

Dharma *Samādhi* (4 of 5) Happiness

July 9, 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS *sukha, mahasukha(?)*, well-being, Bhikkhu Bodhi, goal, means, stepping stone, liberation, well-spring, unification, concentration, gladness, settledness, joy, sequence, flow, raindrops, river, mountainside, stream, current, harmonious, sublime, peaceful, conditions, embodied, friendliness, kindness, compassion

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Today is the fourth talk on the Dharma *samādhis*, the five qualities that are an integral part of how Dharma practice unfolds. When we get into the flow of practice, with settledness, letting go, and being present in a deep, connected, intimate way, this seems to give life to something that is not necessarily something we do. It is something we create the conditions for and we allow to bubble up.

Today the topic is happiness. “Happiness” might not be the best translation. With all these words, you're welcome to find your own words that fit better. What's important is not so much the exact word, but that you

appreciate the sequence – how there's a settling, deepening, and opening that goes from more activated states to more sublime, quieter, more harmonious, more unified, and more connected states.

We go from gladness, which is a little bit more evaluative and might involve more thinking, to the deeper connection that comes with stronger concentration and stronger settledness, to joy. Joy flows and moves to a kind of tranquility. That flows into a kind of happiness. Tomorrow I'll talk about how that opens up to concentration. That sequence, that flow is one of the important things to understand.

There's a flow from more active states of being to quieter and more peaceful states – from coarser states to more sublime states. The Buddha uses the example of the flow of a river down a mountainside. In one example he gives, as the rain falls on the mountainside, the raindrops come together to create little rivulets. They flow into little creeks, then to streams and to rivers. As long as the water is high up in creeks, with boulders, it's very noisy. But when the river gets really big and flows down into the plains of India, it flows quietly and fully.

In the same way, when we are in that stream, in that current, we go from something in the mind and the body that's a little noisier to the harmony of a big river that

just flows quietly along. In the movement from gladness through happiness to concentration, something gets bigger and more full, but also quieter and more still. So when we go from a coarse state to a quieter one, we are not being diminished as human beings. We are actually becoming more full. It is the sequence that is important, rather than necessarily knowing exactly what each of these states are.

That gives you some room to choose your own English words that you associate with the stages. The words that I offer are meant to put you in the ballpark, and then you can find out how they are for you personally. I suspect each person feels and experiences these states differently. You might choose different words. Also, the states might be experienced a little bit differently at different times.

Sometimes I like to call happiness (*sukha*) “well-being,” because that seems like a very broad word that allows all kinds of things to fit into it. People might find this a little bit easier than the English word “happiness.” Some people will point out that happiness and joy might come to us in a different way than pleasure. Pleasure is something we can do for ourselves. We can go out and drink alcohol for the pleasure of it. We can go out and get a massage or stand in the sun, whatever things we do for pleasure. We can even pay for pleasure.

But joy and happiness take more than doing something. Deep contentment, deep feelings of satisfaction, and well-being cannot be bought and cannot be made to happen. We can't go out and get deep satisfaction by buying more, or getting more, or having more worldly experiences. We have to allow something to happen. The well-spring of some of the deepest forms of happiness and well-being we can have is beyond our own little actions.

Buddhism is very much about creating conditions. Mindfulness, being settled, and letting go create the conditions for the flow of the Dharma *samādhī* to happen within us.

At some point, we come to what's called “*sukha*” in Pali. I like to translate *sukha* as “happiness.” Maybe there are other choices. The translation depends on what people's associations with the word “happy” are. *Sukha* is very sublime and it's very embodied. It's said that the joy that happens earlier in this flow is more of a mental thrill. It might thrill the whole body but it's more like the thrill or excitement of really being connected and involved and in the flow of it all. But in happiness, that excitement has been tranquilized and has become calmer. Now there's something much more sublime. People often report that this happiness feels very embodied.

Because it has a strong embodied feeling, Bhikkhu Bodhi translates *sukha* as pleasure. But to me, pleasure has whole different connotations than what's going on with *sukha*, where there's a deep wellspring of a sublime sense of deliciousness and calm. This is the feeling of coming into a warm room on a cold day and having hot chocolate, and just feeling really content, happy, and settled. Calling that “pleasant” or “pleasure” seems to miss a lot of what is happening there.

This happiness that comes is not the goal, exactly. It is considered the means, a little. But if you think of happiness too much as the means and make it a technique to get somewhere, then you lose the connection to the deeper parts of it. We have to let go fully of even wanting or thinking about using it to get somewhere else. However, it is a means of moving further and going deeper. The purpose of this happiness is a deep sense of unification – of concentration.

But that's not the purpose either. The purpose of happiness is to become free. The purpose is to see deeply – to see things as they are in such a way that we can let go of the clinging, the holding, the craving, and the fears that we're stuck with. Happiness is a stepping stone to that.

But we have to allow ourselves to feel it. I once had the silly situation of trying to avoid happiness and joy in practice because I thought it was not really the point. I thought it was kind of silly to be happy or joyful. I wanted to go to places that were really deep and serious somehow. But that was silly because happiness and well-being are a door to going deeper.

Of course, it's not easy to feel well-being or happiness. Sometimes it can be months and years before happiness really opens up. We have to really appreciate the power of mindfulness in all circumstances of our lives and not try to be ahead of ourselves by looking for happiness. But at the same time, we need to know that happiness *is* part of the path. So we want to be able to get out of the way. We want to be able to allow it, recognize it, and get out of the way so that flow can come and we can avail ourselves of well-being.

It's my theory that there's much more joy, tranquility, happiness, contentment, and satisfaction available at any given moment than most people avail themselves of. We're so caught up in our thoughts, our concerns, our projections of the future, our fantasies, our desires, our fears, and our concerns, and they sometimes predominate so strongly, that we don't avail ourselves of the simple joys and happiness that are here.

Sometimes people have a very strong resistance to becoming happy. Some people don't want to experience too much happiness because it's bad luck – they believe something bad is going to happen if they do that. Or we believe we don't deserve it. We may resist happiness because to be a good person, to do the right thing for the family or the world, we think we have to worry more. We think we have to be alarmed and concerned and show that "Oh, everything has to be taken care of. I have to do things." And "I don't have time. I can't focus on myself. I have to focus on the disaster out there in the world."

That kind of orientation can come from a very good place. But we discover that in fact, we can take care of ourselves and the world from this place of happiness, from this place of being settled. So we need to avail ourselves of greater happiness and well-being. Take the little bit of time that it sometimes takes. Sometimes it doesn't take much. Maybe you're in a car at a traffic light. You realize, wait a minute – I have 15 seconds to sit here. Why don't I simply relax here and feel something good in this moment, some deeper satisfaction? Once the light turns green I can be concerned about driving.

As our life unfolds in the Dharma with mindfulness, there are layers and layers of well-being and happiness that we can begin to appreciate. With time, that sense

of happiness becomes stronger and fuller. Happiness becomes a place that we live in or come from. It is a place from which friendliness, kindness, compassion, and peace can arise.

That's very difficult to do if we center our life on our thinking, with all the crazy ways that many of us can think. We can center our life in a deeper place – in the wellsprings of well-being. Then we learn that is a place where we can work effectively for justice, work effectively with compassion, and care effectively for other people. We can be effective, caring, and actively involved in the welfare of our communities. This is a place from which we can engage in difficult conversations with others including conversations around racism and politics. These are becoming more and more important for us to deal with and look at.

But we don't sacrifice our well-being. We realize that in the long term, we can be more effective from this place of happiness than if we come from anger and fear.

Eventually, happiness leads to liberation and freedom. It's a foundation for it. Liberation is considered a whole different degree of happiness. In Buddhism, it is sometimes it's called "*mahasukha*" – great happiness. May greater familiarity, greater investigation, and greater contact with well-being and happiness lead you to great happiness for you and others as well.

In the next 24 hours see if you can settle in, open up, and avail yourself of any happiness that is not as excited as joy, but is more sublime, more settled, more contented, and more satisfying in an embodied way. See what it's like when more of the day is connected to happiness. Keep reminders to remind you to come back and open to something that is here. Thank you so much.