

Ready to Change (5 of 5) Clear, Happy, and Trusting

December 30, 2022

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

trust, mind, suffering, arising, Buddha, clarity, teaching, experience, settle, contribute, softness, profound teachings, open, nature, greed, *pasanna*, Dharma eye

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We come to the last talk of the series titled “Ready to Change.” This series could also be titled “Ready for Change.” First, for ourselves, though, we want to think about whether we’re ready to be changed for the better. If this happens to us, we’re more ready for change in the world. We’re able to receive and be part of that change, without unhealthy resistance, fear, projections, desires, and despair – all the things that contribute both to our sense of discomfort and our deep sense of distrust in the world. Without feeling that things have to be different, that things shouldn’t be this way. Without trusting anger, greed, and fear. Without trusting mistrust.

The Buddha oriented his teachings toward cultivating really wholesome states of mind in people so they’d be ready to hear profound liberating teachings. In his terms, it was opening the Dharma eye, so they would see in a new way. That’s a powerful teaching, the idea that we’re not looking for a new experience – a better experience – we’re looking to see our experience in a new way, a liberating way. Rather than focusing on change – making some change, fixing something, solving something – we’re opening to seeing experience in a new way.

The Buddha would give talks to inspire people. In that inspiration, their minds would become receptive, ready to hear something deep. Their minds would become malleable and soft. Their resistance, for example, their stubbornness, their laziness, their greed – whatever it was – would soften and settle, and they’d really be right there. There would be a kind of softness and willingness to hear, take it in, and lower their guard in a healthy appropriate way. Their minds would be free of hindrances. While the talk was being given, they’d be so connected to it that they wouldn’t be caught up in greed, anger, and delusion. They would be inspired.

The last thing that would happen could be described by the Pali word *pasanna*. We don’t have a particular English translation for this wonderful word. There are different meanings we can make of it – a range of very different English words for it. The delightful task, I think, is to consider how they are all one thing. Somehow, in the world of ancient India, they saw it as its own thing. Maybe they had a different emotion than we have. They divided up the human experience in a different way or held it together in a different way than we do.

You’ll have to use your imagination a bit to fold these different meanings together into one. Maybe you’ll come up with an English word that might hold them all, but so far, I haven’t. Maybe some of you will – or maybe you’ll even think of a word not in the English language.

The first meaning of *pasanna* is “clear” or “bright” – luminosity, clarity – as if you’ve turned on a light and there’s wonderful clarity. The smog has cleared, and it’s clear. There’s a brightness and clarity to the mind and heart. The second meaning is that of a heart that’s happy – just delighted and happy. The third meaning is that of a mind with trust in it. It is reconciled with all things and is pleased or satisfied with what’s here. The word “trust” is one that people often come upon, or “confidence.”

Clarity, happiness, and trust. Is there a single English word that captures all three of these? Or can you somehow fold them in, somehow recognize all of them? In a sense, if we have different qualities at the same time, are they different qualities? Or is there a gestalt – a whole that they’re part of – in the present? So, the idea of receptivity, readiness, softness, malleability, free of hindrances, inspired, elated, clear, happy, trusting.

For now, we’ll settle on the word “trust.” It’s a fascinating kind of concept – or state – to orient ourselves to the exercise: “What is my mind doing right now? Does it express some kind of trust or mistrust? If it’s trust, what am I trusting? Am I trusting anger? Am I trusting fear? Am I trusting mistrust? Where do I put my trust?”

In a sense, whatever the mind is doing most, there is a kind of trust there. And sometimes what we're trusting is not healthy for us. Trust something healthy. Trust the wholesome, not the unwholesome. Trust *trust*, more than mistrust. Trust really being here. What does that do for us to settle us, relax us – the confidence, the faith, something about really being here?

The Buddha prepared people to have a mind like that. Then, he would offer his deepest teachings. And it would open their Dharma eye. It is said that when people's Dharma eye was opened, they would exclaim. They would say a particular thing. It might not seem very interesting or profound when you hear it, but it's really significant. It comes with the experience of awakening, so it's not to be treated lightly or dismissed, even if it sounds like, "that's not much." The words people would say were: "Oh. Whatever has the nature of arising, has the nature of ceasing, ending."

The Dharma eye would show them something very profound about the comings and goings, the arising and passing, of phenomena. What's possible is to see how much the mind does not allow us to stay and be there. We glom on. We grab. We hold on. We have thoughts. The Buddha was being very specific when he gave this profound teaching. He was saying that suffering has the nature of arising and passing.

To understand this, we have to understand that it's the *experience* of suffering. If we've had a profound loss, the loss is not coming and going. It's permanent now. Or, if we have some kind of permanent medical condition that debilitates us, that's there. That's not going to change.

What did the Buddha mean by "coming and going"? It's the psychological experience of suffering and how we relate to it that has the nature of coming and going. It's not permanent. It's not solid. If we trust the present moment enough, trust being present for the river of comings and goings, we discover the place in which all our psychological suffering belongs. It belongs to that river. It belongs to the comings and goings of phenomena.

When we see that – when we wake up to that – we realize that it's possible just to let it be the river of change. We don't have to cling to it and hold onto it. Whatever has the nature to appear, has the nature of disappearing. Let's allow it to come and go. Let's not stop the disappearing. Let's not glom onto it, get caught in it. Let's not think about it in such a way that it becomes kind of continuous. Just let the thoughts arise and go.

Someone might protest, saying: "What do you mean? My body is not coming and going. My body's just here." The body is constantly coming and going – the experience of it, the psychological experience of the body, the thoughts, the concepts, the feelings, the sensations. The body doesn't come and go, but it's a general thing. When we're into the direct experience, that's what we're talking about here. That's where the dharma eye opens – to the direct experience, here and now. Here, our suffering comes and goes, our psychological suffering.

The Buddha's idea of teaching people to create a context of a heart and mind that's ready to be taught, is not to be Pollyannaish about life, to just make it all nice and sweet. It's really to prepare us for the existential difficulties of this life of ours, for our places of suffering and stress, and for our challenges.

What a wonderful thing! What a wonderful thing to cultivate the wholesome, to cultivate these wonderful mental capacities for wholesome states. Not to be blind to what's going on in this world, but to be able to see it and be present for it in a way that we're able to bring the best of ourselves out. We're able to stay awake, present, and nonreactive, so the best parts of us can meet and respond to the world.

I hope that the practice we've done over this last year really makes us better able to contribute to the welfare and happiness of the world. May we do this practice not only for our own sake, but, even more, let's do it for the sake of the world. After all, as we settle and have an open attention – the ability to be free and aware – then, in that openness and awareness, maybe "me, myself, and mine" doesn't matter so much. What's important is what that awareness meets and encounters, and how we care for it. May we care for this world. And let's care for it better because we've gotten to the bottom of our suffering and have learned not to cling to anything.

Thank you all, for this year, for this week, for this day. I'm very glad to have shared with you this time, this teaching, and this practice. I certainly look forward to doing it again starting in the future, in the far future, next year, 2023. So, when that time comes, I look forward to being with you, next Monday. Thank you.