

# Finding Our Way (2 of 5) With Gladness and Sadness

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We are continuing with this week's theme of appropriate and inappropriate states, polarities that exist often in relationship to each other, the healthy expressions and unhealthy expressions of these things. Today, the topic is gladness and sadness. There are beautiful, inspiring forms of gladness, and there is gladness that is not so beneficial for us to experience. There are profoundly human and may be very important experiences of sadness, and there are unhealthy, debilitating ways of being sad. So, to be able to begin teasing apart and seeing that these can take a different shape and form.

When people feel sad, they'll take it as a bad thing, a wrong thing, that it shouldn't be there because it's uncomfortable. Or when they're glad that it is great, they're on top of the world, it is fantastic. But in fact, just because it's gladness or sadness doesn't mean that one is good and the other is bad, one is healthy and the other is not healthy. They both have healthy versions and unwise versions. So, to be able to see those is helpful.

The unwise ones, the ones that are not so healthy to have, tend to kind of live together. And as a pendulum swings, they tend to rebound and react to each other and live in relationship to each other. For example, a person might feel there's a lot of hope, and with that hope (the possibility of something), be really glad and delighted. Then whatever they're hoping for doesn't work out, and so the pendulum swings and they feel sadness, sorrow, and grief. To say it that abstractly may not get my point across.

Perhaps, you have a lot of hope in the lottery numbers you chose. "Certainly, this is the number." You're so glad that you finally have a strong feeling that these are the winning numbers. Then you find out that they're not the winning numbers, and you feel despair and discouragement, especially because you put a lot of money into it. So here, these states live in relationship to each other.

It might be hope around another person, hope for a relationship. "Yes, that's going to happen. I hope for it, and it looks like it's going to happen with that person." You feel energized and pumped up by the energy of hope. And when it doesn't work out, you may crash. So these states kind of exist together.

Some of these states that exist together have a lot to do with self, self-identity issues, definitions of ourselves, or judgments about ourselves. If we get praised or we do something that we think others will approve of, we might feel glad, happy, and kind of energized. When it turns out that what we did wasn't approved of or appreciated by other people, in fact, they were discouraged or upset with us, then we may crash. There might be a natural feeling of some gladness and sadness that is not so tied to our ego, but much of it may be tied to the ego. So the ego is a fragile thing that can be involved in these swings back and forth.

So to begin not just looking at the particular forms of gladness and sadness you might have, but see how these states live in relationship to each other. And to begin deciding that you don't want to live dependent on things that are fragile, that swing back and forth from one end to the other. you want to find another way of living.

So there's gladness and sadness that can come from another way of living. We feel glad that we have stability, that we're not pushed around by the opinions of others or by our fear of rejection. We're centered and stable here; content. Content just to be present and not need a lot. And that gladness, knowing that we're kind of free from a lot of the social drama and games that maybe we were caught up in earlier, can feel like a gladness that isn't part of a pendulum or polarity of two different states. It can just be gladness itself. Maybe it's a gladness that comes from relief. "I used to be so attached to things, wanting things, and spinning out. Now I'm not, and this new state feels good." There's gladness to it. There's satisfaction in it.

There can be sadness that is just a deep part of human life because of loss or change that touches us deeply. There might be sadness because you disappointed yourself. "Yes, I was in touch with some deeper way of being – integrity, honesty, inner goodness – and I got distracted or afraid. Then I did something that I never could have

imagined doing. I hurt a friend. I lied.” Now you’re sad and disappointed because you hurt someone. That sadness is there because there has been pain. Maybe you caused pain. That’s not necessarily a problem. In fact, it might be a sign of healthiness that you feel certain kinds of sadness.

A life without sadness maybe is not a life. There’s a time and place to feel sad. I remember a story I read many years ago about someone who struggled with a lot of sadness. The teacher told this person at some point, “Well, be a sad Buddha.” After a long period of trying to sort out, figure out, escape, and fix this sadness, this little teaching, “be a sad Buddha,” allowed the person to relax and say: “Okay, Buddha can be sad. I don’t have to fight sadness or judge myself for it. There’s a time and place for it.”

Just because we’re sad doesn’t mean that something is wrong. It can actually mean that something is right. Sometimes sadness is a fallow time that something is being prepared inside of us for a new way of being, a new direction that we’re going to go.

A little bit of sadness and gladness belongs to the world of evaluation, of figuring out the value and importance of something. They are kind of higher intellectual states than some of the deeper spiritual states that we can experience. We have to be very careful what we’re evaluating, what we think is important.

For Buddhists, a foundation for all forms of sadness and gladness we might experience is what can be called a refuge. We have a refuge; we have an orientation; we have an understanding; we have a way of seeing; we have a practice that we trust. We have a presence and attentiveness that we trust. It protects us, informs us, guides us, points us away, shows us there’s a way through everything. No matter what is going on, refuge means there is a way.

You might not know what the way is, but if you practice mindfulness, practice meditation, just keep practicing living ethically, the Dharma, your heart will find a way. So this idea of refuge – the ocean of refuge, the ocean of stability that’s underneath the surface waves that come and go. Sometimes there’s a high wave, sometimes a low wave, and these are all just surface manifestations. They’re important parts of the ocean, and some people will spend wonderful times and difficult times playing and struggling with those waves.

But there is a deeper place of refuge, the foundation for it all. And if you remember that you have a refuge, if you remember you trust your practice or yourself in a deep way, that you don’t have to know the way to find your way, then you won’t be so troubled by the waves. You can allow the waves to be there. You can study them, see them carefully, learn from them, learn which ones are healthy and which are not, which are dysfunctional and which are functional. This is an important human skill. And you can learn to ride the waves. You can learn not to identify with the waves so much. You can learn to trust that there’s something deeper here than the waves.

There is the refuge. There’s a certain stability, a home, a companion that always follows you along. It is there to protect you, support you, and guide you, even when you don’t know what’s supposed to happen. This refuge can give a lot more clarity and ease around how we navigate and experience the comings and goings of things like sadness and gladness.

So as you go through your day, you might want to look at the small and large versions of sadness and gladness that come up for you. You might not use the word glad or gladness very much. It might be a kind of mild joy, delight, a pleasant aliveness. And then sadness can be a whole range of things: depression, sorrow, sadness. See how those work for you. And, without judging yourself and making it worse, without the ego coming in, and with the swings of the pendulum, do you think that sadness and gladness are healthy? Does it have a good foundation? Or is the foundation kind of fragile, weak, and maybe even a little bit deluded, like with the lottery ticket for example? Spend some time looking at this, but remember to do it from a foundation of trust, where you appreciate that it’s valuable to learn about yourself and be happy that you’re learning about yourself. Trust this learning process more than the judgments: “Oh, I’m wrong. I shouldn’t be this way.” If you see how you are, then you’re on the path.

Study your sadness and gladness. See if they live in relationship to each other like a pendulum. Or see if there’s kind of deeper or healthier forms of sadness and gladness that are not a problem, that are actually healthy to experience, are appropriate, are not triggering one and the other, but are part of the richness of life, the fullness of life, and the depths of life. And then can you allow for that? Maybe that gladness and sadness needs their time with you. You might appreciate that can be the case for gladness and the family of glad things, but you might not appreciate it for sadness. There’s a time for it. Go for a walk, sit and have tea, allow for it. And then underneath it all, refuge. If the word refuge doesn’t mean something to you, what is it that you trust? What is a

deeper trust, wellsprings that you can trust, that allows you to not be so caught in the waves?

Thank you, and we'll continue this tomorrow.