

Dharmette: Qualities of the Dharma (1 of 5) Visible Here

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So, hello and welcome. Happy to be back, and partly because I was teaching recently about this topic, I would like to do this week on something I've done before, which is the *five characteristics of the Dharma*.

Ordinarily, the *Dharma* refers to the teachings of the Buddha, and there's a very famous, well-known chant in Buddhism about the *Dharma*, about the teachings of the Buddha. But the word *Dharma* switches its meaning from teachings to something deeper and more intimate, and I would like to call it intelligence. The word *Dharma* here refers to a deep embodied intelligence. Sometimes people refer to the *Dharma* as the natural law, the natural processes by which things unfold. But I think that *Dharma*, in terms of the good *Dharma*, the beneficial *Dharma*, the beneficial processes, beneficial kinds of natural laws in which we live in, kind of, if you call it that, are those that relate to a deep inner intelligence that we have.

So, the famous teaching goes in English: the well-taught *Dharma* of the Buddha is visible here, immediate now, inviting inspection, onward leading, and to be personally realized by the wise. So, what the Buddha has to teach is something that is visible here and now, visible here, immediate now, inviting inspection, onward leading, and to be experienced personally.

So, what I'd like to say, what I want to try to convey this week, is how this word *Dharma* here, what the Buddha is pointing to, is a deep intelligence within us. It is an intelligence which we can't quite appropriate for ourselves, can't quite say, "This is who I am," but that is still part of the natural process of being alive. It has to do with a deep attunement with what is visible, what we can—and here visible doesn't mean just from the eyes, but from the mind's eye—something that is directly experienced through our senses.

So it's not through a book, it's not through a *Dharma* teacher like me giving a talk, but rather it's all pointing. All these teachings are pointing to something very deeply in here, which is

a responsiveness. Something is born when some kind of inner intelligence meets the world of inside and outside, meets the natural world. And so I want to try to give some examples.

I love to do standing meditation, and one of the reasons I like doing standing meditation, and close my eyes and just stand, is that in standing, much more than in sitting, the body is constantly responding. Very subtle micro-muscles are adjusting, moving, tightening, and loosening in order to stay standing upright. In sitting, there's much more of a feeling of being stationary, but in standing, there's much more of a dynamic feeling. And so I get absorbed in this dynamic shifting, changing, and adjusting, the little micro-muscle adjustments in the body.

And I'm not doing it. I'm not planning it. I'm not tracking what's needed and sending instructions: now tighten this muscle, loosen here. The body has its own intelligence. The body is picking up the information it needs to make those adjustments. And I don't know if that signal is even going to the brain.

The whole mental processing is bigger than just what happens in the brain. And so the body has a kind of intelligence. It has this ability to sense how we are in space: gravity, weight, movement, shift, the pull of gravity. All these things are coming in and being felt and experienced by the senses. And when those two things meet, the experience of the world in the senses, an intelligence is born, an understanding, a responsiveness is born, and something shifts.

Throughout the day, we are paying attention to the present moment, almost many times unconsciously and not really intentionally. And our body and our system are adjusting according to reality. So, something like walking up a set of steps—if you're able to walk up steps—the different steps might have different heights, and you might even be talking to a friend or enjoying the view or something. But you're paying enough attention, and your body knows to lift its foot higher for a taller step than a shorter one. And there's no calculations, no planning, no intention.

It can just be kind of a subconscious processing, something that we don't necessarily—the usual sense of self, the one who's in charge, the one who's figuring things out, the one who is impacted by the world that we form a self around—it's not operating. And so something knows in our whole physical system. Throughout the day, the body is making intelligent choices in all kinds of ways to adjust for things.

If you're walking down a sidewalk and there's something in the middle of the sidewalk blocking part of it, you might not be paying attention to it. Your conscious attention, your con-

scious interest, might be on other things. But if you're alert and sensitive and awake to what's happening on the sidewalk, you might just walk around the obstacle without any thought, without any plan, without any choice to do so. There's some deep responsivity. You step around this puddle, step around this manhole that's open.

And so there is this deeper intelligence operating in the contact between senses, the sense world, what you can immediately sense, what's visible here, and what goes on around us. That *Dharma* is in that kind of midpoint between what we experience and are, and how we experience the senses that are there to have contact with the world, the external world, the internal world. And the *Dharma* is born in that meeting, in a kind of natural intelligence.

This natural intelligence of the *Dharma*, a particular kind of intelligence, the responsiveness, understanding, wisdom, is visible. It is visible here, in the place where the senses are operating. So that's one of the reasons why we're trying to be very much in the present moment in Buddhist practice and meditation, because it's in here where a certain intelligence is born. And it's not like a strange mystical thing.

My understanding is that we, as human beings, evolved an intimate relationship to the natural world around us on Mother Africa, the continent which is the mother, in a sense, for all of us. This was at a time when we didn't have books and screens and radios and lots of complicated technology, when we weren't living indoors all day long in places where there are hallways and rooms and choices and indoor places to go. People were finely attuned. Their whole body, all the sense doors, were attuned to the natural world around them. That's where everything we needed to do and care for, and take care of ourselves and be safe, was residing, and how we found food and safety.

So there was this deep intelligence that had to operate from taking in all this information around us through our senses. We were designed for an intelligence that was sense-based, carefully with the world. Not one where we find intelligence, we find understanding, we find the world of experience on a screen all day, where we're reading all day and taking in information all day and ideas all day and coding all day, or whatever it might be. It is a way in which our attention to the world is from the neck up, as opposed to deeply connected to the fullness of us, the wholeness of us.

And the *Dharma*, in being directly visible, means the *Dharma* is found in the direct perceptions we have of this world. And that's not a boring thing. It's not a stupid thing. It's not incidental. There's something very deep that can operate when we are in our senses, feeling the present moment as it comes.

And in particular, when the natural world that we're finely attuned to, finely sensing and perceiving, is the inner natural world. As we start getting more and more attuned, receptive, feeling the deep inner world of our direct experience, something responds to that. There's tension sometimes in our body, and there's a knowing of attention. And where those two things meet, an intelligence operates. Some kind of deep knowing, some kind of deep understanding, operates, and that is where the *Dharma* resides.

It doesn't reside just in the senses. It doesn't arise just in the world. It resides where they meet. It's kind of like there's water and there's fire, but when they come together, there is steam. Something new is born in the combination of those two things, and that's where the *Dharma* is found.

It's not something abstract. It's not a set of ideas and teachings to memorize. It's what gets born in a kind of natural intelligence in this deep, deep, deep meeting of our senses, our immediate perceptions here, and especially in our inner life, in our inner natural world. There is a tremendous amount of information coming in about how we find the *Dharma*, how we find our freedom, how we find what's deeply, deeply meaningful within us—the *Dharma* that is born in that place.

So, this will be the topic for this week. And today I kind of covered the first, *sandiṭṭhiko*: clearly visible, visible here, perceivable here. Then we'll go through the other four the rest of this week. And hopefully, you'll come to a deeper appreciation of this: how the word *Dharma*, one of the meanings, can mean a kind of intelligence that will guide us in this Buddhist practice. Thank you.