

The Dharma (1 of 5) Visible Here and Now

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Gil Fronsdal

So warm greetings to you all. For this week, I would like to take as the theme the Dharma that the Buddha taught. There is an ancient teaching about this Dharma that describes how someone understands the Dharma when they have confirmed confidence in the Dharma, in the Buddha, in the practice that we are doing. This idea of confirmed confidence means that we know something – we have experienced something for ourselves so that we know what the Dharma is about. We know something about the Dharma that there is a confidence, a deep sense of maybe faith, maybe trust. The most common way to talk about this is a confidence that is peaceful – peaceful confidence.

To practice enough to have one's own personal experience that one feels, "Oh this Dharma, these teachings of the Buddha, this world of practice is

something I know for myself well enough that I have confidence in it.” One kind of test for this confidence is if I sat down at one of these 7 am sittings and said: “Well you know something? I was completely wrong. All this Dharma stuff that we have been teaching and doing, it’s not really right. You know, there are probably better things to do with your life. I recommend you give it up.” When one has confirmed confidence because one has experienced the benefits, transformations, and freedom from this practice, it doesn’t matter what I say, because you would know. “Well, I’m sorry for you, Gil,” you might say, “I know for myself how much I benefited. I know for myself the value of the Dharma, this practice that I do. I’ll continue because I know for myself.” Really knowing it and having this confidence – how does one come to that kind of confidence?

There is a five-part description of this well-proclaimed Dharma. We could say the teachings of the Buddha, but the Dharma is not a teaching in the abstract, like a creed or set of propositions. The Dharma is part of our lived experience – things that we discover in our lived experience that show us a way to live a wise and good life. What is it about Dharma that provides that? What do we see? What is going on here?

There is a five-part description of what we have confidence in or what we know. It is possible to do a kind of reverse engineering to understand these five

parts. This will tell us what the Dharma is in some deeper way, as opposed to some abstract teachings of the Buddha, vague principles, or natural forces that we connect to. It is something we really discover for ourselves.

These five qualities of the Dharma, five characteristics, are frequently chanted by people in our Theravadan tradition. The English goes like this:

The Dharma is well-proclaimed by the Buddha, by the Blessed One. It is visible here and now, immediate, inviting inspection, onward leading, and to be personally experienced by the wise.

Each of these days we will take one of those and look at it more deeply.

The first one is *sandiṭṭhiko* in Pali. It refers to the fact that the Dharma is directly visible. The *diṭṭhi* here means to see what can be seen. Often we say in English the phrase “visible here and now.” But “here and now” is not in the word. The word is it’s seen, it’s known. Seeing always happens in the here and now. Adding “here and now” emphasizes the immediacy of the experience and the immediacy of the knowing of it. It does not have to be only with the eyes. The word is “visible,” but it is visible with the mind’s eye and with all the different capacities we have for direct attention. We can sense, we can hear, we can feel, we can know in the mind directly what is happening.

The Dharma, well-proclaimed by the Buddha, is not something that you have to believe or find in a book. It is something that we can see for ourselves. In fact, sometimes it is said that everything you need to know in Buddhism can be discovered by your own powers of observation, but you have to look carefully. Maybe what the teachings and instructions do is to point us to *how* to see in the present moment, so the Dharma really comes alive for us.

For today, the idea is the value of our direct experience and to see it clearly. When the Buddha wanted to explain further what *sandiṭṭhiko* means, that the Dharma is directly visible here and now, he referred to our psychological states. We can feel, know, see, experience directly, when there are unhealthy states of mind present. There might be greed, hatred, or delusion. There might be jealousy, envy, avariciousness, lust, anger, or resentment. All kinds of things might be in the mind, conceit. One can know it directly, “Oh, that is present.”

Two things can happen with that direct seeing. If the seeing is clear enough, strong enough, then we are not identified with those states. We are not involved and participating in those states. It is almost like we can take a step back and observe what is happening, rather than being in the middle of the fray. This is a powerful thing to

do for all the difficult states of mind, activities, and forces that exist within a human being. To not be enmeshed in, caught by, reactive to, struggling with it, but to step back in a sense, open up in a sense, so there is an overview of it with mindfulness, with awareness.

There is a clear sense: “This is happening in the present moment. This is here. This is what it feels like. This is what it’s like to know it. This is what it’s like to step back far enough or get a high enough overview. This is what it’s like.” Then we are not caught and involved in it.

If we are not caught or involved, if we really discover how to see it that way, then these unhealthy states of mind have much less, or maybe no, power over us. To see the presence of unhealthy states of mind, like clinging, grasping, resistance, and hating, and see ourselves being unattached, unentangled with it – to see that we can clearly know it without believing it or being pushed around by it – this is a phenomenal thing to discover.

Even more phenomenal is to see that these unhealthy states of mind can disappear. For some people, certain kinds of chronically unhealthy states of mind can be so deeply ingrained, we don’t even know we have them. We assume, “It is always this way” – that the universe was built this way to have these states of mind. To have

these drop away, to have the experience of life without them, can be life-changing for some people, to know that there is another way. “Wow! You mean I don’t have to always be afraid?” “I don’t have to always be aversive?” “I don’t have to always be critical or always fight for what I want?” It is possible to find some peace in a different way.

That is how the Buddha elaborated on this idea that the Dharma is visible here and now. What it means is that we want to be able to see clearly what is happening for us here and now. What can be quite marvelous and wondrous is to discover our capacity to see unhealthy states of mind within us and not believe in them, react to them, or use them as a basis for criticizing ourselves.

All we are asked to do is to know it directly for what it is. Then we can start seeing freedom from it, the ways in which we can know it so clearly that we are not caught by it. To see that over and over again develops the capacity to be here and now. This is the direction that is going. We are cultivating and developing our capacity to be in our lived experience, here and now. The stronger that capacity can be, the more we are interested in this, the more we decrease the often unhealthy drive that pulls us into the world of the past or the future, pulls us into the world of fantasy and rumination.

As we do this, we get to appreciate the richness and texture, and all the different heightened opportunities and potential that are available here in the present moment. I think of being fully present here and now as like opening a door into a multi-dimensional experience of life that is not available if we spend our days in our thoughts – past, future, fantasies, desires, whatever they might be.

The Dharma that the Buddha taught is something that is directly visible here and now. I'd encourage you for this day of practice that you have before we meet again tomorrow – make it a task, make it a real activity of the day to be present in a relaxed, calm way with what can be experienced directly here and now. The Dharma is visible here and now. Thank you.