

The Dharma, Part 2 (5 of 5) Being Available

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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The last of the five characteristics of the Dhamma is that it is to be personally known by the wise or personally experienced by the wise, depending on how the Pali is understood. “Personally” means directly, immediately here. I think it’s very encouraging and inspiring that this Dhamma that we’re doing points to something very deeply personal – that the answer is found in us. The book to read is in our own hearts; it is here. The teachings that are to be followed are the ones that you find here personally, not necessarily from someone like me talking about it.

These five characteristics are that the Dhamma is visible here, it’s now. It’s inviting us to see. It’s onward leading and to be known by the wise. In the ancient text,

this is the exclamation, the inspired utterance, of people who have really tasted or experienced the full potential of the practice for the first time – this sense of how mindfulness, how awareness, can lead to a kind of freedom in the midst of our lives. We can experience that personal freedom here and now. There's confidence – there's no more doubt that this is what it is.

So the characteristics of the Dhamma are in fact something to be experienced by the wise, to be known by oneself, to discover for oneself, not to be taken as articles of faith or creed. They're pointing to experience that's personally known. But in order to do that, we have to be available for this experience of the present moment. We have to be available to experience, to know something personally.

This ability to be available, to be receptive, to be open to, to have the clarity for experiencing what's happening here, now, is not easy to come by. It's something that, for whatever reason, this mind of ours so easily races ahead and is caught in cycles of rumination. It is leaning forward into the next moment, into the next moment. As soon as one thing is finished, we're already on to the next thing because of the momentum of that mind. So the idea is to stop and be present.

Many years ago, I had an analogy for that for myself. When I was young, growing up in Europe, there was

much more handshaking than there is now, I think. I remember when sometimes a politician or an important person went around to shake hands, as soon as their hand was in my hand to be shaken, it immediately went limp. I could see in their body and their face that they were already looking for the next person to shake hands with. It was very unsatisfying because there wasn't a little bit of firmness, like "Here I am, I'm present for you."

The mind is like that sometimes. We're ready for the next thing and the next thing, kind of like the way we both grasp at something tightly and we don't grasp. We're grasping, but we don't really know. In the teachings of the Buddha, what we grasp at are concepts, ideas, fantasies, dreams, delusions, imaginations of things. We don't really grab anything solid. And so the very grabbing of things keeps us going and we're not available, not present, not here for the experience.

So to make oneself a vessel for experiencing something deeply personal, to experience ourselves, our lives, in some deeper way that allows us to tap into what is really present here, visible here. That concepts, ideas, and stories are not exactly something worth seeing or not really seeing reality – really, they obscure it. But if we see how we get caught in thoughts, attachments, clingings, and aversions – that's where we begin seeing

the Dharma: “Look at that.” Then with that seeing, it’s possible to see and find the alternative.

If we are so involved in greed, hate, and delusion that we can’t even see it, then there’s no way but to stop and be available to even see that which is not flattering in ourselves: “Oh, look at that.” And rather than being discouraged by what is not flattering about ourselves in our minds, hearts, and dispositions, in the Dharma, that’s a source of encouragement and inspiration. Not being inspired by what’s not flattering, but being inspired: “Oh, now that I know it, this is a stepping stone to freedom. I needed to know this. Of course, I needed to know this and see this. Now, where’s the freedom?” And part of the freedom is found in that seeing, that recognition.

A part of that freedom is found in not succumbing, collapsing, or being upset by what is not flattering, the faults and difficulties we have inside. See, “Oh, that’s what it is.” And then we start seeing, getting a taste of the simultaneous freedom, the simultaneous way in which we’re looking, come and look, come and see. The way that we see then the way forward. We’re guided into that clarity, guided into that expanding freedom and letting go. And the more we experience that non-clinging, the more we experience that attention that’s free and not clinging, not grasping — the more we can just really be present in a full way for our experience.

We can have that handshake with reality. We're really there with it, and the mind is not already going off to something else.

So, to be available. I will make a final comment about this topic. When the Buddha was talking about this – it's visible, it's here, come and look at it, it's onward leading, and to be experienced by the wise – he once seems to suddenly change the subject. And he talks about not being involved in the conceits of feeling that you're better than others, worse than others, or equal to others. We're not involved in the game, in the ranking, in the status of self.

So, this freedom from comparing ourselves to others, that's part of this freedom he's talking about. It is available here and now. What a gift to give to others – the gift of not comparing, not making ourselves worse or better than others – or even the complications of making ourselves equal. We don't play that comparison game. And the gift to others is that they're allowed to be who they are. We can be present for them in a full way. We can shake their hands or the equivalent, and really be there and present, and give them the gift of freedom.

So, to be personally experienced by the wise – may that be. May you be a wise person, may you be available to experience this life in a deep way, and may that

availability translate into greater respect, reverence, care, and love for others as well.

If you would like to have homework for this time that I'm away, or at least for the weekend, make yourself available for reality. Don't go headlong into it. Make yourself available, let it come to you, let reality find you, rather than you rushing into it. Thank you.