, and include your whole body in the attention. Don't get too interested in energies because interest will also increase the energy. Consider dispassion instead.

If you do a careful, slow, sweeping of your attention from a highly-charged place in your body to the whole body, that may help energy to balance. But you can't push it around. It's like you're just reminding your body that there's other places where your energy could go – down your back or legs or into the space around you.

Bear in mind there's no pressure to get anywhere or to get concentrated. At this time what you need is balance, not an intense focus. When there's balance, that will provide a foundational tone for your approach and energy.

♦ ♦ ♦

**Q** I get tense whenever I try to focus on my breath. I can't see how 'enjoyment' comes into it.

**A** Don't focus on your breath; the practice that you're undertaking is about awareness of *breathing* – the process that's happening without your effort or intervention.

First get your body right, steady and settled. Be with that and float the general inquiry 'Am I breathing? How can I know that I'm breathing?' Be aware of the bodily experience that you get as a result. Does it change? How is that?

It's like you're in a room and there's a cat frisking around that you want to stroke. If you run after it, it runs away. It's not ready yet. So, make yourself comfortable in a chair, put aside aims and concerns, and be present in your body. Eventually the cat will jump into your lap. However, it might not be the creature that you had in mind; it has a life of its own. 'It's not ready yet' is a good point to bear in mind with all stages and processes. Things look straightforward in theory, but *dhammā* are not self. They ripen at their own time.



**Q** I don't see how I can cultivate this approach in my daily life, I'm working; I have a family and responsibilities. I don't have much spare time to do this meditation. Any suggestions?

**A** I sympathize. The most important thing is to get your life in balance.

It seems that duties never end, so make personal regeneration one of them. It will improve your performance in other areas and prune unnecessary concerns. This is a meditation in its own right.

For this, I'd recommend you give more attention to your body into your life. This includes exercise, walking and switching off media, as well as cultivating hatha yoga or qi gong to keep your subtle body healthy. This is

more than a matter of physical health. It's also a matter of balancing your energy, so it's not all going into projects, planning and supporting others

Further: take some time every day (this can be in the office or the subway) to review your duties and concerns. Get grounded in your body and make a list in your mind of what's important for you .... OK, then revise all that to what's *most* important – and why. For this ten to fifteen minutes, put aside deadlines and time-perspectives. This is a mental training. Then review the 'why' again – that's the zone of pressure, or of enthusiasm. That zone is the most important thing. Then put aside, for this short period, the topics that press on you; don't give attention to the worry and stress, give attention to the zone in terms of gladness or enthusiasm. Be with that. Right now, it doesn't matter whether your mind can carry gladdening topics to their completion; this exercise is about resetting the heart. Bear in mind that your heart is basis of your actions, and therefore its balance and well-being is the most important thing.

From your refreshed and balanced heart, review again the topics that carry pressure – remembering that they're just ideas right now. Maintaining your emotional balance, bear in mind that that's all they are. Things may change. Don't commit a whole lot of that precious heart-energy to ideas that may never come to fulfilment, or to what you can't right now take responsibility for. This also may change. The unchanging truth is: work is not a problem, but stress is. Knowing just this helps you to locate the

stress in your heart and release it. Then you can know and focus more clearly on what's really important for you and within your reach. So, your 'concentration' exercise is based on Review, Prune, Reset and Stay Open. This is whole-life *samādhi*, the Noble Eightfold Path.





# **SAMADHI IS PURE ENJOYMENT**

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