

Dharma of Challenges (5 of 5) Available to be Transformed

January 13, 2023

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

beauty, protection, safety, benefit, dialogue, goodness, attitude

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This is our fifth talk on the Dharma of challenges. The last four weeks have laid a foundation for talking about the challenges we have and how we address them with the Dharma, with practice, with mindfulness. Hopefully, the positive states of practice that we talked about in December also support this foundation for looking at challenges.

Last Friday, I talked about Dharma as transformation. Dharma is not just a set of teachings or a practice. It's also the beneficial change that comes about through the practice. It's finding the healthy, appropriate attitude with which to meet life.

A few weeks ago, I gave talks on five beneficial states for hearing the Dharma. When people were in these

states, the Buddha would recognize it and teach them the Dharma that would change them. This is to have a mind that is bright and inspired; receptive or ready; free of hindrances; malleable, pliable, and soft. This idea of being soft, receptive, and available to be changed is such an important attitude for our lives.

It's easy to have a simplistic, obvious, and sometimes important attitude: "No, I can't do that. I have to protect myself or defend myself. I can't just be available – I'll be taken advantage of." To some degree that's true, and we have to do this wisely. As our wisdom and confidence grow about how to be in the world without harming ourselves through our clinging, anger, hostility, ill will, greed, envy, and so forth, we learn to be in the midst of our challenges while being available to be changed.

One of the clear representations of this, for me, is how to be in dialogue with others, where you're addressing some theme, idea, or concern. This could be exploring a conflict we have or a Dharma idea. In a dialogue, if we're only about convincing other people that we're right, then we're not available to be changed. We still might be right, and maybe we'll stay right, but that doesn't mean we can't be available to be transformed, to be changed by the other person. We can hear new ideas and hear them in a different way. We can expand our horizons and understand: "Well, I am right, but this

person is also adding something. They're not taking something away. It's not either or. I'm available to be changed, available to learn something new."

Without that kind of availability, I don't think it's really a dialogue. It might just be spouting opinions or a debate. To be in dialogue with an attitude of "How can I learn something here? Is there something more that I can learn?" is beneficial.

It was relevant for me that when we started the meditation today, the technology wasn't working. So I had to call someone, and we had to figure it out. Usually before starting, I am getting ready, organizing my thoughts of what to talk about. I couldn't do that today because I was dealing with the technology and getting things set up properly. But I was kind of happy, thinking: "This is a challenge. I'm not able able to do this as I usually do. So let's see what happens here now. Let's see what arises. This is happening, and I'm available for what comes next. I'm available to see how this unfolds."

So, rather than being stressed about whether we'd get the sound system working in time, I had a curiosity about how it is now. I didn't need to stress or have any fear. I could just see what would happen. This sense of availability made it much easier and more pleasant than it could have been. I was also able to receive the

generosity of my friend who was helping me problem-solve the technology.

Being available to be transformed is essential for Dharma practice. Because that is so important, we want to understand what gets in the way of being transformed. Why are we stuck, resisting, or closed off? Why are we insisting that we're right, that it has to be "my way"? What's going on for us? So, the reference point is "I want to be available to be transformed, to be changed by the situation, to be freed by it." Having an attitude of "I can't do that, I'm not doing that" – that is interesting.

So, keep this in mind: "Am I available to be changed? Am I available to be transformed by this? Am I available to be freed by it?" Then, we can start discovering that maybe we don't have a lot of confidence or a sense of safety. Maybe we're afraid or we're assertive or we want something. And do not just take that for granted or accept it as a given. Instead, put a question mark next to it. "Do I really need this to be this way or is there another way? Is there another way of being safe or protecting myself that is not shutting down? Is there another way of caring for the situation?"

Also, "What do I have to let go of to be available?" This is such an important question because so many times what we have to do is let go of something we're

attached to. Let go of some *excessive* self-preoccupation in such a way that when we let go of it, it feels like a relief. In the moment, something that was closed or tight or stressed softens and lets go.

We might feel more vulnerable because of that, so we have to figure out how to be with our vulnerability. Maybe we need effective ways of protecting ourselves. Maybe we need to take precautions, like avoiding certain situations or not talking about certain things. But we're not closing down or shutting down or resisting. We're just taking care of ourselves while we're available in an open, caring way for ourselves.

So, the Dharma as transformation – it is here to transform us in a beneficial way. It is here to free us from the stresses, distresses, and fears that we often live under. There is a path of liberation, and liberation is a transformation. If you want to follow this path, develop the confidence and the love for being available to be transformed.

We listen to Dharma teachings and read books on Dharma not to reinforce our own opinions (although that might be nice; it supports our understanding), but rather, to be willing to be challenged by what we read and hear. Question it. The less we agree with it, the more valuable it is for us to engage in a deeper reflection. To ask “What’s happening here?” or “What’s going on?” rather

than quickly coming to a judgment of what's right or what's wrong.

In Dharma life, we cultivate a confidence to always be seeing where the opening, the doorway, the possibility is to be freer. To be available, to be transformed, to let go of something. Available to bring forth some of the beauty that's in our hearts. Available to let our friendliness, our kindness, our love to be present. How can we be available for challenges not only so that we can be changed by them, but also so that we can be changed by the best qualities of our own hearts. To be available to see what goodness can come out in the context of our confidence. Without allowing the good in us to come forth, maybe challenges cannot transform us in other ways.

So, the Dharma of challenges and the willingness to be transformed are part of the art of Dharma practice. The Dharma is partly a transformation process and a liberating process. All in its own time – trusting the process.

You might see over the course of today this notion of being available to be changed, both by the external world and your internal world. What comes forth? How often are you available? How often are you going about your day in a way that you're not really available? Are you insisting on things being your way or there's only

one way to do it? What would it be like to go through your day, noticing when you're available to be changed, and when you're not? What do you learn through that?

Thank you very much. I appreciate this chance to explore this with you. I hope that anything I said hasn't disrespected how difficult some of your challenges are or made it sound like it's easy and simple to be with them. Maybe as we learn to work with the smaller challenges in our lives, we are preparing ourselves to be available and to address the large ones.