

Ready to Change (1 of 5) Ready, Receptive, Available

December 26, 2022

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

wholesome, *kalla*, readiness, mind, Suzuki Roshi, arrive

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Last week, the topic was the four right efforts, where the emphasis is to let go of the unwholesome and develop the wholesome. This week, I want to talk about five wholesome states that can be cultivated, developed, and appreciated in our lives. They are not the common wholesome states that this early Buddhist tradition is most associated with.

Often, the Buddha would begin a Dharma talk, to lay people especially, on the topic of generosity. Generosity is a preeminent, wholesome state in our tradition. He might talk about states of ethical and wholesome integrity. There might be talks on meditative joy, happiness, tranquility – a variety of topics that are fairly well-known in our tradition.

This week, I want to talk about five wholesome states that the Buddha put a particular emphasis on as ones to be developed, cultivated, or evoked in preparation for real insight – to be able to see deeply into the nature of our hearts, minds, and lives. The five wholesome states are a readiness of mind, a malleability of mind, a mind free of hindrances, the fourth I've forgotten for the moment, and the fifth is a bright mind or a confident mind. These are five states that the Buddha would evoke in people in preparation for giving the deepest Dharma, the deepest teachings, he had.

So the Buddha would give a Dharma talk to prepare people for deep teachings. There are five ways that he prepared their minds. The first is *kalla*, usually translated as a ready mind or readiness of mind. It's a mind that is receptive, available, and prepared to receive something significant.

One of the functions of meditation is to cultivate this readiness of mind. The Zen master Suzuki Roshi, the founder of San Francisco Zen Center, in his book *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, his definition of mindfulness was, in fact, a readiness of mind – to be ready and available to attend to the next thing that arrives in the present moment. If we're distracted or thinking retrospectively about what just happened, then we're not there for the next moment.

The art of being able to let go of what just happened enough not to think about it or dwell on it – to be fresh, available, and ready for the next moment – is a phenomenal gift. Many people feel that they're obligated to review, criticize, comment, and be weighed down by what happened in the past, even if it happened just a few moments before. This readiness of mind is always available and open for the next thing and the next thing. The mind is prepared, receptive, and available to be changed.

One of the aspects of readiness of mind is to be ready and available to be changed. A real dialogue with another person is only possible if each person is willing to be changed. When we're in a serious conversation with someone, if we're stubborn or resistant and not willing to change, a dialogue is not really possible. A dialogue, in this definition, is one in which each person may be changed by the conversation. They learn something new. They see something new. They understand something in a new way.

And so the same thing with meditation: are you available to be changed? I don't think that's such an easy thing to be, because of the intensity with which many of us will be involved in our concerns, beliefs, or attitudes. We're holding on to it, resisting something, hunkered down tight or sometimes frozen in time.

Part of meditation practice is to engage in such a way that something softens, opens, and relaxes so that we finally arrive here. A turning point in meditation practice is arriving, when we feel: “I’m here. I’ve arrived. I’m in the present moment.” Of course, we always are, but our mind, our attention, our thoughts are not. In a sense, our life energy is going someplace else. When our conscious, alive attention settles here, on this moment, then we’ve arrived. That is the beginning of being available, of being ready – a kind of receptivity.

Part of understanding this is to understand that it is important and valuable, to appreciate the role and place of this kind of readiness here, and understand what gets in the way of having a ready mind. Each of us probably has three top concerns or ways of being in the mind that prevent us from being ready. One might be that we have chronic anxiety about what’s happening and a need to plan. That planning is to get ready, but it is not being ready for whatever is here. This readiness of mind is kind of a willingness to almost not know, not assert, not project onto life because we’re anxious or we want.

A top concern might be wanting pleasure, good things, delight. Wanting is not a bad thing in and of itself. But if it’s too intense or we are too caught up in it, then we’re not available nor present for what’s actually here. The art of having desire is having desire with such a light touch that it doesn’t blind us to here and now.

Another top concern that interferes with readiness is a preoccupation with the past. It might be an emotional preoccupation (e.g., resentment) or reviewing and trying to figure something out. Those are some of the possibilities. What are the top three ways in which your mind operates that interfere with your mind being ready?

This readiness is a willingness to put aside our preoccupations and projections, our beliefs and opinions about what is happening, so we can see, hear, and know as if everything is new. And in a certain way, they are. If we don't see in this way that everything is new, then we limit the possibilities for our own transformation, our own way of being changed – which is part of the purpose of cultivating a readiness of mind. And with that, the Buddha would give deep teachings in order to awaken people, teachings for what he called “opening the Dharma eye.”

So, a ready mind – a wholesome state to be cultivated. We begin by appreciating the value of having a readiness, an availability. Then to evoke it or recognize it in ourselves, and let it expand, let it grow. Let it push against the edges of what gets in the way of that, so we really see what interferes with it. And then experiment with what it's like to live in this world ready, available, and receptive, with a kind of not knowing mind – a mind

that doesn't assert or insist that it knows everything. It's available.

This is a wonderful, wholesome state of mind that supports wholesome life, a wise life, a compassionate life. It supports the ongoing development of this practice that we do. It's one of five states that the Buddha emphasized. We'll go through the next four this week. And all of this might be considered preparation for the coming year. Maybe we're getting ready for 2023.

Thank you very much, and I appreciate this chance to be with you all.