

Dharmette: Qualities of the Dharma (2 of 5) Immediacy

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So, hello and welcome to this week, where the topic is the five characteristics of the *Dharma*. And as I said, the *Dharma* is often understood to mean the teachings of the Buddha, but it also refers to what he is teaching: to the truth or the deep experience of what he's pointing to. And it's very personal, what he's pointing to. It's not some abstraction, and so I like to think of that.

The *Dharma* that the Buddha is pointing to is a certain intelligence that we're capable of, a certain way of responding and understanding and being in relationship with the world. And so it's very personal. So you can certainly, if you want to learn the teachings of the Buddha, go and get big, fat books to learn all about the details of it. But the purpose of those teachings is not just to have ideas and understandings, but to see how those teachings are pointing back, for ourselves, into ourselves, to practice. And to practice in a way that cultivates and develops a new form of intelligence, a new form of deep sensitivity. That guides us to freedom, that leads us, that opens up to a profound experience of life.

And so these famous teachings, which are very simple and chanted every day, say that the well-taught teachings of the Buddha are to be seen here, are immediate, invite inspection, are onward-leading, and are to be personally experienced by the wise. So this is the five ways of understanding what the Buddha is pointing to. So the first that I talked about yesterday is that it's visible, *sandiṭṭhiko*. *Diṭṭha* means visible, but it's not just meant to be with the eyes. Through all our perceptions, it's perceivable.

And so this idea is that it's something we can perceive through our senses. So, if you read a book about Buddhism and the teachings seem complicated, and you're trying to put the pieces together and make sense of them, make logic of them, that might be a nice exercise, but it doesn't really—it's not what the teachings are about. The teachings are meant to point

here, to the world of what we can directly experience for ourselves, directly perceive for ourselves, which is something the Buddha keeps emphasizing in his teachings. And I'll give examples of more specifically what the Buddha is pointing to in the next few days. But the examples he gives, in fact, you see how they're something we perceive for ourselves.

Perceptions only exist in the present moment. We only see, for those of us who can see, in the present. We only hear, those of us who can hear, only in the present moment. Those of us who can smell, we only smell in the present moment. Taste, we only taste in the present moment. The tactile world that we feel in our whole body—it's only in the present moment that we can experience those things.

And these might seem to be random and uninteresting sensations, but these sensations are the world to develop a heightened sensitivity to, because those provide very important data for us to understand more deeply what's going on. In a very simple way, they provide all we need to know about what is wholesome and unwholesome, what is stressful and not stressful, what is opening and satisfying and enriching with us, and what is not. Right there in the sense experience, begin seeing and feeling the guide toward a kind of wholeness and fullness and well-being that becomes deeper and deeper. That shows us more and more the places where we're attached, places where we're clinging, places where we're resisting. And so, to keep going deeper, to feel open, open to this world, its phenomenal spiritual depth opens up the world of the senses, what can directly be visible here. It opens to the depth of what the *Dharma* has to offer.

So the first one is what's visible. The second one is immediate. The word is *akāla*, and *kāla* means time, and *a* is a negative prefix, but it can also mean not of time. Some people like to translate it in ways that sound a little bit transcendent, like “timeless.” You know, so timeless suggests something which exists without a beginning and an end, and it can be quite inspiring, that sense of spaciousness and temporal spaciousness. But it lends itself to some kind of transcendent ideas as well about what the *Dharma* is.

Akālika can also mean immediate, so it's not just saying it's now; it's in the immediacy of now, here, now. And so, what is not now? What is not now is the world of our thinking that constructs pasts and futures. Of course, we have pasts and memories, and they're important. Of course, we have to be concerned about the future, which is partly a prediction. But sometimes we predict well, sometimes poorly, about what's happening in the future and making plans.

Of course, we have to do these things. This is not to deny the value of it. But people lose themselves in the past, lose themselves in the future, lose themselves in fantasy and com-

mentary and conversations in the mind and judgments and reactivity and bias. The inner world of thinking, of the words and the beliefs we keep telling ourselves over and over again, can be very undermining, very debilitating. To continually have words that are self-critical—that we're not good enough, we're losers, we're not loved, we're not this and that—we have all these ideas that we live in, and there's a lot of authority. It can feel like this is the truth, but it isn't.

These are kind of surfaces. They're kind of like the commentary. They're kind of like the advertisements that are not that important, but want our attention, are designed to get our attention. But the lived life, that we can drop down below the level of all this commentary, all this constructed world, is often not about the present moment. It's not about now, and now in the real moment here. So it's kind of a wonderful world to open into.

So even if you start asking, you know, “Now, my knee hurts. Why is it hurting?” you're concerned about something in the present moment, but you look back. “What did I do yesterday? Did I twist it? Was I not paying attention? And what happened there?” So you think you're in the present moment, but you're in thoughts about the cause in the past. Or you're thinking, “Well, if I don't fix the knee, then I'll be limping tomorrow.” That might be a reasonable supposition, but it does remove us from the present moment.

When we're going deeply into the *Dharma*, where the Buddha is pointing to, it's emphasized: it's immediate. There's almost like there's no time. It's that immediate. There's no past and future. Just this, just this information. Just we're taking in this data, this experience.

And this is part of why this *Dharma* teaching, this teaching about the *Dharma*, is so significant to call intelligence. It's the present-moment data, present-moment sense experience, that's being gathered by the whole of our psychophysical processing system, not the limited one that has only to do with thoughts and imagination and idea constructs. But there's something deeper operating here now. And, in fact, it's not too difficult to understand that a huge percentage of our daily processing, daily intelligence, operates in a subconscious way, free of the conscious agent of thoughts, the agency or person, the self that's kind of engaged in the world of trying to navigate and figure out and imagine and plan.

Something as simple as walking down a sidewalk and knowing where you have to go: the sidewalk, the road, kind of curves to the right. And you might not be thinking about something; you might be thinking about something else. But something in your body that knows the way knows to gently kind of shift the direction of your feet when they step, so you can follow that curve around. Something knows what angle you should turn and when to stop curving and start going straight again. It's subconscious processing, taking in the curvature

of the sidewalk, the road, what's going on. And other people are walking this way toward you, and you know to step aside.

You know, there's all these kinds of things that are happening, and not necessarily in the conscious mind, though they could be conscious. But there's a deeper mind that's operating and makes it much more efficient. We have to have this deep kind of subconscious processing because otherwise life is too complicated to decide how much energy and lift to put into a foot to clear the step. You don't pull up your measuring tape and measure the step, how tall it is, and calculate how much you have to swing your foot. And the steps can be different heights, and we somehow know to lift our foot less and more because of that. This is a deeper intelligence, and we want to tap into this deeper, more subconscious way in which understanding comes about.

But the reference point for that understanding, the reference point for this deeper intelligence, is what's really important. And that'll be the topic for tomorrow, when we go to the next step, next characteristic, which is that the *Dharma*, this deep intelligence, invites inspection. It guides us in a certain very important way. So thank you.

And for today, you might want to consider how much you're really in the present, here in the immediate now, and what it is that takes you away from it. How much does it take you away from it? Are there ways in which you undervalue this now? You dismiss it, the now, because you think other things are more important. They might be, but just kind of really track yourself and see what you're doing. Thank you.