

Christina Feldman

*Meditation Month 2023: Samadhi: Cultivating Inner Calm and Collectedness*

Week Three: “A Well-Trained Mind”

January 15, 2023



Welcome back to Week 3 of this program as we reflect upon and investigate what *samadhi* is. This week, what I would like to focus on is what the Buddha meant by a well-trained heart or well-trained mind. When he speaks about a well-trained heart or mind, he's not speaking about something that just accidentally arises or something that a few people are blessed with and others are not. He uses this word “training,” or cultivating, in a very intentional way.

One of the great arts of meditative development and one of the great arts of a life lived with clarity, happiness, and freedom lies in our ability to both develop and sustain intention and attention. The people we most admire in the world for their ability to affect change, skillful change and transformation, are those who have been able to sustain both intention and attention, often in the midst of very adverse circumstances. They remain undiverted, undistracted, clear on their pathway and the changes that they wish to bring about.

What we see in our own experience is that intention and attention arise and fall together. When our intentions fall away, so too does our attention. When attention drops away, so too does intention. We can have so many noble and wise and skillful intentions in our lives: to be generous, to be patient, to be kind, to be responsive. We can have so many wise intentions in our lives: to live compassionately. And yet we can feel so frustrated when our intentions are forgotten or sabotaged.

The greatest saboteurs of intention and attention are the veiling factors that we touched upon in the last session: the veiling factors of craving for sensual pleasure, ill will, agitation and worry, dullness and dissociation we can sometimes experience, and the pattern of doubt. These are not just meditation experiences but can shadow and, in reality, govern our lives. In the teachings, this collection of patterns is often referred to as Mara, the personification of the habit patterns that lead to creating and recreating the world of distress. Each of these patterns has an extended family. Craving carries with it deep beliefs in insufficiency, in not being enough, in not having

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enough, in not being good enough. Ill will has an extended family of impatience and frustration and jealousy and anxiety and the need to be in control. Numbness is not just about falling asleep on our meditation cushion. Dullness, numbness, and dissociation are the times when we just don't want to feel or don't feel resilient enough to be in touch and connected with the world both inwardly and outwardly. Doubt carries many images of a self that is incapable, powerless; the need for certainty in an uncertain world.

The Buddha speaks of these patterns as being at the root of the psychological and emotional distress we can experience. They are the root of generating the stories that too easily become our nightmares. They're the root of all of our psychological and emotional storms. I would invite you to check this out in your own experience.

A meditative journey to the development of a well-trained heart mind is a journey through these patterns. For most people, they are our classroom. This is our curriculum. This is where we learn to sustain attention and intention, learning to be undiverted in our intentions to gather, to calm, to still, to cultivate calm abiding in the midst of these patterns arising. In any spiritual, contemplative tradition, you will find the encouragement to do just this: to calm, to attend to the moment, to sustain attention and intention, and to be wholehearted. I think this journey really begins by developing an emotional literacy that knows craving as a craving, that knows aversion as aversion, that knows restlessness and worry as restlessness and worry, that knows dullness as dullness, and that truly knows doubt as doubt.

We learn not to feed these patterns with thought. They don't have an independent self-existence. When they are not fed, they begin to lose their power. The Buddha used the image that if you want a fire to keep on burning, just throw logs on it. If you want the fire to begin to cool, stop feeding it. We see the ways in which story and narrative sets up and reinforces and deepens these patterns of reactivity. Instead, we see them arise and pass when they are not fed. We develop the

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emotional literacy, and we're able to ask the question: What does this pattern need? What would be helpful? Is it a greater cultivation of contentment, of kindness? Is it a greater sense of energy? Or is more investigation needed?

Calming and stilling are the willingness to commit to just being wholeheartedly present in one moment at a time, to commit to one breath, to commit to the sense of our feet touching the ground. To know this, we begin to train the mind. We begin to train the heart, where we give greater authority to our intentions than to Mara, where we give greater authority to our intentions than to the mood of the moment or the mental state at the moment.

Samadhi does not uproot Mara. The Buddha was very clear on this. But samadhi blindfolds Mara. Samadhi blindfolds Mara in the sense that in the climate of collectedness and calmness and stilling, the habit patterns of Mara cannot find a foothold in the mind. And there is a space to investigate them and to understand them.

We begin with what is called applied attention and intention. We set the intention to be present with just one breath, one moment, and we find that our attention does slip away. And so we reapply it, we renew those intentions. Intentions need that renewal. They don't just last of their own accord. We don't make one intention to be kind, or one intention to be patient, and think that it overpowers all the surges of Mara. We learn to apply and to reapply moment to moment with an effort that is kind and caring. The body then begins to settle. The mind begins to calm.

Attitude is so important here. We are on a path that requires depths of patience and kindness. And it is a path that has a direction: awakening and the end of distress. I'd like to offer you a quote that I find so touching from the *Digha Nikaya* where the Buddha says, "When there is appreciation, joy is born. When the mind is joyful, the body calms down. When the body calms, it feels happiness. Being happy, the mind gathers." Through the willingness to apply and reapply

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intention and attention, we begin to see the emergence of our capacity to sustain intention and attention and the possibility of samadhi. This has profound implications not only just for our practice but also for the whole of our lives. A well-trained mind is a mind that is no longer governed by Mara but is guided by sustained intention. It is a mind that has the capacity to think clearly and reflectively. The Buddha speaks of the three wise intentions to cultivate and to sustain. It's a short list: the intention of kindness, the intention of compassion, and the intention of non-clinging. These intentions can guide our speech, our thoughts, and our actions. They also have extended families. A well-trained mind is a mind that's a true friend, a place of ease, of spaciousness, of stillness, and of responsiveness.

Once more, settle into a posture where you can feel easeful, where you can feel wakeful, where the body feels to be a friend. Establish a sense of groundedness, collectedness, gatheredness, intentionally cultivating calm abiding in the midst of all things, whatever agitations might be present, whatever sense of contractedness or busyness might be present.

Introduce that clear intention to cultivate calm abiding with kindness, with compassion, with non-clinging, with each out-breath, the sense of breathing out agitation, breathing out busyness, allowing the mind to settle in, to join the body in this cultivation of calm abiding. Just listen to the mind heart of the moment, sensing whether any of the veiling factors are present. Is there a sense of discontent, of wanting a better moment, a better body, a better mind? Is there a pattern of ill will, frustration, impatience, tightness, pushing away, resisting? Is there a mood of agitation, worrying, busyness, restlessness in the body or mind? Is there a pattern of dullness, of numbness or disconnection? Is there a mood or a pattern of doubt, uncertainty, floundering?

It is in the midst of this we cultivate clear intention, wise attention, in the midst of this, giving a greater authority to those intentions and attention rather than to whatever mood or veiling factor is present. In the midst of this, you can find the groundedness of the body that we can settle in. In

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the midst of this, we cultivate a mind heart of kindness, compassion, of not clinging. We explore what it is to be undiverted, to not feed those patterns of thought, to let them be: arise and pass, applying and reapplying the intention to be present in the body of the moment, to calm the agitations, to cultivate stillness, wellness, easefulness.

We apply and reapply those intentions and attention many times. In all the moments we find ourselves diverted or forgetful, we come back. We discover we can return, celebrating and appreciating a capacity to return, to come back, to collect, to gather; beginning to steady those intentions, beginning to steady the attention; appreciating what it is to abide in calmness and collectedness, in gatheredness, to be ungoverned by Mara, to be ungoverned by patterns of reactivity; calming the storms. Breathing in and out with kindness. Breathing in and out with care. Breathing in and out with clarity, clarity of intention, to know this moment just as it is, to know this breath just as it is, to know this body, mind, heart, and moment just as it is.

Continue with this practice if you wish, or emerge, if that is appropriate for you in this moment, not leaving behind that sense of gatheredness and collectedness, not leaving behind that field of skillful intention.