

Dharma *Samādhi* (1 of 5) Carried By Inspiration

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If you make the effort to climb up the ladder of a slide and then allow yourself to slide down, in a certain way you make your own effort to get to the top, but then you allow gravity to slide you down. Yesterday I was watching some kids on a water slide. They were sliding down and smashing into the water in a delightful way. When you make a paper airplane, you have to know how to fold the paper just right. But when you throw the paper airplane, it's not only a matter of how you throw it. It's also up to the air that holds the paper airplane up. That air is what allows the paper airplane to fly.

When you want to grow a garden, maybe tomatoes, you have to plant the seeds and maybe create a lot of conditions in the soil like keeping it fertile and watered. But the whole thing depends on the sunlight. We do our part to care for the plant, but we also allow the sun to do its work so the plant can grow. If you plant it in the shade, it doesn't grow so well.

The cooperation of our effort and something that's not our effort that allows something to unfold also occurs in meditation practice. It happens more deeply in Dharma practice, which is practice in our whole life. We have to make our effort. We have to do what we need to do, climb the ladder, or plant the seed and nurture the seed. We have to make a leap of faith, in a sense. Then something is there to catch us. Something is there to hold us, help us grow, and support us, like the sunlight.

It is a special, magical moment in meditation practice when you feel that something other than your own effort has been activated and is supporting you, helping you, and guiding you. I don't know if this is the best analogy, but when I was younger and used to run, I found that no matter how much I was in shape, the first part of the running, maybe the first 50-100 feet, I didn't want to run, and it was like work. I had to override the feeling that it was too much.

Then I would get into a groove with the running and it felt like the running was running me. Running expends a lot of energy, but there was an effortless feeling as if there was more than just the usual me as the agent applying myself and making myself run. Something kicked in and the running just seemed to arise out of my body effortlessly.

But I had to start. I had to do the beginning for something else to come along and pick me up. The same thing happens in Dharma practice. We have to do our part of it. All this "I" has a role. We have to make some effort, but it can be overdone. If we only focus on me, myself, and mine, if we think it's only about personal effort – "I'm the agent; it is up to me; am I doing well enough? I have to do more; I'm not doing it right; look how great I am" – we miss how we're supported by something. Something else comes along to support and move us.

I like to think of this not as some supernatural thing, but rather, like running, it is the natural functioning capacity of our whole psychophysical ecosystem. Our whole inner being, our whole mind and body as a system is so much more than whatever we associate with ourselves as the agent, or the victim, or the experiencer of something. We are a large cooperative and we as the agent and the experiencer have to contribute our part to the cooperative. But then we have to allow the rest of the cooperative to do its work.

At some point, part of Dharma practice is to make room for and allow this kind of Dharma process to move through us. One of the things this is associated with is Dharma joy – allowing a certain kind of Dharma joy to

arise. The Buddha called it “Dharma *samādhī*.” Many *samādhīs*, many concentration states are emphasized in this Buddhist tradition. But there’s one called Dharma *samādhī*.

Dharma *samādhī* has to do with having five qualities – five things are activated, or we are absorbed in them, or they are flowing through us. It is as if these qualities were activated through us and we’re being carried by them. *Samādhī* is like being carried by something as much as being absorbed in something. The qualities of Dharma *samādhī* are gladness, rapture, tranquility, happiness, and concentration.

By the end of the week, if not the end of today, I hope you will have memorized these five things – gladness, joy, tranquility, happiness, and concentration. I tend to call this the “gladness pentad.” These five qualities appear over and over again in the Buddha’s teachings as a sequence, as well as a list. When the Dharma clicks in, when there’s an appreciation of something called the Dharma, this inner cooperative process begins to well up, and we’re carried by these five qualities.

The way they flow into each other is inspiring. The Buddha presents these as natural processes, and as there’s momentum in the practice, one leads to the next. Whatever gladness is, when it has momentum and we are being carried by it, it can lead to the arising of joy. When mental joy arises, a tranquilizing and calming of the body can follow in its wake. As the body becomes calm, the arising of happiness, *sukha*, can follow. As the body is with the arising of happiness, what can follow in the wake of that is concentration.

So those are the five. Then, remarkably, built on these five, with the same sense of a natural flow where one thing gives rise to the next, there can be seeing things as they are. There can be a dramatic real insight into this world. Or there can be deeper and deeper levels of concentration. In the *suttas*, we see these five qualities leading to either deeper states of concentration or deep states of insight.

For someone new to meditation, how do you access these five wonderful qualities? It isn’t so much that we access them, as when we start getting settled and working through the hindrances, at some point we open up to and allow something deeper to occur. Those deeper things often arise in the wake of something else. Maybe we’re inspired by something – “Wow, this is fantastic.”

There’s a whole series of things that the Buddha talks about that can create this kind of catalyst for gladness and joy. There is being free of the hindrances – finally having a mind that’s not out of control, not caught up in chasing after desires, aversions, and thoughts. There’s a settledness and peacefulness because we’ve reclaimed our minds from our distractions. We feel, “Wow, this is so good to not be distracted and to be able to be here. We really appreciate that and feel the joy of it.

Not everyone is able to do that because sometimes the mind is always looking ahead – “What’s wrong? This can’t be quite right.” Or “It’s going to be better over there – the grass is greener on the other side of the fence.” Being free of the hindrances is the ability to just settle back and appreciate the goodness of this moment.

Another catalyst is living a life of good ethical conduct. We can be inspired by our goodness, our virtue. That can be a catalyst for joy if we allow ourselves permission to feel the goodness of our own virtue. For example, we haven’t killed anyone today, stolen from someone, or broken any of the precepts. Sometimes we are guilty before we’re tried. We’re just basically wrong and we don’t allow ourselves to feel the joy of going through a whole day without killing anyone, stealing from anyone, lying to anyone, or hurting anyone with our sexuality. The Buddha encouraged people to feel that delight or joy.

There is also the inspiration of the Dharma. The goal of practice and the purpose of practice can be inspiring. The Buddha, Dharma, and the Sangha can be inspiring. Knowing other practitioners can inspire us. This can also be the inspiration of the Dharma itself. All these things are inspirations the Buddha talks about.

The Pali word that Bhikkhu Bodhi translates as “inspiration” is *veda*. It can mean “to know,” but it can also mean “to feel.” At some point, we have a feel for the Dharma. We have a feel for what liberation or freedom is. As we start getting a feel for what this is about, when we know it, Reading about it can be inspiring. But to start feeling it in ourselves – getting a very personal experience of it – can be inspiring.

Inspiration gives rise to joy and gladness. When we have gladness and joy strongly enough, with enough clarity, with channels open and a willingness to experience them, this can set in motion going down the Dharma slide. This can be seen as being carried by the Dharma air or wind or being receptive to the Dharma light because

there's no more shadow over us. The light begins to let something inside grow and evolve. It's a remarkable process, this cooperative practice that we're involved in where we offer ourselves to the practice, and the practice then cooperates and offers itself to us.

This is the introduction. We will go through these five qualities over the next week. Today I hope that you talk with friends and spend time considering what inspires you in the Dharma. What feeling for the Dharma do you have? Even if your life is a challenge today. There are a lot of challenges people live with these days. I don't want to belittle those challenges or say, "Just be joyful." Perhaps even because of those challenges, there can be something that inspires you and gives you courage and inspiration to practice in the middle of the difficulties you have. May the Dharma be with you. May you experience Dharma *samādhi*. Thank you.