

Dharma *Samādhī* (2 of 5) Gladness and Joy

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The title of the talks this week is “Dharma *Samādhī*.” Dharma *samādhī* is a teaching from the Buddha of five different mental and emotional qualities that we enter into as we would enter into a stream to be carried by the current.

Practice can sometimes feel like a lot of work, especially when we first start. But at some point, we enter into a stream, a momentum that's not our doing and not part of our effort. Rather it's something that begins to move through us. This can be as simple as when we sit down and we don't do much except maybe be present, we might feel that things begin to shift. Maybe our shoulders relax a little bit and the belly softens.

We did not necessarily initiate that. It just happened on its own. Some people notice that by the end of a 30-minute meditation, things are much more settled in the body and there's more ease and relaxation. It wasn't so much that we did any of that. We just stayed present, stayed with the breathing, and stayed out of the busy mind that gets stressed out. Things relaxed and were shed. That is the stream of relaxation. We allow that and we get out of the way.

As we relax, there can be a feeling of pleasure, goodness, or rightness in relaxing that can also bring a sense of gladness or joy – a sense of, “Yes, this is good.” The sense of gladness that can come can be seen not as something we intentionally create or do, but as a byproduct of the settling that can go on in practice.

The idea is that there's something else going on in practice besides what we are engineering. We are allowing something. The stronger and more regular our practice is, the more we know how to show up and be in the present moment, and the more capable we are of opening up and allowing this Dharma flow or unfolding to happen.

Using the language of flow is intentional. The Buddha himself used the metaphor of a current – at some point, the practice puts us in a current, and we're carried along by the current in the river. In Pali, the word for “current” is *sota*. It is often translated into English as “stream.” Someone who has entered into the Dharma flow has become a stream-enterer. But the word “stream-enterer” doesn't quite capture the idea of being carried by a flow. That meaning is lost when one translates it as “stream,” when the word literally means “current.” So someone has entered the current.

Dharma *samādhī* means beginning to enter a current that has five different things – gladness, joy, tranquility, happiness, and concentration. The flow goes from one to the next. It's a remarkable thing that the practice creates the conditions for these wonderful positive states of mind that are potentials within us to begin to flow. It is as if the practice has the capacity to help us relax and let go. Experiencing these five qualities may be connected to letting go. The more we can let go, the better we feel.

So today the topic is the first two of these Dharma *samādhīs*, which I am translating as “gladness and joy.” There are other choices for these two words. The Pali words are *pāmojja* and *pīti*. The first word is sometimes translated as “joy” rather than “gladness,” and the second as “rapture.” There's an idea from ancient times that the first one is a weak form of the second one. Rapture is an intensification of joy.

I offer you both possibilities as a kind of assignment so you can think about and reflect on them and have conversations with people about which words you would choose for these first two Dharma *samādhī* qualities.

Would you use “gladness and joy,” or “joy and rapture?” Would you use something else? You might want to reserve “happiness” for the fourth quality. Finding your own words that work for you is a very important principle in this practice. If the ideas and language don’t work for you, then it’s more difficult for the Dharma to open and unfold in you, or to live in you. So don’t take English translations of Buddhist terms as fixed ideas. Take the translations more as general suggestions and begin to find how the process works for you.

In any case, the first one is gladness. I like the word “gladness” because, to me, gladness is an appreciation. It’s a bit evaluative and arises in comparison to other things. It’s about understanding the context and seeing, “Oh, this is good.” The second joy (*pīti*) can also be that, but it means more the delight, the pleasure, and the joy that come from really being absorbed and engaged in meditation itself, in the activity we’re doing. It’s the self-enjoying joy of being engaged and present for what we’re doing. *Pīti* is not an evaluation and comparison with something else. It is the joy of the activity itself.

For example, gladness might be what we feel when we have been caught up in the hindrances for a long time, swirling around in desire and ill will and so forth, and finally, the fantasies, the illusions, and the distractions of these things fall away and we feel, “Oh, I’m back. I’m finally myself again. I’m here. I’m no longer being pulled away by all these things and this feels good.” The feeling of goodness is gladness in comparison to the feeling of being caught or lost. The Buddha talks about a variety of things that give rise to gladness, and that’s one of them.

One of the predominant things that gives rise to gladness is no longer being caught by the hindrances. That can be a long slog. It takes a long time, sometimes years, for people to have the hindrances abate. When it does, they will start entering into the river, the flow of gladness that’s there – “Ah, this is nice.”

Another interesting source of gladness that he talks about is virtuous behavior, living a virtuous life. This has to do with our conduct. What we actually do is to not harm anybody else intentionally or violate the precepts. It has to do with living from wholesome qualities, and also feeling that we have wholesomeness inside of us. We dedicate ourselves to being wholesome and skillful and living a good life.

The Buddha said that leads to a feeling of non-regret. Non-regret – not having regret because we don’t do anything harmful – can be a source of gladness. There are plenty of people I know who are living good lives, but many people have such a strong inner critic that they don’t avail themselves of that goodness. They don’t appreciate that actually they haven’t killed, stolen, engaged in sexual misconduct, lied, or been intoxicated recently. In that time that we haven’t done those things, that’s a good thing. The Buddha said that the gladness and joy of that is something you can avail yourself of. You can open to and allow that, or just recognize that it is good.

It’s interesting that this emphasis on experiencing gladness or joy from our ethical life is something that scholars have said was also prominent among the ancient Greeks and also the early Christians. There was an understanding that an ethical life was the source of a kind of joy or happiness. This understanding was lost in Europe around the time of the Protestant Reformation and the rise of capitalism, when there was a greater emphasis on the individual.

I think in the modern 20th or 21st century, in the kind of European-centric currents of our modern world, a lot of the emphasis on joy and happiness has been focused on personal psychological well-being. Whereas the ancients, including the Buddhists, had a very clear sense that happiness was something that we did in community, and how we behave ethically in community is also a source of our joy or gladness.

The other thing the Buddha talked about that gives birth to this kind of gladness is having an upright mind. This is often translated into English as a “straight mind,” meaning an upright mind, an honest mind, and an honest heart. Feeling that we have goodness inside and we’re honest are some of the products of mindfulness practice because mindfulness is a practice of learning how to be more and more honest with ourselves and our world.

Having this uprightness and dedication to being honest can bring a sense of gladness. We might not always be completely ethical according to our standards, or always as upright as we’d like to be, but one of the sources of joy and gladness is that we’re dedicated to it, and it’s our intention to keep trying to do better. We are glad that we’re trying, and that this is our inspiration.

The last thing I'll say is that what Bhikkhu Bodhi translated as "inspiration in the Dharma" can be a source of joy and gladness. When we read the Dharma and hear the Dharma, we can be so glad to be connected to it and know it. This feels right. But the Pali word is not "inspiration." It means something like "to have a feeling for the Dharma." The idea is not that we just read the Dharma and think it feels right, but we have some intuitive or felt sense of what it's about – *this* ease, or freedom, or peace, or openness, or compassion, is good.

There are many different ways: we can appreciate, we can open up to, and we can spend time connecting to what's inspiring so that some feeling of gladness arises. The gladness is not manufactured. It comes from really connecting to what inspires us and then allowing it to live there and recognizing it.

As the practice deepens and gets stronger, then the gladness is a support, a fuel, or a foundation for the next Dharma *samādhī* quality, which is joy (*pīti*). Some people translate it as "rapture" because it's very physical and it can sometimes be quite intense with a lot of energy. Technically it's considered to be a mental phenomenon, a mental kind of delight and joy. The mind has been lit up with delight in engagement in doing the practice..

This generally happens when people can really stay in the present moment. Then there's a gladness about that and joy and delight in the involvement in staying present with the breath and staying in the present moment with experience. *Pīti* is not necessarily something we make happen. It is something that we avail ourselves of when we start to get a sense of relaxing, letting go, feeling the simplicity of a mind that is not caught up in unfortunate mind states and activities. Then we tune into the well-being, the joy, and the goodness of that.

The art of Dharma practice is partly the art of opening up our attention. We don't deny what's difficult, but we do include what is not difficult. We include where the gladness is, where the joy is, and where the delight is. We include the light of engagement, the light of being here, the light of not being caught anymore, the light of the goodness of being honest and having an upright mind and being deeply connected.

This willingness to open and say yes to what is good without denying what is bad, wrong, or difficult is the door through which this flow, this current can begin moving within us. We're waiting for and allowing the current of the Dharma, the Dharma *samādhī* current to move through us.

This is gladness and joy (or other people call the first one "joy" and the second one "rapture." Maybe you have your own two words for what you like to call these. Tomorrow we'll talk about the third factor that flows out of those and continues this movement of the flow into tranquility. In the meantime, today please spend some time looking for Dharma gladness and Dharma joy. See if it's here for you. See if maybe there's a way of saying "yes" and opening to your experience, even when things are difficult, which allows some kind of spark, a little tingling of joy, delight, and gladness to be part of your day for the next 24 hours. May you enjoy your day. Thank you.