

Qualities of the Dharma (1 of 5) Visible in the Here and Now

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Hello everyone. I'm glad to be back. I've been gone for about a month. I've had a wonderful time. For about three weeks I was involved in a program to train people to be Buddhist teachers in the context of the natural world – for example, in wilderness retreats. Then the last four days I went backpacking with my wife to add to the time living outdoors and camping.

For this week's talks, I'd like to go through the five qualities of the Buddha's teachings. They are described as the well-spoken teachings of the Buddha. In Pali the word for teaching is *dhamma*, which is a very rich word. It could also mean reality, truth itself. The importance of the five characteristics of the teachings is seen in the fact that the monastic Theravadan community chants them every day as part of their liturgy. They are reminded of these five qualities on a daily basis.

The English translation of the qualities is: "The Dharma is well-proclaimed, well-spoken by the Blessed One. It is visible here and now, immediate, inviting to be seen for oneself, onward leading, and personally realized by the wise."

These five qualities of the Dharma are also the instruction for how to practice, where to look, and where our focus is. We are not just finding them in a book or in lists. Rather, we have a direct experience ourselves.

"It's visible here and now" is one translation of the first quality. *Sanditiko* is the Pali word. *Diti* here has the meaning of "to see or to view or to observe." *San* means "for oneself." It is not to be contemplated, logically figured out, or learned externally. There is something that we're looking for that is directly visible here and now.

The question is, what is it? The times when the Buddha describes what this is, we could – in modern English – call it "seeing certain psychological states." In particular, in the simplest way he says it, is "to see directly greed, hatred, and delusion as they are present, and to see when there is no greed, hatred, and delusion." When we see the absence, then we are seeing the Dharma.

This is not a teaching into states of mind, meditation, metaphysics, or philosophy. It is about seeing a psychological state – a state of mind that is free of affliction, distress, and the suffering that comes with greed, hatred, and delusion.

If you see that state, you are seeing the Dharma that's visible here and now. And the rest of the meaning follows what the Buddha says as well. It's immediate. It's not something that belongs to the world of time because it's very present and immediate. This teaching is inviting you to come and look for yourself. Discover this. You don't have to believe it or memorize it. Just come to see for yourself what the absence of greed, hatred, and delusion is like.

See for yourself how the absence of greed and delusion is onward leading. It is a guide or a guidepost for yourself. It's a north star. To have some experience of this kind of freedom, joy, happiness, and peace that can come from this kind of absence is a guide for how to see it again, to find it, to look for it, and to live by it. This is something that is not supposed to be believed, but something to be experienced by the wise. And here, the term "the wise" is you. You are the wise person who is learning how to see clearly – learning what to recognize and know.

I am emphasizing the absence of greed, hatred, and delusion. This is an umbrella term for all kinds of states of affliction. The emphasis is a deep seeing into ourselves, into the states and qualities of mind, the places of attachment and clinging. Not so that we hang out there, seeing it and suffering because of it, but so that we can look past and beyond it to see a mind that is free of affliction and of these particularly difficult psychological states.

I am fond of saying that Buddhism is sometimes more psychological than it is philosophical or religious. It is pointing to something directly to be experienced in our own mind, in the way our mind operates and works. It is there that we discover freedom. If we're spending time trying to solve the problems of the world – something that is very important to do – it is important to know that's not where we're going to find freedom. We might rearrange the world to be perfect – just the way we want it to be – but it's not going to stay that way for long. Very quickly things will change and not be perfect anymore.

But if we turn the attention to ourselves, that's where a certain kind of perfection can happen. That's where we can learn how to find our freedom in an imperfect world. How to find our non-reactivity in a world where people are reacting all the time. We can find our wisdom in a world where there is no wisdom. The wisdom that we're building on is the wisdom that arises from knowing for ourselves that it's possible to live without greed, hatred, and delusion.

That wisdom is the direction where our practice is going. That wisdom is what the Dharma is, what the Buddha is pointing to as possible. It's something that's directly visible. It's immediately here and now. The Pali word *sanditiko* can also be translated as "it is to be seen here and now."

Such a healthy way of living with wisdom in the world can arise when the reference point is to be free of afflictive states. Admittedly, to be free of greed, hatred, and delusion in some permanent way is a big task. But I hope that each of you have moments throughout the day where you find yourself (maybe accidentally) free of the afflictive states of stress due to greed, hatred, and delusion. Also free of clinging, grasping, pushing away. Free of anger and fear. Maybe the momentary sense of freedom is accidental.

For example, maybe you go for a walk in your neighborhood and you see that someone has a beautiful garden or there is a beautiful tree. Something about seeing the tree or the garden settles or releases something for a few moments. You have just the appreciation, delight, and joy. Right there are moments of freedom. Right there we're seeing the Dharma. It is possible to be free of afflictive states.

Look for those moments throughout the day. Appreciate the small ways in which they occur. They are teaching you the Dharma. Then from seeing those experiences clearly, you might begin to understand the afflictive states more fully when they appear later. You might not be as wedded or committed to them. You might not want to invest so much time and mental energy in being caught up in obsessive thinking, clinging, resistance, or anxiety. There is another way of being where we're free. If you can see it in small ways through the day, that vision can build, grow, and inform you about how you can live. Don't underestimate the value of seeing the small ways in which we are free.

We can build on small ways to experience a greater freedom in our life. This freedom can be visible here and now, immediate, and inviting us to come and check it out for ourselves. It is onward leading and personally realized by the wise.

I'll continue to go through these qualities over this week and hope that my reflections help you to understand the Dharma and practice in an intimate way. Thank you.